

Note on Transliteration

I am using the Library of Congress system without diacritics, with the following exceptions:

- In the main text I have chosen to spell names ending in “skii” as “sky” (as in Zhukovsky)
- I will use the common spelling of the names of noted Russian authors, such as Tolstoy

Introduction

This dissertation focuses on three Russian poets—Aleksandr Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, and Vasily Zhukovsky, and on the handling of rusalka figures in their work. I claim that all three poets used the rusalka characters in their works as a means of expressing their innermost fantasies, desires, hopes, and fears about females and that there is a direct correlation between the poets' personal lives and their experiences with women and the rusalka characters in their works.

Aleksandr Pushkin used the rusalka figure in two of his poems—the short whimsical poem “Rusalka” written in 1819, and the longer more serious poetic drama “Rusalka” that he started in 1829 and never finished. The ways in which Pushkin uses the rusalka characters in these works represent his growth and development in terms of experiencing and understanding women's complex internal worlds and women's role in his personal and professional life. I claim that the 1819 poem “Rusalka” represents the ideas that Pushkin had early on in his life associated with a power struggle between men and women and his fears related to women, whom he viewed as simplistic, unpredictable, and irrational, with the potential of assuming control over men through their beauty and sexuality and potentially using that control to lead men to their downfall. In the 1829 poetic drama “Rusalka” one can see Pushkin's much richer and fuller understanding of the women's complex internal worlds, of the power and independence of women, of the suffering and pain that come with being rejected and abandoned, of the grief and guilt that can arise over lost love, and the unknown direction in which love takes people, keeping in mind that it brings bliss, but also challenges.

Mikhail Lermontov's character demonstrated a unique combination between a threatening and wild "demonic" side marked by skepticism, pessimism, and cynicism, and a beautiful and gentle soul that showed Lermontov's soft human side. In three of his works, "Rusalka" (1836), "Morskaia Tsarevna" (1841), and "Demon" (1830-1839), Lermontov used human and non-human figures to express his distinctive vision on the possibilities of lasting love between individuals. I claim that the portrayal of the union between human and non-human characters in these works is an expression of Lermontov's two-sided nature, which turned the poet's life into a never-ending struggle between the beauty of his human soul and the cynicism, skepticism, and pessimism of his demonic side.

Even though Vasily Zhukovsky—a "sentimental dreamer and proponent of virtue"¹, had a life very different from that of Lermontov, he used the rusalka character Undina in his work *Undina* for purposes similar to Lermontov's. Zhukovsky not only translated Friedrich Heinrich Karl de la Motte, Baron Fouqué's prose work *Undine* into Russian, but also transformed it into an original beautiful work of Russian poetry. I believe that in the character of Undina—a unique hybrid between a human soul and the inhuman essence of a water spirit who takes the unusual role of a protagonist instead of the traditional role of an antagonist, Zhukovsky combined his ideas and dreams of an ideal female figure with his need and hope for one.

All three poets depicted, addressed, or described multiple real and fictional female figures in their other works. The fact that the works in which they use the rusalka characters are not describing or addressing specific people, unlike their ordinary love lyrics, gave the

¹ Ilya Vinitsky, "Introduction," in *Vasily Zhukovsky's Romanticism and the Emotional History of Russia* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 6.

poets the opportunity to imagine and speculate on different scenarios about their own internal quest for understanding and finding an ideal partner and love. The rusalka figure, as opposed to other fictional female figures that the poets used in their works, seems to have been a specific device for the expression of the poet's innermost feelings, fantasies, fears, and desires in the early part of the nineteenth-century Russia. This can be explained by the powerful role and the strong presence of Russian folklore in Russians' lives. In the following two sections, I will discuss the distinctive role of the rusalka figure in the Russian cultural imagination, as well as cultural attitudes toward women that were prevalent during the formative years of Pushkin's, Lermontov's, and Zhukovsky's lives. Then, in the subsequent three chapters I will discuss each of the poet's work on the rusalka figure in turn.

In *Ivan the Fool: Russian Folk Beliefs, A Cultural History* Andrei Sinyavsky states that the ancient tradition of folklore is rooted deeply into Russian people's psychology and they all, with or without realizing it, share a strong connection to the old folk beliefs. Sinyavsky claims that "it is the more primordial and ancient, the more primeval and organic gods, who have accompanied the Russian people throughout their history. That means they can characterize both the Russian way of life and folk culture better than those heavenly rulers who lost their original form."² According to D. K. Zelenin the rusalka is one of the oldest, most well-known and wide-spread characters in Russian folklore. Zelenin claims that these

² Andrei Sinyavsky, *Ivan the Fool: Russian Folk Beliefs, A Cultural History* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 108.

water spirits exist in the myths of all Slavs, Western and Eastern.³ He also points out that “the bulk of available materials and recorded memorates and fabulates for the nature spirits dates from the end of the nineteenth century, when belief in those personages was already in a state of decline. In the 1850’s the situation had been quite different: a contributor to an ethnographic study published by the Imperial Geographic Society noted that many of the peasants of Iaroslavl’ Province claimed to have encountered *rusalki* personally.”⁴ And it wasn’t just the peasants from the Iaroslavl’ Province who claimed to have encountered *rusalki*. Peasants from all over Russia believed that their own lives or the lives of people they knew have been affected by *rusalki* in some way. The *rusalka* figure was very important and influential in the lives of the Russian peasants as shown by the fact that she is one of most developed and complex folklore characters and has a large number of beliefs, rituals, and traditions that the peasants devoted to her as described by Zelenin in *Ocherki Russkoi Mifologii: Umershie Neestestvennoi Smert’iu i Rusalki* (*Articles on Russian Mythology: Unquiet Dead and Rusalki*) and by Propp in *Russkie Agrarnye Prazdniki: Opyt Istoriko-Ėtnograficheskogo Issledovaniia* (*Russian Agrarian Holidays: An Attempt for Historico-Ethnographic Research*). According to the accounts from Zelenin, Propp, and Sinyavsky, the *rusalka* character has always been gender-defined as a woman, and in the Russians’ minds the parallel between a *rusalka* and a woman is instinctive, natural, and unquestionable. As Zelenin points out, looking at the *rusalki*’s characteristics and behavior one can clearly see that there are striking similarities between the *rusalki* and village women in terms of appearance, behavior, way of life, and social structure and that even

³ D. K. Zelenin, "Rusalki," in *Izbranye Trudy. Ocherki Russkoi Mifologii: Umershie Neestestvennoi Smert’iu i Rusalki* (Moscow: Indrik, 1995), 122.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

after they die, as unclean/ unquiet dead, the rusalki keep imitating their normal life preserving their appearance, everyday routines, and habits.⁵

The Russian rusalka has some similarities with the Greek siren that served as the base for the creation of the Western mermaid, but there are also some distinct differences between the rusalka and the siren. The Greek siren came to Russia through literary texts and was not widely known all over Russia. It was well known in certain parts of Russia, which is obvious from a few existing accounts of the appearance of the “rusalka-faraon”⁶—beautiful women with fish tails who seduce men with magical songs. The upper body of the rusalka-faraon is human and the lower part is a fish tail. The Russians believed that they were Egyptian women who drowned in the sea while pursuing the Jews. Their singing is magical and beautiful. Sometimes when they sing even the sea becomes calm and a person can get hypnotized and listen forever. However, there are just a few accounts of rusalka-faraons. The main mermaid- like figure in Russian folklore is the rusalka.⁷

In *Ocherki Russkoi Mifologii: Umershie Neestestvennoi Smert'iu i Rusalki* Zelenin describes the rusalka character in great detail. He states that in the Russian mind the image of the rusalka is very unclear, foggy, confusing, and fluid. Part of the reason why this is, is because the image of the rusalki is a very complex image that combines characteristics from a number of major folklore characters such as the water spirit, the forest spirit, personified illnesses, the midday spirit, the ancient Greek siren, etc. Many sources show that people see rusalki as unclean/ unquiet dead. They are mostly women who died from unnatural death under unnatural circumstances. Many believed that in general, women and

⁵ Ibid., 149.

⁶ rusalka-pharaoh

⁷ D. K. Zelenin, op. cit., 149.

young girls who took their own life and/or weren't given a proper burial become rusalki. This was especially true for women who drowned, as well as the souls of unbaptized children. In the Orenburg region they believed that rusalka is the soul of a female who drowned because of unfortunate love or any other unfortunate circumstances. In the Vladimir and Minsk regions people believed that rusalka is a female who was cursed by her parents and could never get their forgiveness while she was alive. In the Orel region rusalki were females who mysteriously disappeared. In the Russian villages there were some young girls who ran away from home for one reason or another. They usually hid in the fields or forests and ate forest fruit, plants, nuts, honey, grains, and food stolen from the villages. If someone met them they appeared as rather wild and exotic, which might have added to the people's beliefs about the rusalki and contributed to the stories about how they live and what they look like. Rarely such girls came back to the villages as someone's wife, but it was very unclear whether they would stay or run away again at some point.⁸

The Russian people think of the rusalki as women, mostly young and beautiful. There are some parts of Russia where people think of rusalki as old and very ugly. In northern Russia they think rusalki are very ugly, hairy, hunchbacked, with big bellies, huge breasts, very sharp nails, and long hair with which they catch the people passing by. However, such accounts are limited and very subjective because religious people used to picture unclean force creatures in an exaggerated ugly way, thinking that the unappealing appearance shows the impurity of their souls.⁹ In southern Russia the rusalki are mostly

⁸ Ibid., 150.

⁹ Ibid., 151.

beautiful. They are forever young beauties. The rusalki have gentle blue eyes, but their expression never changes. The eyes always remain cold and glassy as if they belong to a corpse. Their bodies are gentle and very pale, almost transparent. In many regions the rusalka is tall and very thin. They are light like feathers, quickly run from one tree to the next, jump from one branch to the next, and swing on the branches calling each other with clear and gentle voices. In most regions people believed that the rusalki did not have clothes. They were naked without shoes and without head-scarves. Some say that the rusalki have little crowns on their heads made from flowers or tree branches. Their hair goes down to their knees and is wavy and silky. Some of them have blond hair. Others have green straight hair. In some regions the rusalki's hair glows in the dark.¹⁰

Zelenin points out that one can learn a lot from the way the rusalka's hair looks. The hair color of the rusalki can tell us about the origin of the rusalka. The water gods in many cultures have green hair and green beards. The grass that grows on the bottom of the rivers and on the river banks is seen as the water spirit's hair. The forest spirit has dark blond-orange hair. Some scholars think that the rusalki's blond hair shows that at the very beginning their place of origin was the forest, not the river. The fact that the rusalki have loose hair shows their connection to the witches and the female representatives of the unclean force who never braid their hair and always leave it loose on their shoulders. However, loose hair can also be a sign of not being married. Many scholars think that long ago single women did not braid their hair. Slowly this custom changed and the unmarried

¹⁰ Ibid., 152.

women let their hair loose just for the important events in their life—the wedding, confession, mourning, and in case of their own death (in the grave.)¹¹

Unlike most other spirits, which remain in or near the places they are associated with (for example the forest spirit—*leshii*—remains in the forest), the *rusalki* are mobile spirits and have a few different domains that they inhabit at different times. The main ones are water, forests, and fields. Zelenin claims that this fact is explained by the category the *rusalki* belong to—unclean/unquiet dead. As such they have to inhabit the place of their death or the place where they were buried. Drowned women, who turn into *rusalki*, have to live in the water depths where they died. They also have to live at the place where they were buried if they ever had a funeral. Drowned women, if found, like all the other unquiet/unclean dead, were buried in the woods and in the fields. The *rusalki* also change the places that they live depending on the different times of the year. Most of the time the *rusalki* can stay out of the water just for a limited amount of time—until their bodies and hairs get dry. After this, if they don't go back to the water, they might disappear forever, suffering great pains. Because of this the *rusalki* rarely come out of the water and when they do so it is only for short periods of time. They sit on rocks by the water, waiting for their victims. They also comb their long wet hair.¹²

All *rusalki* share a number of characteristics concerning their behavior and habits. In many regions it was believed that the *rusalki* are constantly dissatisfied, sad, melancholic, and longing for something they really wanted, but could never have. They don't like young girls and young women and when they see them in the forest they attack them, take their

¹¹ Ibid., 177.

¹² Ibid., 169.

clothes off and chase them out of the forest.¹³ With young men they act in a different way. Laughing and giggling, the rusalki surround them, tear their clothes until they completely undress them, then grab them under the armpits and start tickling them until the men faint. Then the rusalki cover them with kisses, pick them up and bring them back to their homes and put them in their beds. The rusalki love to seduce men. Not a single man can resist their beauty and everyone immediately falls in love with the rusalki. In some regions people say that love between a man and a rusalka is possible. The rusalka takes the man to her underwater home and he lives there with her enjoying all sorts of privileges. The only disadvantage is that the man can't leave the underwater home even for a second. Also many Russians believe that young men who enter in a relationship with a rusalka become quiet, sad, and melancholic, and then get ill.¹⁴

The sixth week after Easter is known as Rusalnaia week. According to the legends it is called Rusalnaia week because the rusalki use this week for fun and games, celebrate their weddings, swing on trees, swim, dance, and sing special songs. It is mostly during this week alone that the rusalki are visible for the living. During this time they try to seduce young men and lure them to their homes. Rusalki are especially dangerous during the Rusalnaia week. They can be found in all three domains- in the forests, the fields, and the rivers. If a man is walking through the woods at night and hears someone calling his name he should never answer. This is the rusalka calling. At night the rusalki hide in the trees and call popular male names hoping that someone will answer. If the man answers the rusalki jump down from the trees, find the man and tickle him to death. If the man does not

¹³ Ibid., 187.

¹⁴ Ibid., 193.

say anything the female-demons with green hair can't hurt him in any way. At night they go to the river or to the lake and make branch and flower crowns for each other. It is extremely dangerous for people to be alone at such places, especially if they can see little moving flames and hear sad melancholic songs. The rusalki will disorient the person by playing with hundreds of little flames, will lure them in by the irresistible force of their songs and the person will slowly disappear in the cold depths of the swamps or in the dark, dangerous river. The desperate cries for help will be answered by the rusalki's loud laughter.¹⁵

All sources agree on the fact that the rusalki's "normal" behavior outside of the Rusalnaia week is not as dangerous and is mostly about just having fun and having a good time similarly to most young, single village girls. They participate in swimming, bathing, swinging on branches, playing, singing, dancing, clapping, laughing, strolling, talking, joking, and combing their long wet hairs. Sometimes, however, their mood suddenly changes and becomes darker, more threatening and unpredictable. This is when they cry, sing sad, melancholic songs, and giggle in an evil threatening way. Some of the sources define the rusalki's singing as charming and enchanting. It is magical because the one who hears it will by all means go to the rusalka. When they are in a bad mood, the rusalki very often scare people, harm them and even kill them. The rusalki kill people they meet by different means. Some cut off their heads. Others turn their heads backwards and break their necks. Often the rusalki kill people by tickling them to death under the armpits. The person dies in agonizing laughter. The rusalki would also grab people while they're bathing in the rivers, pull them to the bottom, torture them, and kill them. Propp states that the

¹⁵ Ibid., 199.

laughter of a rusalka is the triumphant laughter of death that lures the living, especially the young and the beautiful, to the kingdom of death.¹⁶ Zelenin claims that in order to make the person come to them so they can tickle them to death, the rusalki use different methods. The rusalki can call them by name, or ask them to swing with them, or seduce them with their beauty and charm, hypnotize them with magical songs, confuse them with moving flames, offer them food, and tempt them with games and riddles.¹⁷

The rusalka's social life is very developed, compared to that of the other spirits. Almost always the rusalka comes out of the water and does things in a group. The accounts of lonely rusalki are very scarce. Scholars assume that it is the younger rusalki who live and act in groups, while the older ones (widows and married women) lead a lonely existence. This guess is taken from the way real village life is, since with unclean/ unquiet dead, the social norms and habits they had while they were alive are preserved even after they die. As far as family relations go, in most regions people believe that the rusalki are single. The rusalki's social hierarchy is made even more complex by the fact that some sources talk about the rusalki's leader. A lot of sources mention the queen of the rusalki. She is the most experienced among them and without her permission they can't kill or even scare anyone.¹⁸

In many regions, people believe that the rusalki have special magical powers similar to those of the witches and sorcerers. They can hypnotize people and control them, control people's belongings, make cows stop giving milk, etc. There are accounts that the rusalki have the power to influence nature. They can influence the grass, the crops, etc. Some say

¹⁶ Vladimir Propp, *Russkie Agrarnye Prazdniki: Opyt Istoriko-Etnograficheskogo Issledovaniia* (Leningrad: 1963), 73.

¹⁷ D. K. Zelenin, op. cit., 200.

¹⁸ Ibid., 188.

that where the rusalki walked the grass becomes taller and greener and the crops become stronger. In other regions people believe that the rusalki can kill the grass and the crops and send destructive rain and winds if people are working on their holidays.¹⁹

Most of the rusalka rituals and holidays, keeping in mind the rusalka's association with femininity and moisture, are related to the Russian peasants' appreciation of agriculture, the earth, vegetation, and growth. Propp in his *Agrarnyye prazdniki* says that the peasants believed that since the rusalka is a water creature, her coming out to the fields gives earth life giving moisture and calls for healthy, plentiful crops. S.V. Maksimov says, "At night under the moonlight, which on the account of the rusalki is much brighter than usual, the rusalki swing on the branches and dance in merry circles while singing and clapping their hands. The earth that was touched by their feet while they were walking, running, or dancing will give abundant, healthy crops and the grass there will be much thicker and greener." ²⁰

Propp states that the spring holidays have a strong erotic undertone. Mother earth is giving birth and that is one of the central events in every peasant's life. The rusalki, being celebrated in the spring, are also erotic figures to a certain extent. As already discussed they tempt, attract, invite, lure, and call people. Propp points out that the eroticism of the rusalka is well hidden, subtle, scary and threatening. The rusalka represents not mother earth, but the power of water. Water is necessary to the peasant, but water does not give birth. The rusalka herself is dead. Her beauty can not be used for procreative functions. However, keeping in mind that sexuality is always a part of a ritual, it can't just disappear.

¹⁹ Ibid., 189.

²⁰ Vladimir Propp, op. cit., 80.

That is why in the rusalka rituals there is still a sexual element, but it serves the opposite purpose. The beauty of the rusalki is dead beauty and emphasizes the eternal emptiness of their wombs and their inability to ever experience motherhood. That makes them scary and threatening. They lure and tempt men with their beauty, but what follows is not a unity of love, but the rusalka's deadly, loud laughter.²¹

The nineteenth-century fascination with the mermaid figure was not unique to Russia. In *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* Nina Auerbach talks about the nineteenth-century's attraction to the demonic, otherworldly mermaid in Victorian literature and art and claims that "in her mysterious hybrid nature whose humanity is only an appearance the mermaid becomes an emblem of Victorian womanhood generally, promising human repose but exercising preterhuman powers."²² Interestingly, the Russian fascination with the rusalka figure seems to predate the British, Victorian-era fascination with similar figures. Nonetheless, Auerbach's analysis of the role and meaning of such figures seems broadly relevant to our understanding of the rusalka figures' role in the early nineteenth-century Russian literature. According to Auerbach the ramifications of the mermaid in the nineteenth century are one manifestation of a mythography of womanhood without which our understanding of the age is truncated. According to Auerbach the mermaid derives from a serpent-woman, a hybrid creature who guards the gates of Hell in Book II of *Paradise Lost* and is as close as we come to a Christian female demon. The roots of the mermaids, serpent-women, and lamias who invade the Victorian imagination also lie in the antiquity that was held in high esteem by the nineteenth-century classicists.

²¹ Ibid., 81.

²² Nina Auerbach, "The Myth of Womanhood: Victims," in *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Harvard University Press, 1982), 96.

Auerbach suggests that these creatures' massive invasion might typify the restoration of an earlier serpent-woman, the paralyzing Greek Medusa, who in Hesiod's account, was decapitated by Perseus, who became a hero when he refused to look in her face.²³ Victorian iconography adopted this image and adapted it to its own vision in which her "hybrid nature, her ambiguous status as creature, typify the mysterious, broadly and evocatively demonic powers of womanhood in general."²⁴ Auerbach states that the Victorian artists and authors "force us to look into the serpent woman's face and to feel the mystery of a power, endlessly mutilated and restored, of a woman with a demon's gifts."²⁵

Auerbach says that "while right-thinking Victorians were elevating woman into an angel, their art slithered with images of a mermaid." According to Auerbach mermaids submerge themselves not to negate their power, but to conceal it. "The mermaid... is a creature of transformations and mysterious interrelations, able to kill and to regenerate but not to die, unfurling in secret her powers of mysterious, pre-Christian, prehuman dispensation." Auerbach explains that the crisis of belief that characterized the nineteenth century brought with it unorthodox and sometimes frightening new vehicles of transfiguration. Men were stretching to godhood and "many citizens did their uneasy and self-deceiving best to obey."²⁶ Auerbach points out that while the Victorian man strove loudly to be "good and a god", the mermaid exemplified the secrecy and spiritual ambiguity of woman's ascribed powers. She was a threat to her credulous culture. "The social

²³ Ibid., 9.

²⁴ Ibid., 94.

²⁵ Ibid., 9.

²⁶ Ibid., 7.

restrictions that crippled women's lives, the physical weaknesses wished on them" were according to Auerbach fearful attempts to exorcise a mysterious strength.²⁷

Auerbach discussed a number of examples of mermaid characters used in Victorian literature. Hans Christian Andersen's tale "The Little Mermaid" is the first example she gives and she sees it as an allegory of a good woman's mutilated power. Auerbach claims that the sacrifices made by the mermaid -renouncing her flexible tail for bleeding feet, allowing for her tongue to be amputated and losing her unearthly voice, and abandoning her home, only to be given a "problematic soul" that "only the Prince's caprice can bestow", are not surprising in the context of the taboos that constrained the Victorian woman and her "disruptive power." Many actual woman, who chose to be guided by what Auerbach defines as the Victorian mythology, were "lovable and silent self-disinherited mutilate[s]". The fullness of their "extraordinary and dangerous being" according to Auerbach could at any moment return through violence. However, many, just like the little mermaid chose to not kill the Prince in order to have their wounds healed and their native magic restored.²⁸

Auerbach also gives examples of mermaids who were not "obediently mangled" such as Thackeray's Becky Sharp from *Vanity Fair*, who "keeps her tail judiciously submerged and subdues all assaults...with inexplicable vitality." According to Auerbach Becky's compelling self-possession animates fin-de-siecle art such as Gustav Klimt's "Watersnakes", which Auerbach sees as appropriating the viewer and his terrestrial sphere to themselves. According to the author the lamias who invade British fiction possess

²⁷ Ibid., 8.

²⁸ Ibid., 8.

societies with similar ease. “These serpent-women, terrestrial cousins of the hybrid mermaid in their secret self-transformations, their power over social life and its laws, exude power that withers patriarchs.” Auerbach gives George Eliot’s lamialike Rosamond and Gwendolen, Tennyson’s Vivien, and Sheridan LeFanu’s Carmilla as examples of mermaids who are not “obediently mangled” and find their greatest successes in challenging and displacing male authorities.²⁹ Auerbach concludes by stating “woman is not frailer than man is, but stronger and more powerful; her nature is broadly demonic rather than fallibly human; she must lead us out of history toward a new dispensation; in short, woman is “so much more addicted to the practice of the black art because by definition, woman is an angel.”³⁰

Similarly to Victorian England, where men were exploring the angelic and demonic sides of femininity and the place of women in a male-centric society through art and literature, in Russia too men engaged in an ongoing debate about the place and role of women in society and in literature based on what they saw as feminine traits and characteristics. In “The ‘Feminization’ of Russian Literature: Women, Language and Literature in Eighteenth-Century Russia” Judith Vowles points out that at the end of the eighteenth century the writer Nikolai Karamzin and his followers “made women’s taste and women’s language the standard of literary and linguistic excellence.” They assigned to women such authority over Russian language and literature that later scholars have spoken of a “feminization” of Russian culture. According to Vowles that “feminization”

²⁹ Ibid., 8.

³⁰ Ibid., 108.

accompanied the rapid Westernization and secularization of Russian society that took place in the eighteenth century. Society was transformed by the presence of aristocratic women, and writers had to adapt to that change. Trediakvskii was the first one to make a gendered distinction between the “manliness of the Slavonic language” and the “tenderness of Russian” and the “tender ladies’ speech” and the association of women with the lighter genres, the theme of love, and Western influences that persisted throughout the country. Similar distinctions were made both by writers of the neoclassical school and the sentimentalists in the second half of the eighteenth century.³¹

Vowles points out that the most eloquent discussion about women, language, and literature came from the satirists who rebelled against the deleterious effects of Western influence and women’s presence in society in satirical journals and plays from the late 1760’s onward. According to Novikov “women’s language” was the coin of a Westernized society corrupted by frivolity, fashion, and love affairs, and contemptuous of Russian manners and morals. Women’s association with Anacreon’s light verses focusing on love (represented as tempting, corrupting, dangerous lust and manipulation), and wine was emphasized, and this clearly did not belong among the “high genres” and were ill-suited to represent the literature of a great nation. Men, on the other hand, were associated with the “high genres” such as the ode and the epic, which were well-suited to represent the literature of the great Russian nation. Novikov’s satires “were designed to reform and shape Russian society and to define and create the virtuous man and his helpmate, the ideal Russian wife and mother.”³² Novikov and other satirists contrasted the ignorant female

³¹ Judith Vowles, “The ‘Feminization’ of Russian Literature: Women, Language, and Literature in 18th- Century Russia,” in *Women Writers in Russian Literature*, 669.

³² *Ibid.*, 711.

dandy to the educated virtuous woman, but women's education was to be placed in service of the women's proper role as wife and mother—an idea that was also supported by freemasonry.³³ The same idea of the supporting role of the woman can be seen in the nineteenth century, with authors like Belinsky assigning a subservient role to women by asserting that the grand and holy role and meaning of women was to aspire in men the energy of their soul and noble passions, to support a feeling of duty and the quest to glory.³⁴

Karamzin and his followers established the usage of polite society as the standard for Russian literary language. The woman in her various incarnations such as “the worldly lady,” “amiable woman,” “dear woman,” and “beautiful woman” became the writer's ideal reader. Male writers such as P. I. Makarov hoped that women would raise Russian culture to the heights to which French women had brought French civilization and according to Konstantin Batushkov a writer should be he “who writes as one speaks/ whom ladies read.” As Joe Andrew points out in his article “A Crocodile in Flannel or a Dancing Monkey: the Image of the Russian Woman Writer, 1790-1850” “Karamzin's views on women's primarily ancillary role in literary creativity...would seem to have been shared even by his opponents in these literary debates.”³⁵ Indeed, Admiral Shishkov, the “arch-conservative in things literary”, as quoted by Andrew, expressed very similar views in

³³ Ibid., 720.

³⁴ “Поприще женщины - возбуждать в мужчине энергию души, пыл благородных страстей, поддерживать чувство долга и стремление к высокому и великому вот ее назначение, и оно велико и священо.” (“Белинский Виссарион Григорьевич.” Афоризмы. Личности, 2009. Web. Mar. 2017. <<https://persons-aforism.ru/aforizm/11233>>.)

³⁵ Joe Andrew, “A Crocodile in Flannel or a Dancing Monkey: the Image of the Russian Woman Writer, 1790- 1850,” in *Gender in Russian History and Culture* (Great Britain: Antony Rowe Ltd, Chippenham, Wiltshire, 2001), 51.

1811.³⁶ The Karamzinists disagreed on whether women should even write. According to some, such as Batiushkov, women were intended to be only readers and for a woman to write was vulgar and immoral.³⁷ The notion that men and women belong to completely separate spheres that can not and should not ever overlap is seen in the nineteenth century, with authors such as Lev Tolstoy who said that a woman who tries to imitate men is as disgusting and repulsive as a man that tries to imitate women.³⁸ Others like Makarov encouraged women to write and wondered “what Barbarian would dare not to praise that which a tender, white, lovely hand has written?”³⁹

During Romanticism the concept of the creative “genius” evolved and it was immediately assigned gender characteristics. Belinsky claimed that the man of genius is as good as women at depicting female characters because “man” subsumes woman, “This is because a man, by his very nature, is more all-encompassing than a woman, and is endowed with the ability to step outside his individual personality and to enter into all kinds of situations, of which he has no direct experience and never will have.” Belinsky also claimed that “...whereas a woman is locked within herself, in her female and feminine

³⁶ “This desire [for fame] is aroused in his [the writer] particularly when he hears in his own lifetime the superior thoughts which he has arrayed in the beauty of style repeated by the most tender lips of the most fair sex. What enormous advantage for literature stems from this! Ladies, this most charming half of the human race, this soul of conversation, these kind teachers who inspire in us the language of affection and courtesy, the language of feelings and passions, ladies, I say, are those lofty inspirations which fire put spirit for song.” (Ibid., 50.)

³⁷ Ibid., 51.

³⁸ “Женщина, старающаяся походить на мужчину, так же уродлива, как женоподобный мужчина.” (“Лев Толстой, цитаты.” Socratify.net. Web. Mar. 2017. <<http://citaty.socratify.net/lev-tolstoi/25630>>.)

³⁹ Joe Andrew, op. cit., 52.

sphere, and if she leaves it, then she becomes some kind of ambiguous creature. And this is why a woman cannot become a great poet.”⁴⁰

Catriona Kelly discusses the idea held by men at the time that, as Andrew puts it “the women’s psychology is determined by their physiology”, which followed the ideas of Alberti, *De infocunditate corporis ob foecunditatem animi in foeminis*, published in Halle in 1743, which asserted that there was an inverse correlation between the mental development and the reproductive faculties in a woman. As Andrew explains it, the more educated a woman was, (and/or if she strove to be a writer), the less able she would be to be a mother.⁴¹ According to male conceptions of the time, imagination was related to innate sexual characteristics and having imagination would “unsex” women. Since, due to their sexual characteristics, women were incapable of having imagination, they could never experience genuine inspiration. Men often pointed out that women, unlike men, due to their gender, lack a “quill” or a “pen” and thus they can’t understand and direct something they don’t have.⁴² In “A Crocodile in Flannel or a Dancing Monkey: The Image of the Russian Woman Writer, 1790-1850” Joe Andrew quotes the famous Elena Gan, a Russian female author who tried to expand on the concept of the feminine genius during the Pushkinian period, who said, “But here people look at me just like a crocodile in flannel or a dancing monkey. People look at me as if I were a fairground fright, a snake in a flannel.”⁴³ Yael Harussi has noted, “Early nineteenth-century women writers were not by any standard

⁴⁰ Ibid., 64.

⁴¹ Ibid., 62.

⁴² Catriona Kelly, ‘Poetry after 1820: Romanticism and the ‘Man of Genius’ in “The ‘Feminine Pen’ and the Imagination of National Tradition: Russian Women’s Writing, 1820-1880” in *A History of Russian Women’s Writing 1820- 1992* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 35.

⁴³ Joe Andrew, op. cit., 52.

average Russian women. They formed a unique minority within the fairly limited numbers of literate or educated women, themselves a small part of educated Russian society, or, more precisely, the nobility.”⁴⁴ Many men at that period also supported the idea that women were not rational and logical beings who thought and made decisions with their minds, like men did. According to such views, women thought with their hearts and this was why they often experienced extreme, irrational and inexplicable emotions foreign to men, such as selfishness defined by jealousy and vengefulness. Belinsky said, “Women think with their hearts, and men love with their heads.”⁴⁵ In the novel *Rudin* Ivan Turgenev commented on the suffocating selfishness of women, foreign to men, by saying that there are three types of selfish people—the ones who live and let others live, the ones who live and don’t let others live, and the ones who don’t live and don’t let others live either, to which type he assigned women.⁴⁶

In “The ‘Feminine Pen’ and the Imagination of National Tradition: Russian Women’s Writing, 1820-1880” Catriona Kelly talks about one of the reasons why in Russia during the eighteenth and nineteenth century men tried in so many different ways to keep women in a submissive role that they could control: the ongoing power struggle between the *grandes dames* of the eighteenth century, such as Catherine the Great, and the controlling men of the nineteenth century. According to Kelly, female supremacy and even the idea of

⁴⁴ Ibid., 57.

⁴⁵ “Женщина мыслит сердцем, а мужчина любит головой.” (“Виссарион Григорьевич Белинский.” Greatwords.org. Web. Feb. 2017. <<http://greatwords.org/quotes/1680/>>.)

⁴⁶ “Есть три разряда эгоистов: эгоисты, которые сами живут и жить дают другим; эгоисты, которые сами живут и не дают жить другим; наконец, эгоисты, которые и сами не живут и другим жить не дают. Женщины большей частью принадлежат к третьему разряду.” (“Иван Сергеевич Тургенев.” Socratify.net. Web. Mar. 2017. <<http://citaty.socratify.net/rudin-ivan-sergeevich-turgenev/93855>>.)

equality between men and women made young men of Pushkin's generation very anxious, and thus the early nineteenth century became the time when the female exclusion from the "masculine" sphere of inspiration and the conviction that masculinity and writing were associated were pushed to an extreme in Russian culture. The young male authors were still highly intimidated by the aging, but still powerful, both sexually and politically, eighteenth-century *grandes dames*, which can be seen in the works of some nineteenth-century male authors, one of whom was Pushkin.⁴⁷ In the short story *Queen of Spades*, Pushkin created the powerful, aging Countess who turns into a threatening, blood-chilling, ghostly figure that haunts Hermann's nightmares. Some critics such as Svetlana Slavskaya Grenier also see Tatyana at the end of *Eugene Onegin* as being transformed into a dominant high society *grande dame* who has the power to reject and hurt Onegin just like he rejected and hurt her before.⁴⁸ The career of Anna Bunina, who in Andrew's words is "probably the finest woman writer from the first two decades of the nineteenth century", is a good illustration of how nineteenth century male authors were very protective and territorial when it came to females potentially invading their sacred space. Andrew points out that when Bunina began her literary career in the early years of the century, her entry into a space that was occupied almost exclusively by men was welcomed, since women were encouraged to lend their civilizing influence to literature. However, within a few years the praise turned into criticism, both because of the general reaction to women's greater involvement in literature, seen as an increasing threat to male supremacy, but also because it was felt that Bunina herself had overstepped her allotted role. She was one of the first

⁴⁷ Catriona Kelly, op. cit., 34.

⁴⁸ Svetlana Grenier, *Representing the Marginal Woman in Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature* (London: Greenwood Press, 2001), 28

women in Russian history to attempt to live by her writing, an endeavor in which even very few men were successful at this time. As Andrew points out, throughout her career, writing was a serious professional activity and not the pastime for a ‘society lady.’⁴⁹

These general ideas (and even fears) about the role of women in society may form an important backdrop for the formation for the early nineteenth century’s poets’ attitudes toward women. The three poets under discussion may have channeled some of these concerns as well as the impressions they gained from their own experiences with women into the enigmatic and intriguing figure of the rusalka, thereby creating a series of poetic works that merits critical analysis. Previous scholars have tended not to pay too much attention to most of these works, either seeing them as creations less significant or compelling than other works deemed to have more importance, or else limiting their commentary to details of the work’s composition and so on. This dissertation seeks to bring these works to the foreground and to analyze them from a new point of view, and perhaps to offer fresh perspectives on the complex psychological framework that each writer brought to his work.

I will begin with Pushkin, because his first poem about the rusalka predates both Lermontov’s and Zhukovsky’s major work on the theme. I will follow this with a discussion of Lermontov’s work on the rusalka and the Demon, which both continues the Pushkinian perspective and yet alters it in important and idiosyncratic ways. I will conclude with an examination of Zhukovsky’s Undine creation, which offers a dramatic restatement or revision of the traditional Russian view of the rusalka reflected in Pushkin’s and Lermontov’s works.

⁴⁹ Joe Andrew, *op. cit.*, 55-56.

Aleksandr Pushkin

This chapter focuses on Aleksandr Pushkin and the use of the rusalka figure in two of his poems- the short whimsical poem “Rusalka” written in 1819 and the longer more serious poetic drama “Rusalka” that he started in 1829 and never finished. To the best of my knowledge previous scholars who have analyzed Pushkin’s life and works such as B. V. Tomashevskii (*Pamiatka o Pushkine* [*A Memoir about Pushkin*]; *Pushkin i Franciia* [*Pushkin and France*]; *Pushkin: raboty raznykh let* [*Pushkin: works from different years*]), T. A. Gukovskii (*Pushkin i russkie romantiki* [*Pushkin and the Russian Romantics*]; *Pushkin i problemy realisticheskogo stilia* [*Pushkin and the problems of Realism*]), V. E. Vatsuro (*Pushkinskaia pora* [*Pushkin’s time*]), S. Bondii (*O Pushkine* [*On Pushkin*]), and David Bethea (*Realizing Metaphors: Alexander Pushkin and the Life of the Poet*) have tended not to pay too much attention to these two works, perhaps seeing them as creations less significant or compelling than other works deemed to have more importance in their analysis.

The chapter consists of two main sections. In the first section I look at Pushkin’s 1819 poem “Rusalka” and events in Pushkin’s life that influenced the way Pushkin developed the plot and the rusalka character in the poem. I claim that the poem reflects the ideas that Pushkin had early on in his life that were associated with the power struggle between men and women and his fears related to women assuming control over men through their beauty and sexuality and using that control to lead men to their downfall and death. Pushkin’s early views on this issue were based on the time when his generation grew up (a time marked by the men’s attempts to suppress women and keep them under control), on his

impression of his mother and his sister, and on the way he experienced his first romantic love. The nineteen-year old Pushkin, influenced by the moods of his era and his generation, and lacking sufficient personal experience with the subject, assumed that women were beautiful empty shells, pretty faces on tempting bodies who lacked internal worlds and who could be inexplicably irrational and threatening. This idea can be seen in the way he creates the 1819 rusalka as an overtly flat, simplistic, and destructive character.

The second part of the chapter deals with the poetic drama “Rusalka” that Pushkin started in 1829 and never finished. This poem and the rusalka character in it are very different from the 1819 ones. The 1829 poem is longer and darker, and the rusalka character is much deeper and more complex. There are multiple factors that influenced the fact that the second poem is so different. Pushkin was no longer a carefree teenager enjoying the fame of a brilliant poet. He had faced multiple challenges such as being spied on by the government, not being allowed to leave the country, exile, censorship, and declining health. His days were gloomy and his life was losing direction. At that point he started seeing women as his only escape and salvation. However, since 1820 his opinion of women had drastically changed. He had multiple relationships with women who were attractive to him not only because of their external beauty, but also because of the beauty of their internal worlds. Pushkin met and interacted with women who were strong, independent, self-confident, talented, well educated, intelligent, and shared his passions and interests. He was looking for a partner whose internal world could match his, not just for a beautiful doll to play with. In the 1829 poem “Rusalka” one can see Pushkin’s much richer and fuller understanding of the power and independence of women, of the suffering and pain that come with being rejected and abandoned, the grief and guilt over lost love, and the

unknown direction in which love takes people, keeping in mind that it brings bliss, but also challenges.

Pushkin's better understanding of these concepts is based on his experiences that he had with women since 1820, including the motherly, loving, and protecting Ekaterina Karamzina, Praskov'ia Osipova, and Elizaveta Khitrovo; the young, charming friends, who were full of life—Zizi Osipova and Elizaveta Ushakova; the mistreated women whom he rejected and caused pain to: the pregnant serf girl from Mikhailovskoe and the devoted Anna Vul'f; and the ones that he had difficult and challenging romances with—Elizaveta Vorontsova, Ekaterina Ushakova, Anna Olenina, and the love of his life, his wife Natal'ia Goncharova. I believe that Pushkin's experiences and impressions from these relationships are reflected in the 1829 poetic drama "Rusalka."

Pushkin depicted many different female figures in his early works, including Lyudmila in *Ruslan i Lyudmila* (*Ruslan and Lyudmila*), the Circassian maiden in *Kavkazskii plennik* (*Prisoner of the Caucasus*), Zarema and Maria in *Bakchisaraiskii fontan* (*The Fountain of Bakchisarai*), and Zemfira in *Tsygany* (*Gypsies*). I will not be discussing those female characters because my focus is on the rusalka figure, which, as already explained in the introduction, seems to have been a specific device for the expression of the poet's innermost feelings, fantasies, fears, and desires in the early part of the nineteenth-century Russia. Pushkin wrote his early poem "Rusalka" in 1819. I claim that Pushkin's relationships with his nanny Arina Radionovna Yakovleva, his sister Ol'ga Pushkina and his first love Ekaterina Bakunina had a major influence on this work.

Arina Radionovna Yakovleva was the Pushkin family nanny. She raised Aleksandr, Lev, and Ol'ga. She sang them Russian songs, told them fairytales, and remained one of the

poet's most loyal friends. Until her last breath she loved the poet, and for him she was the embodiment of the Russian soul. In his early poems Pushkin says that he grew up not knowing sorrows and misfortunes, and this he owes to his nanny Arina—a good old lady, who took care of both Pushkin's education and fun.⁵⁰

Для развлечения,
оставив книг ученье,
В досужий мне часок,
У добренькой старушки
Душистый пью чаек.⁵¹

[For fun,/ Having left the textbooks,/ In a boring hour,/ At the good old woman's place/
I'm drinking hot tea.]

In a later poem Pushkin called her “a friend through the most challenging of times.”

Подруга дней моих суровых
Голубка дряхлая моя!
Одна в глуши лесов сосновых
Давно, давно ты ждёшь меня⁵²

[The friend from my challenging days/ My tired dove!/ Alone in the silence of the woods/
You've waited for me for a long time]

Pushkin dedicated many poems to his nanny Arina—a recognition he did not give to his father, his mother, or any of his other relatives. In Arina and in his grandmother Pushkin found the image of the loving, kind older woman who gave him unquestionable love and support and helped develop his imagination and talent with magical Russian songs and

⁵⁰ Valentin Savin, "Женщины в жизни и поэзии Пушкина" ("Women in Pushkin's life and works") at <https://www.stihi.ru/2016/03/20/9650>

⁵¹ Aleksandr Pushkin, “Для развлечения...” (“For fun...”)

⁵² Aleksandr Pushkin, “Подруга дней моих суровых...” (“The friend from my challenging days...”)

fairytale. This is the image that one sees in the 1816 poem “Сон” (“Dream”) that the poet wrote remembering his childhood while at the Lyceum.⁵³

Но детских лет люблю воспоминанье.
 Ах! Умолчу ль о мамушке моей,
 О прелести таинственных ночей,
 Когда в чепце, в старинном одеянии,
 Она, духов молитвой уклоня,
 С усердием перекрестит меня
 И шепотом рассказывать мне станет
 О мертвецах, о подвигах Бовы...
 От ужаса не шелохнусь, бывало,
 Едва дыша, прижмусь под одеяло,
 Не чувствуя ни ног, ни головы.⁵⁴

[I love the memories from my childhood./ Ow! I should not forget my nanny,/ The beauty of the wondrous nights,/ When in a cap and an old blanket,/ She calmed the spirits with a prayer,/ And made the sign of a cross over me/ And whispering started telling me about/ About dead men, about Bova's adventures.../ From horror I could not move/ Barely breathing, I closed my eyes under the blanket/ Not feeling my legs or my head.]

Arina shared with Pushkin the challenging years of his Mikhailovskoe exile. She was his only and most loyal friend and companion that helped him and kept him company and also the first one to hear his works as stated in a passage from *Eugene Onegin*.⁵⁵

Но я плоды своих мечтаний
 и гармонических затей
 Читаю только старой няне,
 подруге юности моей...⁵⁶

[The fruits of my dreams/ And my harmonic designs/ I read only to my old nanny/
 The friend from my youth...]

⁵³ Valentin Savin, op. cit.

⁵⁴ Aleksandr Pushkin, “Но детских лет люблю воспоминанье...” (“I love the childhood memories...”)

⁵⁵ “Слушаю сказки моей няни; она – единственная моя подруга, и с нею только мне не скучно...” [“I’m listening to my nanny’s fairytales—she is my only friend and only with her I’m not bored...”] (Valentin Savin, op. cit.)

⁵⁶ Aleksandr Pushkin, *Evgenii Onegin*, Chapter 4, stanza 35.

Arina died in 1827. Upon visiting Mikhailovskoe after her death Pushkin was filled with bitter sweet memories about his beloved childhood friend whom he would never see again.⁵⁷

....вот опальный домик,
Где жил я с бедной нянею моей
Уже старушки нет. Уж за стеной
Не слышу я шагов ее тяжелых
Ни кропотливого ее дозора⁵⁸

[Here's the house no longer in favor,/ Where I lived with my poor nanny/ She is no longer living. Behind the wall/ I don't hear her heavy footsteps/ And her laborious marching]

Pushkin's first female friend was his sister Ol'ga Sergeevna Pushkina. She was two years older than Aleksandr and was his best friend in his childhood games. Most of Pushkin's initial impressions about women are based on Ol'ga. Just like her brother, Ol'ga was raised by the nanny Arina and by their grandmother Mariya Alekseevna Gannibal. Ol'ga's character was very similar to that of her mother. She had sudden and sharp mood changes going from extreme joy to extreme anger. She was very well educated. Ol'ga spoke French, knew geography, history, algebra, and had great talent for art. She was not only the poet's best friend in the games, but also his first audience for his early poems that he wrote in French. When Pushkin went to the Lyceum he could not see his sister very often since the students were not allowed to go home. He expressed his strong longing to

⁵⁷ Valentin Savin, op. cit.

⁵⁸ Aleksandr Pushkin, "....Вновь я посетил..." ("...I again visited...")

see his sister and his frustration with the monastic lifestyle and rules of the school in the 1814 poem “К сестре.”⁵⁹

Ты хочешь, друг бесценный,
 Чтоб я, поэт молодой,
 Беседовал с тобой
 И с лирою забвенной,
 Мечтами окриленный,
 Оставил монастырь
 И край уединенный,
 Где непрерывный мир
 Во мраке опустился
 И в пустыни глухой
 Безмолвно воцарился
 С угрюмой тишиной...

.....
 С подругой обнимуся
 Весны моей златой...
 Но это лишь мечтанье!
 Увы, в монастыре,
 При бледном свеч сиянье,
 Один пишу к сестре...⁶⁰

[Do you want to, my dear friend,/ That I, a young poet,/Talked to you/ And with forgotten lyre/ Lifted by dreams/ Left the monastery/ And the secluded land/ Where the world/ Is engulfed by darkness/ And in a quiet desert/ Quietly rules/ With sad silence// I'll hug my friend/ My golden spring/ But this is just a dream!/ Alas, in a monastery/ Under the dim candle light/ Alone I'm writing to my sister]

Pushkin and Ol'ga remained very close friends until the end. Ol'ga took her brother's side during his fights with their father and Pushkin knew about his sister's secret wedding in 1828 at which he was present and blessed the newlyweds. Ol'ga died when she was seventy- one years old, almost blind and immobile.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Valentin Savin, op. cit.

⁶⁰ Aleksandr Pushkin, “К сестре” (“To my sister”)

⁶¹ Valentin Savin, op. cit.

Pushkin's first love was Ekaterina Pavlovna Bakunina. She was the sister of one of Pushkin's classmates at the Lyceum. Pushkin's feelings for Bakunina inspired the young poet. On November 27th 1815 the fifteen-year-old Pushkin wrote in his diary that Zhukovsky gave him his poems as a gift. Pushkin never parted from the little book and read and reread Zhukovsky's love poems. Pushkin became thoughtful and quiet and his answers became noncohesive. Earlier he was laughing at his friends that were in love; now they were laughing at him. He wrote a poem in which he described the secret torments of love and happiness that he was introduced to.⁶²

Когда в забвении перед классом
 Порой терял я взор и слух,
 И говорить старался басом,
 И стриг над губой первый пух,
 В те дни... в те дни, когда впервые
 Заметил я черты живые
 Прелестной девы, и любовь
 Младую взволновала кровь,
 И я, тоскуя безнадежно,
 Томясь обманом пылких снов,
 Везде искал ее следов,
 Об ней задумывался нежно,
 Весь день минутной встречи ждал
 И счастье тайных мук узнал...⁶³

[When in forgetfulness in front of the class,/ I lost my vision and my hearing,/ And was trying to speak with a bass,/ And was shaving the first fuzz over my lip,/ In those days... In those days when I for a first time/ Noticed the lively features/ Of a beautiful girl, and love,/ Excited the young blood,/ And I, suffering hopelessly,/ Engulfed by the deception of ardent dreams,/ Was looking for her traces everywhere,/ Was thinking lovingly of her,/ Every day waited for the minute- long meetings,/ And was introduced to the secret suffering of happiness...]

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Aleksandr Pushkin, "Когда в забвении перед классом..." ("When in forgetfulness in front of the class...")

Ekaterina was a friendly and pretty girl. She came on the weekends to see her brother at the Lyceum. Pushkin would anxiously wait for her at the window, and once he saw her coming he ran down the steps pretending that their meeting was a coincidence. The few words they exchanged and her smile meant the world to the young poet. On November 29, 1815 Pushkin wrote in his diary about his tormenting desperation while waiting for her. The entry starts with a short poem about the temporary nature of happiness followed by boredom and loneliness.⁶⁴

Итак, я счастлив был, итак, я наслаждался,
Отрадой тихою, восторгом упивался...
И где веселья быстрый день?
Промчался летом сновиденья,
Увяла прелесть наслажденья,
И снова вокруг меня угрюмой скуки тень!..⁶⁵

[And so, I was happy, and so I was enjoying,/ I was getting drunk with excitement.../
And where did the short day of happiness go?/ It seemed like a summer dream,/ And the
beauty of happiness died away,/ And again I found myself surrounded by the shadow of
sad boredom!...

Pushkin continues the same diary entry with a description of him waiting at the window, looking at the road covered in snow and of the minute of sweet happiness when he and Bakunina met at the staircase. Pushkin commented on how good she looked in her black dress and how even though he had been miserable for 18 hours because he had not seen her, he was happy for 5 minutes during their meeting.⁶⁶

Я счастлив был!.. Нет, я вчера не был счастлив; поутру я мучился ожиданьем, с
неописанным волненьем стоял под окошком, смотрел на снежную дорогу — ее не
видно было! Наконец я потерял надежду, вдруг нечаянно встречаюсь с нею на
лестнице, — сладкая минута!...
Как она мила была! Как черное платье пристало к милой Бакуниной!

⁶⁴ Valentin Savin, op. cit.

⁶⁵ Aleksandr Pushkin, “Итак, я счастлив был...” (“And so, I was happy...”)

⁶⁶ Valentin Savin, op. cit.

Но я не видел ее 18 часов — ах! какое положение, какая мука!..
Но я был счастлив 5 минут...⁶⁷

[I was happy!...No, yesterday I was not happy; since the morning I was tormented by waiting, with undescrivable excitement I stood under the window, looked at the snowy road- I could not see her! At the end when I lost all hope, suddenly I met her at the staircase- sweet minute!.../ How sweet she was! How the black dress fit perfectly the dear Bakunina!/ But I have not seen her in 18 hours- ah! What a situation, what pain!.../ But I was happy for 5 minutes...]

After a happy spring and summer during which Bakunina lived in Tsarskoe selo with her mother and Pushkin saw her everywhere, she moved to St. Petersburg and rarely came to the Lyceum. Pushkin was engulfed by sadness and wrote about looking at the distant road with a gloomy soul.⁶⁸

Вчера за чашей пуншевою
С гусаром я сидел,
И молча с мрачною душою
На дальний путь глядел.⁶⁹

[Yesterday I shared a glass of punch/ With the Hussars/ And quietly with a gloomy soul/ I looked at the distant road.]

I claim that Pushkin's interactions and relationships with his nanny Arina Yakovleva, his sister Ol'ga Pushkina and his first love Ekaterina Bakunina had a major influence on the creation of the 1819 poem "Rusalka." As already discussed Pushkin was very close with his nanny Arina and for him she was not only a loving mother and a loyal friend, but the embodiment of the Russian soul. From her fairy tales and songs the young Pushkin learned about Russian culture and traditions, including Russian folklore where the rusalka character comes from. Pushkin's experiences with his sister Ol'ga Pushkina and his first

⁶⁷ Aleksandr Pushkin's diary entry quoted by Valentin Savin, op. cit.

⁶⁸ Valentin Savin, op. cit.

⁶⁹ Aleksandr Pushkin, "Слеза" ("Tear")

love Ekaterina Bakunina influenced the way Pushkin developed the early rusalka as a dominant, powerful female character that is tempting, mysterious, threatening, and destructive. Moreover, the fact that Pushkin gave the rusalka such a role in his 1819 work is related to his early views and ideas about men and women in terms of power and control.

In *Pis'ma zhenshin k Pushkinu* (*Women's letters to Pushkin*) Leonid Petrovich Grossman points out that Pavel Viazemsky, the son of Prince Petr Viazemsky and Vera Viazemskaia, both of whom were Pushkin's close friends, always remembered Pushkin's conviction that "it is crucial for a man to be able to get women's attention,"⁷⁰ which the poet shared with him when he was still a small child. Pushkin was teaching the young Pavel that while trying to do so, the man was not allowed to stop after the first attempt, but he had to persistently keep going forward arrogantly, without any concerns, in order to make women respect him.⁷¹ Grossman claims that in his letters Pavel stated that Pushkin was constantly giving him advice on how to address and communicate with women, adding to his lessons inappropriate quotes from Sébastien-Roch Nicolas de Chamfort—one of Pushkin's favorite French authors.⁷² Grossman also points out that lack of interest and cold-heartedness marked the young Pushkin's attitude to women's *spiritual* worlds. Pushkin's brother Lev testified that during his conversations with women Pushkin almost never talked

⁷⁰ "в важном значении для мужчины способности приковать внимание женщин" [It is crucial for a man to be able to get women's attention.] (Leonid Petrovich Grossman, "Vstupitel'naya stat'ia," in *Pis'ma Zhenshin k Pushkinu* (Moscow: Sovremennye problem, 1928), 9.)

⁷¹ "не следует останавливаться на первом шагу, а идти вперед, нагло, без оглядки, чтобы заставить женщин уважать вас" [One must not stop after the first attempt, but go forward arrogantly, without any concerns, so in order to make women respect him.] (Ibid.)

⁷² Ibid.

about poetry and literature.⁷³ According to Grossman one of the reasons why Pushkin loved the ladies' attention and adoration was that he viewed them as his true "audience,"⁷⁴ and the big circle of women readers and admirers around Pushkin elevated him to a higher level as an author.⁷⁵

I claim that there are two main reasons for the young Pushkin's conviction that women should be viewed only as an audience and should be controlled by men. One of the reasons is the atmosphere of the time when Pushkin was growing up. As already discussed in the Introduction, even though Russian culture was 'feminized' during the eighteenth and nineteenth century women were still assigned a passive, submissive role by men, and one of the reasons for this was the powerful and threatening *grande dames* who were still lurking in the shadows of the eighteenth century and intimidating the hungry for power, control, and dominance. The desired tole for women was viewed by men as the virtuous wife and mother—the ideal companion to the man. She should also be the ideal reader of the male authors' works and should not write herself, because exposing women's experiences was vulgar and unacceptable and because due to their gender, women did not have imagination and could not experience genuine inspiration. Even when encouraged to write, women were still viewed as inferior in the sense that according to men their works would be received well not because of their intrinsic quality, but because they were written by the beautiful hand of a woman. As Joe Andrew puts it "...the role of women in many

⁷³ Ibid., 11.

⁷⁴ "они его истинная публика" [They're his true audience.] (Ibid.)

⁷⁵ Ibid., 8.

aspects remained traditional; they give 'advice', they are handmaidens, Muses to the great men."⁷⁶

The young Pushkin, being nineteen years old at the time, lacked extensive personal experience with and understanding of women's internal worlds. He had frequent interactions with his nanny and his sister Ol'ga and had just fallen in love for a first time, but never got to know his beloved beyond the distant admiration of her beauty. Thus, it is fair to claim that his early ideas of women's internal worlds and position in society may have been influenced to a large extent by the popular beliefs of the time. Joe Andrews points out that Pushkin on one hand enjoyed good relations with and patronized several women writers, but could very unflattering about these women writers in private. For example he sent a copy of "Gypsies" to Volkonskaya with a new poem dedicated to her; yet his comments in private letters on Volkonskaya were much less flattering, and his general approach to literary women was to group them in the catch- all cliché of the 'bluestocking.' According to Hugh Aplin, Pushkin "seemed to experience difficulty in dissociating a writer who happened to be female from the ladies he encountered in society." On the other hand for Andrew it is surprising that someone who was so concerned with the state of Russian literature and who wrote so much about it actually wrote so little about women writers as such. Andrew points out that in his public and semi-public utterances Pushkin was not much kinder to women than he was in private, and he was the first prominent writer to challenge the Karamzinian view concerning the alleged primacy of women's taste as a literary criterion. Andrew quotes page 16 from Pushkin's *Extracts from*

⁷⁶ Joe Andrew, "A Crocodile in Flannel," in *Gender in Russian History and Culture* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York : Palgrave in association with Centre for Russian and East European Studies, U of Birmingham, 2001), 53.

Letters, Thoughts and Observations (1827) in which Pushkin says, “People complain about the indifference of Russian women towards our poetry, suggesting that the reason for this is ignorance of their native language.” However, according to him this is not the real reason. Pushkin continues, “Poetry slides across their hearing, but does not penetrate to their souls; they are insensible to its [poetry’s] harmonies...Just have a good listen to their literary opinions, and you will be surprised at the wrong-headedness, even the crudeness of their understanding...There are few exceptions.” Andrew concludes that Pushkin was of very little help to the cause of women’s writing and their overall position in literature.⁷⁷

The other reason for Pushkin’s views on control and power over women is the young poet’s relationships with his sister Ol’ga Pushkina and his first love Ekaterina Bakunina. As already discussed Pushkin’s older sister Ol’ga Pushkina was his partner in the games that he played as a child and remained his loyal friend for the rest of his life. Pushkin’s early impressions of women were based on his interactions with Ol’ga. One of her characteristic features was her sudden and sharp mood changes ranging from extreme joy to extreme anger. These sharp mood changes were also characteristic of Pushkin’s mother. These inexplicable, extreme, and at times even threatening conditions that Pushkin observed from two of his closest women while growing up- his mother and his sister, undoubtedly influenced the development of his views on women as unpredictable, irrational beings who perhaps should be kept under control by the rational male. Ekaterina Bakunina, the poet’s first love, may also have influenced his early views on women and the desire to not be passive and submissive to them. The relationship remained forever one-sided, since the young poet never revealed his feelings to Bakunina and remained limited

⁷⁷ Ibid., 58-59.

to the anxious awaiting of her arrival, the distant observation and admiration of her beauty, and a few casual greetings and brief conversations. The young poet failed to establish a relationship with Bakunina in which he felt a sense of control and thus, by remaining a passive bystander who simply waited and observed, he did not have the chance to develop a deeper and more meaningful relationship with her; then she left forever, which deeply hurt him.

I claim that the 1819 poem “Rusalka” reflects the knowledge and understanding of Russian folklore that Pushkin gained from his nanny Arina Yakovleva and the young poet’s fears associated with the power struggle between men and women based on the time when his generation grew up and on his relationships with his sister Ol’ga and his first love Ekaterina Bakunina. Through the poem Pushkin may be expressing his innermost fears of women as mysterious and inexplicable beings, who gain control over men through the power of beauty and sexuality and who use this control to lead men to their downfall and death. In Pushkin’s naked rusalka one can see some of the main characteristics of the rusalki according to Russian folklore—‘emptiness’ and inability to create beauty and life, an innate connection to the uncontrollable power of nature, and inexplicable deadliness. I claim that by exposing these characteristics in the naked rusalka, the young Pushkin, influenced by the general male opinions about women during the era when he grew up and on his own early personal experiences with women, is trying to show why women should be viewed with suspicion and should not be allowed to have control over men: their true identity is someone who seems to have great potential on the outside, but who turns out to be dead and empty on the inside, someone who will use power and control not for creation,

but for destruction, someone who is innately related to irrationality, manipulation, and destruction.

As already stated, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, men emphasized the innate connection between women and low subjects and emotions such as obsessive romantic love, passion, lust, and desire. Men also claimed that women could only appreciate abstract beauty, but never create it, and that due to their sex and their lack of a “quill” or a “pen” they were deprived of imagination, inspiration, and creativity. This argument aligns with the idea of the Karamzinists such as Batiushkov, and even conservatives, such as Shishkov that insisted that women are fit to be admiring readers and muses, but never authors, and even if they write their works would be liked not because of their quality but because they were written by the fair hand of a lady. It was already pointed out that men of Pushkin’s generation, despite supporting the idea that women were the ‘fairer’ sex, also brought up the differences between the ways men and women thought and acted and how women experienced what men saw as inexplicable, irrational, and extreme emotions and mood changes, which made them look unreliable, threatening, and destructive to the men. All of these components can be seen in Pushkin’s “Rusalka” poem.

Над озером, в глухих дубровах,
 Спасался некогда монах,
 Всегда в занятиях суровых,
 В посте, молитве и трудах.
 Уже лопаткою смиренной
 Себе могилу старец рыл —
 И лишь о смерти вожденной
 Святых угодников молил.
 Однажды летом у порогу
 Поникшей хижины своей
 Анахорет молился богу.
 Дубравы делались черней;
 Туман над озером дымился,
 И красный месяц в облаках

Тихонько по небу катился.
 На воды стал глядеть монах.
 Глядит, невольно страха полный;
 Не может сам себя понять...
 И видит: закипели волны
 И присмирели вдруг опять...
 И вдруг... легка, как тень ночная,
 Бела, как ранний снег холмов,
 Выходит женщина нагая
 И молча села у берегов.
 Глядит на старого монаха
 И чешет влажные власы.
 Святой монах дрожит со страха
 И смотрит на ее красы.
 Она манит его рукою,
 Кивает быстро головой...
 И вдруг — падучею звездою —
 Под сонной скрылася волной.
 Всю ночь не спал старик угрюмый
 И не молился целый день —
 Перед собой с невольной думой
 Все видел чудной девы тень.
 Дубравы вновь оделись тьмою;
 Пошла по облакам луна,
 И снова дева над водою
 Сидит, прелестна и бледна.
 Глядит, кивает головою,
 Целует издали шутя,
 Играет, плещется волною,
 Хохочет, плачет, как дитя,
 Зовет монаха, нежно стонет...
 «Монах, монах! Ко мне, ко мне!...»
 И вдруг в волнах прозрачных тонет;
 И все в глубокой тишине.
 На третий день отшельник страстный
 Близ очарованных берегов
 Сидел и девы ждал прекрасной,
 А тень ложилась средь дубров...
 Заря прогнала тьму ночную:
 Монаха не нашли нигде,
 И только бороду седую
 Мальчишки видели в воде.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Aleksandr Pushkin, “Rusalka” (1819).

[Over the lake in the quiet woods,/ A monk found seclusion,/ Always working hard,/ In fast, prayer, and work/ Already meekly with a shove/ The old man was digging a grave for himself-/ And long- awaited death/ Was the only thing he prayed for./ Once in the summertime/ By the door of his house,/ Anahoret was praying to God./ The woods grew dark;/ Fog spread over the lake,/ And a red moon in the clouds/ Was quietly traveling through the sky./ The monk started looking at the water./ He was looking full of fear;/ And could not understand himself.../ And he saw that the water started boiling/ And then suddenly became calm again.../ And suddenly...light as a night shadow,/ White as early snow on the hills,/ A naked woman came out/ And quietly sat at the shore./ She was looking at the old monk/ And was combing her wet hair./ The holy monk was shaking with fear/ And looking at her beauty./ She was waving at him/ And shaking her head at him.../ And then suddnely like a shooting start/ She hid under a sleepy wave./ The old man could not sleep all night/ And did not pray for the whole day-/ In front of him unconsciously/ He kept seeing the shadow of the beautiful girl. / The woods became dark again;/ The moon started traveling through the clouds,/And again the girl/ Was sitting over the water, beautiful and pale./ She was looking, shaking her head,/ Jokingly blowing kisses,/ Playing, splashing the waves,/ Giggling, crying like a child,/ Calling the monk, gently moaning.../ “Monk, monk! To me, to me!...”/ And suddenly sinks in the transparent waves;/ And everything is quiet./ On the third day the passionate outcast/ Next to the enchanted shores/ Was sitting and waited for the beautiful girl,/ Shadows spread over the woods.../ Dawn chased away the darkness of night:/ They could not find the monk anywhere/ And only the grey beard/ The little boys saw in the water.]

The externally beautiful rusalki, as an extreme version of female beings, are unable to create beauty, since they are dead and their wombs are empty. When they tempt men, the result is not a natural union of love, but a reverse ritual of emptiness and death. The rusalka in the poem is destructive and deadly without a logical reason or explanation. She is an overly simplistic character to whom Pushkin gave no inside and no depth.

In the beginning of Pushkin’s poem the old monk is in the safe center—he has lived a pious, secluded life devoted to hard work and prayer and far from temptations and sin.

Над озером, в глухих дубровах,
Спасался некогда монах,
Всегда в занятиях суровых,
В посте, молитве и трудах.

[Over the lake in the quiet woods,/ A monk found seclusion,/ Always working hard,/ In fast, prayer, and work]

He has been living his life based on pure faith and sacred beliefs and is getting ready to reach his 'happily ever after' by leaving his imperfect earthly shell and letting his righteous soul join God and the eternal light.

Уже лопаткою смиренной
Себе могилу старец рыл —
И лишь о смерти возжеленной
Святых угодников молил

[Already meekly with a shove/ The old man was digging a grave for himself-/ And long-awaited death/ Was the only thing he prayed for]

However, his 'happily ever after' is ruined and the end is re-written by someone who can't create beauty and who is destructive by nature- a female spirit. The rusalka that appears in front of the monk is a magnificent enchantress- naked, pale, light beauty with wet dripping hair.

И вдруг... легка, как тень ночная,
Бела, как ранний снег холмов,
Выходит женщина нагая
И молча села у берегов.

Глядит на старого монаха
И чешет влажные власы.

Святой монах дрожит со страха
И смотрит на ее красы.

.....
И снова дева над водою
Сидит, прелестна и бледна.

[And then suddenly became calm again.../ And suddenly...light as a night shadow,/

White as early snow on the hills,/ A naked woman came out/ And quietly sat at the shore./ She was looking at the old monk/ And was combing her wet hair./ The holy monk was shaking with fear/ And looking at her beauty.// And again the girl/ Was sitting over the water, beautiful and pale]

The rusalka uses all kinds of tricks to gain control over the monk in order to be able to manipulate him and to pull him into her cruel, destructive realm. The rusalka's power is in her beauty, her flirtatiousness, and her ability to provoke men's fantasies and desire. She uses all of her secret weapons in order to turn the monk from a pious righteous man into a marionette blinded by lust.

Она манит его рукою,
Кивает быстро головой...

.....

Глядит, кивает головою,
Целует издали шутя,
Играет, плещется волною,
Хохочет, плачет, как дитя,
Зовёт монаха, нежно стонет...
«Монах, монах! Ко мне, ко мне!..»

[She was waving at him/ And shaking her head at him...// She was looking, shaking her head,/ Jokingly blowing kisses,/ Playing, splashing the waves,/ Giggling, crying like a child,/ Calling the monk, gently moaning.../ “Monk, monk! To me, to me!..”]

The rusalka's goal is not to make the monk follow her because she wants to enter a sacred marital union with him and have a home and a family. The rusalka's goal is to gain control over the monk and to pull him away from the center, from his holy “happily ever after,” turning his fairy tale into a horror story that ends in destruction and sin. The rusalka wants for the monk to give up the control that he has over his life—his righteous ways of firm faith, prayer, and hard work—and to give that control to her, based on the sinful temptations of the flesh. Instead of joining God in Heaven for eternity the rusalka tempts the monk to join her and the rest of the “unquiet dead” who took their own lives—a sinful deed which denies the person a proper religious burial and a place in a proper cemetery. The monk quickly becomes a victim of the rusalka's manipulation, gives up his pious life, and begins his way on the downward spiral that she has created for him.

Святой монах дрожит со страха
И смотрит на ее красы.

.....
Всю ночь не спал старик угрюмый
И не молился целый день —
Перед собой с невольной думой
Все видел чудной девы тень.

.....
На третий день отшельник страстный
Близ очарованных берегов
Сидел и девы ждал прекрасной

[The holy monk was shaking with fear/ And looking at her beauty.// The old man could not sleep all night/ And did not pray for the whole day-/ In front of him unconsciously/ He kept seeing the shadow of the beautiful girl. // On the third day the passionate outcast/ Next to the enchanted shores/ Was sitting and waited for the beautiful girl]

At the end the rusalka succeeds in achieving her cruel goal- the monk follows her in the lake, and thus leaves the center of religious, righteous life, and enters the realm of sin and destruction. The fact that the monk's grey beard is the only thing that can be seen from the monk is a powerful illustration of his separation from his religious self. He surrendered his body and his soul to the sinful lake depths, but his beard—a powerful symbol of religious belonging and holiness in Orthodoxy, remained on the surface of the lake.

Заря прогнала тьму ночную:
Монаха не нашли нигде,
И только бороду седую
Мальчишки видели в воде.

[Dawn chased away the darkness of night:/ They could not find the monk anywhere/ And only the grey beard/ The little boys saw in the water.]

In Pushkin's "Rusalka" one can also see another parallel with an idea that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Russian men often used as a justification for women's inferiority and for why they should not be the ones exercising control—the irrational way in which women's brains work and the way they think with their hearts instead of with their brains,

which involves the display of certain extreme emotions characteristic only of women, such as selfishness characterized by jealousy and vengefulness. Based on these characteristics men tended to relate women to nature—a realm characterized as inexplicable, unpredictable, and uncontrollable as well. Pushkin himself grew up with constant inexplicable displays of such extreme emotions from his mother and his sister. The rusalka's connections to irrational, inexplicable emotions such as extreme selfishness and to nature in the poem are obvious. In the rusalka's actions, in her unreasonable cruel intentions towards the monk, her obsession with making him give up his righteous way and drown in sin for no reason, one can see the way Ivan Turgenev defined women's selfishness—not letting themselves or anyone else live, as was already described in the Introduction. The rusalka is a dead being, but she also deprives the monk of his life. Her appearance is related to certain changes in nature: the woods get dark, a cloud falls over the lake, there is a red moon in the sky, the water in the lake starts boiling.

Дубравы делались черней;
Туман над озером дымился,
И красный месяц в облаках
Тихонько по небу катился.

.....
И видит: закипели волны
И присмирели вдруг опять...

.....
Дубравы вновь оделись тьмою;
Пошла по облакам луна

[The woods grew dark;/ Fog spread over the lake,/ And a red moon in the clouds/ Was quietly traveling through the sky// And he saw that the water started boiling/ And then suddenly became calm again...// The woods became dark again;/ The moon started traveling through the clouds]

The circumstances under which the rusalka appears are very specific and have been identified in Russian folklore as associated with foreshadowing the appearance of an evil,

unclean force, and/or signifying misfortune and danger. Other indicators of the rusalka's strong connection to nature are the fact that she lives in the lake, sits on the shore when she comes out, and combs her wet hair.

Выходит женщина нагая
И молча села у берегов.

Глядит на старого монаха
И чешет влажные власы.

[A naked woman came out/ And quietly sat at the shore./ She was looking at the old monk/
And was combing her wet hair.]

Pushkin also compares the rusalka to an element from nature—a shooting star.

И вдруг — падучею звездою —
Под сонной скрылася волной.

[And then suddenly like a shooting star/ She hid under a sleepy wave.]

Ten years later, in 1829, Pushkin started writing a poetic drama with the same title—“Rusalka.” He worked on the poetic drama for a number of years, but he never finished it. This poetic drama is much longer and more complex than the short and whimsical 1819 “Rusalka”. When he started writing his second “Rusalka,” Pushkin was no longer the twenty-year old arrogant boy who approached life with a mocking and sarcastic self-confident smile. Since then life had taught the young poet multiple difficult lessons and had permanently left the gloomy mark of skepticism on him and his works. In 1823 Pushkin wrote the poem “Demon,” which very well captured his conflicting emotions based on the way he had changed not only as an author, but also as a person. The poem tells the story of a man whose young days were filled with “возвышенные чувства,” (lofty feelings) with the excitement of love, freedom, and creativity, with new experiences and impressions.

В те дни, когда мне были новы
 Все впечатленья бытия —
 И взоры дев, и шум дубровы,
 И ночью пенье соловья —
 Когда возвышенные чувства,
 Свобода, слава и любовь
 И вдохновенные искусства
 Так сильно волновали кровь⁷⁹

[In those days when to me were new/ all impressions of the world-/ And the glances of the girls, and the noise of the forest,/ and the night singing of the nightingale-/ When the lofty feelings,/ Freedom, fame, and love/ And the inspiration from the arts/ So strongly excited the blood]

However, those days ended when a malicious spirit secretly started visiting him and started pouring icy anger in his soul with his smile, strange stare, and his mean speeches.

Часы надежд и наслаждений
 Тоской внезапной осеня,
 Тогда какой-то злобный гений
 Стал тайно навещать меня.
 Печальны были наши встречи:
 Его улыбка, чудный взгляд,
 Его язвительные речи
 Вливали в душу холодный яд.

[The hours of hopes and pleasure/ Were suddenly engulfed by sadness/ Then some sort of malicious genius/ Started secretly visiting me./ Our meetings were sorrowful:/ His smile, the strange glance/ His evil words/ Brought cold anger to my soul.]

This malicious spirit despised love and freedom, challenged salvation, called the wonderful just a dream, and mocked life, refusing to bless anything in nature.

Неистоимой клеветою
 Он провиденье искушал;
 Он звал прекрасное мечтою;
 Он вдохновенье презирал;
 Не верил он любви, свободе;
 На жизнь насмешливо глядел —

⁷⁹ Aleksandr Pushkin, "Demon"

И ничего во всей природе
Благословить он не хотел.

[With never-ending malice/ He tempted salvation/ He called the wonderful a dream;/ And despised inspiration;/ He did not believe in love and freedom;/ And mocked life-/ And nothing in all nature/ Wanted to bless.]

According to T. G. Tsyavlovskaya, a Pushkin scholar, the Demon, the malicious spirit who secretly visits the young poet, is a reflection of the oppressive skepticism that takes over Pushkin's life in 1823. Many of Pushkin's contemporaries recognized in the Demon the dry and sarcastic Alexander Nikolaevich Raevsky whom Pushkin befriended, while living in the south. However, Pushkin publically denied such speculations with the publication, "О стихотворении "Демон"" ("About the poem "Demon""), under a different name, which was supposed to come out in 1825, but did not come out until 1874. In this publication Pushkin said that the Demon served a different, more ethical purpose. Pushkin said that during the best time of one's life when one's heart is not yet icy, it is still open to the wonderful, it is still naïve and gentle. However, slowly the constant contradictions of existence start bringing doubts to it, which eventually destroy hope. The Demon, according to Pushkin, stood for the spirit of denial and doubt, and showed its characteristics, and its deadly influence on the moral dimension of the century.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ "Пушкин намеревался публично опровергнуть такое мнение в заметке под чужим именем: «Думаю, что критик ошибся. Многие того же мнения, иные даже указывали на лицо, которое Пушкин будто бы хотел изобразить в своем странном стихотворении. Кажется, они не правы, по крайней мере вижу я в «Демоне» цель иную, более нравственную. В лучшее время жизни сердце, еще не охлажденное опытом, доступно для прекрасного. Оно легковерно и нежно. Мало-помалу вечные противуречия сущности рожают в нем сомнения, чувство мучительное, но непродолжительное. Оно исчезает, уничтожив навсегда лучшие надежды и поэтические предрассудки души. Недаром великий Гете называет вечного врага человечества духом отрицающим. И Пушкин не хотел ли в своем демоне

The poem “Demon” marked the beginning of a new, darker and gloomier stage in Pushkin’s life. As Yuri Druzhnikov points out in *The Life and Death of Alexander Pushkin: A Genius at Odds with Himself* in the late 1820’s and early 1830’s Pushkin’s life was a constant struggle full of insecurity, false hopes, and empty illusions.”⁸¹ Pushkin was not only struggling with health problems, conflicts with the authorities, and the impossible dream of leaving the country, but also with his relationship with his beloved and trusted mentor Vasily Zhukovsky. At that point, to judge by the correspondence between the two authors, Zhukovsky started harshly criticizing Pushkin for the direction that his life and his works had taken. In a letter from 1825 Zhukovsky says, “You don’t understand yourself, you are rebelling like a child against misfortune, which is a result of your immaturity... Stop being an epigram, be a poem.”⁸² In another letter from 1826 Zhukovsky admits that he despises everything that Pushkin had written because Zhukovsky saw his works as unacceptable for moral and ethical norms, and claimed that Pushkin is to blame for the fact that the generation growing up with his works would have no stability in life due to Pushkin’s wild ideas presented through the beauty of his poetry.⁸³ According to

олицетворить сей дух отрицания или сомнения, и в сжатой картине начертал отличительные признаки и печальное влияние оного на нравственность нашего века.” (Т. Г. Tsyavlovskaya at [https://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/ Демон_\(Пушкин\)](https://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/Демон_(Пушкин)))

⁸¹ Yuri Druzhnikov, “Pushkin in 1830: From Skepticism to Apathy” in *The Life and Death of Alexander Pushkin: A Genius at Odds with Himself* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 6.

⁸² “Ты сам себя не понимаешь; ты только бунтуешь, как ребенок, против несчастья, которое само не иное что, как плод твоего Перестань быть эпиграммой, будь поэмой” (“В. А. Жуковскому” [“To V. A. Zhukovsky”] in *Письма 1815-1825* [Letters 1815-1825] at http://pushkin-art.ru/letters_t1_3_183/)

⁸³ “Ты знаешь, как я люблю твою музу и как дорожу твоею *благодаря приобретению* славою: ибо умею уважать Поэзию и знаю, что ты рожден быть великим поэтом и мог бы быть честью и драгоценностью России. Но я ненавижу все, что ты написал возмутительного для порядка и нравственности. Наши отроки (то есть все зреющее

Zhukovsky, Pushkin had already done harm that could never be repaired and he must realize that talent is nothing and moral and ethical greatness is everything.⁸⁴ In a letter from 1834 Zhukovsky exclaimed, “You’re a foolish man, I’m completely convinced now. Not only foolish, but also not well-behaved...”⁸⁵

Yuri Druzhnikov points out that, in the late 1820’s and early 1830’s, on one hand Pushkin was battling the oppressive Russian government that was paying unhealthy attention to him since the poet’s early post- Lyceum period. Druzhnikov points out that official correspondence is riddled with expressions such as “place appropriate secret surveillance over him,” “personally pay the appropriate attention to his life-style,” and “His Imperial majesty commands the placing of A. Pushkin under the secret surveillance of the government.”⁸⁶ The government rejected most of Pushkin’s attempts to leave Russia and was building a tight, suffocating net around the poet. Nikolay Putyata, a close friend at that time, noted, “Pushkin asked to go abroad, but they won’t let him. He was even ready to go with Baron Schilling to Siberia, to the border with China. I don’t know why this goal of his didn’t come to pass, but traces of it remain in his poem ‘Let us go, I’m ready...’”⁸⁷

Поедем, я готов; куда бы вы, друзья,
Куда б ни вздумали, готов за вами я
Повсюду следовать, надменной убегая:

поколение), при плохом воспитании, которое не дает им никакой подпоры для жизни, познакомились с твоими буйными, одетыми прелестью поэзии мыслями; ты уже многим нанес вред неисцелимый.” (“В. А. Жуковский. Письма к А. С. Пушкину” [“V. A. Zhukovsky. Letters to A. S. Pushkin”] in Электронная библиотека классической литературы [Electronic library for classic literature] at <http://libclub.com/J/JukovskiiVA/JukovskiiVA-125-1.htm>)

⁸⁴ “Талант ничто. Главное: величие нравственное.” (Ibid.)

⁸⁵ “А ты ведь человек глупый, теперь я в этом совершенно уверен. Не только глупый, но еще и поведения непристойного...” (Ibid.)

⁸⁶ Yuri Druzhnikov, *op. cit.*, 7.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 18.

К подножию ль стены далекого Китая,
 В кипящий ли Париж, туда ли наконец,
 Где Тасса не поет уже ночной гребец,
 Где древних городов под пеплом дремлют мощи,
 Где кипарисные благоухают рощи,
 Повсюду я готов. Поедем... но, друзья,
 Скажите: в странствиях умрет ли страсть моя?
 Забуду ль гордую, мучительную деву,
 Или к ее ногам, ее младому гневу,
 Как дань привычную, любовь я принесу?⁸⁸

[Let's go, I'm ready; wherever you go, friends,/ Wherever you think of, I'm ready to follow you,/ Everywhere, running:/ to the base of the wall in distant China,/ In lively Paris, there afterall,/ Where Tassa no longer sings the rower in the night/ Where the remains of the ancient cities sleep under the ashes/ Where the cypress groves spread their aroma,/ For anywhere I'm ready. Let's go...but, friends/ Tell me: will my passion die while traveling?/ Will I forget the proud, tormenting girl,/ Or to her feet, to her youthful rage,/ As a tribute I'll bring my love?]

According to Druzhnikov, all of Pushkin's attempts to leave the country were turning into "empty futility." Destiny, as Pushkin foresaw, would not be shattered, so just one thing remained—for him to die at home in his own country. Druzhnikov points out that indifference and apathy characterized Pushkin's state of mind at the end of January and in February of 1830.⁸⁹ At this time, suspiciousness and malice were beginning to show in the thirty-year-old poet, a condition that would sometimes affect people who were in no way guilty of his troubles. His literary polemic acquired extreme forms. He composed lampoons, politely termed "epigrams," of his colleagues, and in response to some critical articles by Nikolay Nadezhdin, Pushkin called him a fool of a journalist, a cunning serf, a blockhead, a lackey.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Aleksandr Pushkin, "Поедем, я готов; куда бы вы, друзья" ("Let's go, I'm ready; wherever you go, friends")

⁸⁹ Yuri Druzhnikov, *op. cit.*, 20.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

During those challenging times Pushkin no longer viewed women as inferior, inexplicable, irrational, or simply an audience or a muse that had to be controlled. He started looking for a partner, for a woman who would be attractive to him not only with her external beauty, but also with her rich internal world that would match his in terms of education, intellect, knowledge, and interests. As Joe Andrew points out, the times had also greatly changed since Pushkin's youth in terms of women and their position and role in society and literature. In his 1833-34 article "On Russian Women Writers" Ivan Kireevsky talked about the striking changes seen over the past fifteen years and how an educated woman at that point was considered quite normal, and women were beginning to think for themselves, form their own opinions, and to thirst for enlightenment. Women were stepping outside the purely family sphere and were taking their place on the public stage.⁹¹

Pushkin witnessed and experienced these striking changes in his own experiences with women during that time period. From 1820, when he spent a few months with the impressive Raevsky sisters, Pushkin started developing relationships with women who were not only charming, but also strong, self-confident, well educated, smart, and could be his equal in conversations and discussions. Pushkin was hoping to find a partner that would provide the light of love and happiness in his dark life and would give meaning to his gloomy days. In the following section, I will briefly look at some of the more important examples of relationships in Pushkin's life that may have fed his depiction of the female protagonist of the unfinished "Rusalka." These included motherly or nurturing older women such as Ekaterina Karamzina, Vera Viazemskaia, Praskov'ia Osipova, and

⁹¹ Joe Andrew, op. cit., 60.

Elizaveta Khitrovo, who had the experience and the knowledge necessary to establish themselves as very powerful, influential, independent, self-confident, and respected society women, but were also able to give Pushkin the gentleness of sincere motherly love. It also included young, beautiful, and intelligent girls, full of life, who were more playful, such as the Raevsky sisters, Zizi Osipova, and Elizaveta Ushakova. They all admired Pushkin's poetic talent and never crossed the boundry of sincere, but strictly platonic friendship.

Pushkin met Ekaterina Andreevna Karamzina, the second wife of Nikolay Mikhaylovich Karamzin, in the summer of 1816 in Tzarskoe selo. Ekaterina immediately liked the young poet, welcomed him into her family, and became a mother to him. Pushkin's feelings for Ekaterina were a combination of respect, adoration, and love. His friendship with Ekaterina lasted his whole life and he was very grateful for the attention she gave him. Ekaterina was the one who made the sign of a cross over the dying poet.⁹² A few years later Pushkin met another motherly figure that became very influential in his life and works. 1824 marked the beginning of the poet's two-year exile in Mikhailovskoe where he met Praskov'ia Aleksandrovna Osipova. She was a highly educated woman, who knew a lot about history, literature, and followed the development of poetry. Her father wrote poetry, and Pushkin,

⁹² "...Он сам этого пожелал... Он протянул мне руку, я ее пожала, и он мне также, а потом махнул, чтобы я вышла. Я, уходя, осенила его издали крестом, он опять протянул мне руку и сказал тихо: „Перекрестите еще", тогда я опять, пожавши еще раз его руку, я уже перекрестила, прикладывая пальцы на лоб, и приложила руку к щеке; он ее тихонько поцеловал и опять махнул." [He wished for this...He stretched out his hand, I held it, he held mine, and then he waved at me to leave. I, leaving, made the sign of a cross over him, and he again stretched his hand to me and said quietly, "Make the cross over me again", then I again, taking his hand, made a cross over him, putting my fingers on his forehead, and touching his cheek with my hand; he quietly kissed it and waved at me to leave again.] ("Переписка А. С. Пушкина с женщинами" ["A. S. Pushkin's correspondence with women"] at http://az.lib.ru/p/pushkin_a_s/text_0650.shtml)

Yazykov, and Del'vig were frequent guests at her house. When Pushkin arrived in Mikhailovskoe she was forty-three years old. Based on Praskov'ia correspondence with Puskin, it can be seen that her feelings for the poet were a combination of strong attraction of a female to a male as well as motherly love and desire to help and protect a son. She called him "my dear and always loved Pushkin"⁹³ and "the son of my heart."⁹⁴ She wrote to him, "I kiss your beautiful eyes which I love so much."⁹⁵ Pushkin's letters to Praskov'ia were for her the greatest happiness and pride. She kept every page he wrote to her and in 1833 confessed to him that she rereads his letters "with the joy of a money collector who keeps counting the piles of gold that he had saved."⁹⁶ Pushkin highly valued Osipova. He never allowed himself to disrespect or offend her with sarcastic and humorous comments, which he made about many other women, including her daughter Anna Vul'f. He dedicated to Praskov'ya the poems "Подражания Корану" ("In imitation of the Quran") and "Простите, верные дубравы" ("Farewell, my dear woods").⁹⁷

In 1827 after his return from the Mikhailovskoe exile Pushkin met another close female friend who developed motherly feelings for him—Elizaveta Mikhailovna Khitrovo. She was the daughter of the famous Field Marshall Kutuzov and the mother of the glorious St. Petersburg beauty Dolly Fikel'mon, who was one of Pushkin's close friends. The letters between Elizaveta and Pushkin show that they were connected by firm friendship. Elizaveta received European education and the poet was undoubtedly interested in the mind

⁹³ "мой дорогой и всегда любимый Пушкин" (Ibid.)

⁹⁴ "сын моего сердца" (Ibid.)

⁹⁵ "Целую ваши прекрасные глаза, которые я так люблю" (Ibid.)

⁹⁶ "с наслаждением скупца, пересчитывающего груды золота, которые он копит..." (Ibid.)

⁹⁷ Ibid.

and the knowledge of this woman who was very well informed about the current political events.⁹⁸ Khitrovo loved Pushkin with a very specific, worrisome love,⁹⁹ constantly being concerned about him and his fate, and trying to establish a calm, creative life for him.¹⁰⁰ Khitrovo promised Pushkin that he could count on her for everything without any doubts.¹⁰¹

Three of Pushkin's notable younger female friends came from the Raevsky family. During the 1817-1819 period Pushkin quickly grew up and through his poems he started criticizing the authorities and their actions. The regime did not like these witty epigrams, and Pushkin was almost sent to Siberia. However, with the help of his influential friends such as Karamzin, Zhukovsky, and Vyazemsky, on May 6, 1820 Czar Aleksandr I recommended that the poet be sent to Ekaterinoslav. When General Raevsky's family stopped at Ekaterinoslav on their way from Kiev to Kavkazkye Vody Pushkin joined them on their trip. For two months Pushkin enjoyed the family's lovely company, the beautiful nature, and the healing power of the water. He wrote to his brother Lev that all four daughters are wonderful and the oldest one, Ekaterina, is a remarkable woman. None of

⁹⁸ "Найденные недавно письма к ней Пушкина указывают на прочное дружеское чувство, связывавшее их, и на несомненный интерес поэта к уму и знаниям этой европейски образованной женщины, всесторонне осведомленной в событиях политической современности." (Valentin Savin, *op. cit.*)

⁹⁹ "Вы слишком хорошо знаете, что любовь моя к вам беспокойна и мучительна." (Ibid.)

¹⁰⁰ "Она любила Пушкина особой, тревожной любовью, беспокоясь о нем, заботясь о его судьбе, стремясь всячески наладить ему спокойную творческую жизнь." (Ibid.)

¹⁰¹ "Океан будет между вами и мной, но рано или поздно вы всегда найдете во мне для себя, вашей жены и ваших детей -- друга, подобного скале, о которую все разобьется. Рассчитывайте на меня, на жизнь и на смерть, располагайте мною во всем и без всякого стеснения." (Ibid.)

the four saw themselves as Pushkin's muses, and they never had personal relations with Pushkin. They admired his talent and his works, but were not romantically interested in the poet. Pushkin developed similar friendships with Praskov'ia Osipova's younger daughter Evpraksiya and with Elizaveta Ushakova, the younger sister of Ekaterina Ushakova with whom Pushkin had a passionate, but unfortunate love affair. Zina, or Zizi as her relatives and friends called her, was a pretty, lively, happy girl and Pushkin enjoyed flirting with her. He treated her like a mischievous little girl, which can be seen in the poem which he wrote in her album.¹⁰²

Вот, Зина, вам совет: играйте,
Из роз весёлых заплетайте
Себе торжественный венец —
И впредь у нас не разрывайте
Ни мадригалов, ни сердец.

[Here's my advice to you Zina: play,/ From joyful roses make/ a celebratory crown for yourself-/ And don't tear apart/ Neither our madrigals, nor our hearts.]

Elizaveta, like Zizi, was a goodlooking girl whom Pushkin liked, but their feelings for each other never developed beyond good friendship.¹⁰³

Even more important and relevant for the unfinished poetic drama "Rusalka" are two other sets of women: (1) the women with whom Pushkin was involved and whom he may have treated poorly, such as a serf girl that he got pregnant in Mikhailovskoe and Anna Vul'f, who could never overcome her love for him, a love to which the poet could not respond; and (2) the women with whom he had affairs which may have been difficult and

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

complex or which led to difficult consequences. These include Elizaveta Vorontsova, Ekaterina Ushakova, Anna Olenina and his wife Natal'ia Goncharova.

In 1825-1826 Pushkin had a romance with a serf girl from the village of Mikhailovskoe whom the poet got pregnant. In January 1825 I. I. Pushtin, one of Pushkin's friends from the Lyceum, visited Pushkin in Mikhailovskoe and observed the beginning of Pushkin's relationship with the serf girl. Pushtin noted that coming into the room he noticed a figure that very much stood out from all of the other ones. Pushkin immediately recognized his friend's playful thoughts and smiled in a meaningful way.¹⁰⁴ In May 1826 Pushkin wrote a letter to Count Viazemsky describing the outcome of his relationship with the serf girl.

Письмо это тебе вручит очень милая и добрая девушка, которую один из твоих друзей неосторожно обрюхатил. Полагаюсь на твое человеколюбие и дружбу. Приюти ее в Москве и дай ей денег, сколько ей понадобится, а потом отправь в Болдино, в мою вотчину, где водятся курицы, петухи и медведи... При сем с отеческой нежностью прошу тебя позаботиться о будущем малютке, если то будет мальчик. Отсылать его в воспитательный дом мне не хочется, а нельзя ли его покамест отдать в какую-нибудь деревню, хотя бы в Остафьево. Милый мой, мне совестно, ей-богу, но тут уже не до совести.

[This letter will be given to you by a very nice and good girl, whom one of your friends was not careful enough with and got pregnant. I am relying on your humanness and friendship. Give her shelter in Moscow and give her money, as much as she needs, and then send her to Boldino, to my estate, where they have chickens, roosters, and bears...I am asking you, with fatherly gentleness, inquire about the future of the child, if it happens to be a boy. Sending him to a boarding school is not what I want to do; maybe it is better to send him to a village, maybe to Ostav'ev. My dear, I feel remorse, oh God, but this is not a matter of conscience.]

¹⁰⁴ “Вошли- рассказывает Пушкин,- в нянину комнату, где собрались швеи. Я тотчас же заметил между ними одну фигурку, резко отличавшуюся от других. Он тотчас же прозрел шаловливую мою мысль и улыбнулся значительно.” (*Пушкин и 113 женщин-поэта. Все любовные связи великого повесы. Кумиры. Истории Великой Любви* [*Pushkin and the poet's 113 women. All of the love relationships of the great poet. Muses. Stories of great love*] at <https://books.google.com/books?id=USZhAAAAQBAJ&pg>)

Viazemsky could not help Pushkin since the girl was a serf and was considered shared property of the Pushkin family.¹⁰⁵ Based on information from unpublished documents such as the letter that the "известная вам" ("the one known to you") sent Pushkin in 1833 the literary historian and Pushkin scholar P. E. Stegolev claims that the serf's name was Ol'ga Mikhailovna Kalashnikova.¹⁰⁶ The fate of the girl and of Pushkin's child remain unknown. As we shall see, Pushkin's experience with this woman may have left a strong, searing impression on his treatment of the rusalka in his unfinished drama.

Anna Nikolaevna Vul'f, Praskovia's oldest daughter, was probably the most unfortunate of Pushkin's female friends, since she was the only one who developed strong life-long romantic feelings for the poet to which he could not respond. She was a typical young girl from the Trigorskoe countryside. Anna was well-educated, dreamy, and not very attractive.¹⁰⁷ She adored Pushkin's talent and was very much in love with the poet. Pushkin's flirtation with Anna was very brief, but Anna was in love with him for the rest of her life. Her love was very patient, accepting, and forgiving. According to Valentin Savin, Anna's letters to Pushkin are the only letters, preserved to this day, to the poet from a female that stand out with the depth and sincerity of the woman's love. Pushkin was annoyed by Anna's neverending attention and even wrote to his brother Lev that he was tired of her ("с Аннеткою бранюсь, надоела").¹⁰⁸

Over the years Pushkin offended and hurt Anna multiple times with his mocking comments and poems, witty jokes, and affairs with other women.¹⁰⁹ She could not

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ "Переписка," op. cit.

¹⁰⁷ Valentin Savin, op. cit.

¹⁰⁸ "Переписка," op. cit.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

understand his romances with other girls who were not as smart as she and who did not understand the poet and his works nearly as well as she did.¹¹⁰ In one of the letters to the poet Anna wrote, “You torment and hurt a heart the value of which you don’t know.” Anna tried to attract Pushkin’s attention in multiple ways including passionate love confessions, bitter insults, and stories about other suitors that were in love with her. Anna could never overcome her love for Pushkin despite the fact that he never responded with the same feelings. In a letter to him written in September 1826 she called the poet “nasty” and unworthy of being loved. Anna declared that no one would ever make her feel the same excitement and hope the same way as Pushkin did.¹¹¹ Anna never married. Her only source of happiness and hope was Pushkin’s infrequent letters. It is believed that their last meeting was in 1837, not long before Pushkin’s duel.¹¹²

One of the women with whom Pushkin had an affair that was complex and challenging and elements of which can be seen in the unfinished poetic drama “Rusalka” is Elizaveta Ksaver’evna Vorontsova. In August 1823 Pushkin fell in love with Elizaveta. She was the wife of general Mikhail Semenovich Vorontsov under whom Pushkin served in Odessa. Elizaveta was beautiful, very slender, smart, and well- educated. Pushkin was forcefully separated from Elizaveta when he was no longer welcome as a guest in their house after his relationship with her husband deteriorated and he was exiled to Mikhaylovskoe in

¹¹⁰Valentin Savin, op. cit.

¹¹¹ “скажите мне, прошу вас, почему вы перестали мне писать: это безразличие или забвенье? *Гадкий* вы! недостойны вы того, чтобы вас любили, много счетов нужно было бы мне свести с вами, но горестъ, что я больше не увижу вас, заставляет меня все забыть... Прощай мое прошлое блаженство и... уves! {Не разобрано.}. Никто в жизни не заставит меня испытать тех волнений и ощущений, какие я переживала рядом с вами.” (“Переписка,” op. cit.)

¹¹² Ibid.

August 1824. During their final meeting Vorontsova gave Pushkin a very expensive ring and kept the same ring for herself. Pushkin wrote a poem about the expensive gift, calling it his lucky charm that will protect him.

Храни меня, мой талисман,
Храни меня во дни гоненья,
Во дни раскаянья, волненья:
Ты в день печали был мне дан.

....

Пускай же ввек сердечных ран
Не растравит воспоминанье.
Прощай, надежда: спи, желанье;
Храни меня, мой талисман.¹¹³

[Protect me, my talisman,/ Protect me in my days of turmoil/ In my the days of regret, excitement:/ You were given to me on a day of sorrow.// Don't let the century of heartfelt wounds/ Poison the memories./ Farewell hope: sleep desire;/ Protect me, my talisman.]

Pushkin wore the ring for the rest of his life and Zhukovsky was the one who removed it from the dead poet's hand.¹¹⁴

Before Pushkin met the love of his life, his wife Natal'ia Goncharova, in 1829 he had very passionate, but also very painful and unfortunate love affairs with Ekaterina Ushakova and Anna Olenina and both experiences greatly influenced his works, including the poetic drama "Rusalka" as will be shown later in this chapter. After Pushkin was allowed to come back from exile in 1826 he split his time between Moscow and St. Petersburg. In 1826 in Moscow Pushkin met the Ushakov family. When Pushkin met Ekaterina Ushakova she was seventeen years old. Pushkin passionately fell in love with her, and she responded with the same feelings. Ekaterina loved literature and adored Pushkin's works. Ekaterina loved the

¹¹³ Aleksandr Pushkin, "Храни меня, мой талисман..." ("Protect me, my talisman...")

¹¹⁴ Valentin Savin, op. cit.

poet and he even thought about about proposing to her. However, he never did, and the pain he caused her can be detected in the poem “Я вас узнал, о мой оракул”, which he sent to her in January, 1830 from St. Petersburg.¹¹⁵

Я вас узнал, о мой оракул,

 Но по веселой остроте,
 Но по приветствиям лукавым,
 Но по насмешливости злой
 И по упрёкам... столь неправым,¹¹⁶

[I recognized you, my Oracle, // By the joyful harshness, / By the cunning greetings, / By the malicious sarcasm / And by the accusations...so unjust]

One of the reasons why Pushkin never proposed to Ekaterina was that in the midst of their romance he spent about eighteen months in St. Petersburg during which he went through a misfortunate romance with another woman—Anna Olenina. Pushkin’s relationship with Anna Olenina was one of the most dramatic in his life. It seemed that Pushkin had serious intentions towards the nineteen-year-old Anna and wanted to get married. In the margins he often wrote “Annete Pouchkine” and proposed to Anna multiple times. After receiving multiple rejections Pushkin had to say his farewell. Upon leaving he wrote in Anna’s album what became one of the iconic love poems of Russian literature, “Я вас любил: любовь еще, быть может”, which became Pushkin’s last testimony of his strong love for Anna for which unfortunately there was no future.¹¹⁷

Я вас любил: любовь еще, быть может,
 В душе моей угасла не совсем;
 Но пусть она вас больше не тревожит;
 Я не хочу печалить вас ничем.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Aleksandr Pushkin, “Я вас узнал, о мой оракул...” (“I recognized you, my Oracle...”)

¹¹⁷ Valentin Savin, *op. cit.*

Я вас любил безмолвно, безнадежно,
 То робостью, то ревностью томим;
 Я вас любил так искренно, так нежно,
 Как дай вам бог любимой быть другим.¹¹⁸

[I loved you once: perhaps that love has yet/ To die down thoroughly within my soul;/
 But let it not dismay you any longer;/ I have no wish to cause you any sorrow./ I loved
 you wordlessly, without a hope,/ By shyness tortured, or by jealousy./ I loved you with
 such tenderness and candor/ And pray God grants you to be loved that way again.]¹¹⁹

The experts tend to relate two of Pushkin's famous 1828 poems, "Предчувствие" ("Premonition") and "Дар напрасный, дар случайный..." ("A useless gift, a random gift...") that focus on the themes of the challenges and misfortunes that change the course of one's life and the lack of meaning and direction in life, to the unfortunate end of his romance with Olenina.¹²⁰

The last notable female in Pushkin's life who greatly influenced his works that will be mentioned in this chapter is his wife Natal'ia Goncharova. Pushkin went from St. Petersburg to Moscow in 1829. He was still feeling the pain of Olenins' rejection. However, the great poet could not live without love. Pushkin saw Natal'ia for a first time at a ball at house number 22 on the Tverskoi Boulevard. Natal'ia was a breathtaking beauty, and Pushkin was enchanted by that beauty. Soon after their first meeting Pushkin wrote the poem "Мадонна" (Madonna) in which he declared:

Я влюблен, я очарован,
 Я совсем огончарован.
 С утра до вечера за нею я стремлюсь,
 И встреч нечаянных и жажду, и боюсь.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Aleksandr Pushkin, "Я вас любил..." ("I loved you...")

¹¹⁹ http://max.mmlc.northwestern.edu/mdenner/Demo/texts/loved_you_once.htm

¹²⁰ Valentin Savin, op. cit.

¹²¹ Aleksandr Pushkin, "Мадонна" (Madonna)

[I am in love, I am charmed,/ I am completely enchanted by Goncharova./ From morning until evening I strive for her,/ And our meetings I both await and fear.]

Pushkin wrote to Natal'ia that he loved her soul even more than he loved her face.¹²²

Pushkin waited for almost two years for Natal'ia's mother's permission to marry her daughter. Pushkin wrote that this rejection made him lose his mind and that same night he joined the army and was sent to the Caucasus.¹²³ While he was waiting on a decision for almost two years Pushkin deeply suffered and kept dreaming of having his own home, family, wife, and children.¹²⁴ Natal'ia's mother received Pushkin at her bedside, but didn't say anything definite to him. Druzhnikov points out that the poet articulated the moment in a letter to his future mother-in-law: "Your silence, your coldness, that distraction and that indifference with which Mlle. Nathalie received me..." The poet recalled the insult in the beginning of April of 1830, which is, a whole half-year after his return from Erzerum and that visit. As Druzhnikov puts it, "consequently, for all these months his intentions towards Natal'ia were under a large question mark or were, as he put it himself, despairing. He went off to St. Petersburg "with death in his soul" ("la mort dans l'ame")."¹²⁵

Pushkin married Natal'ia in February, 1831. From the first days of his marriage Pushkin felt the burdens of having a wife. Even though he enjoyed the fame of one of Russia's greatest poets alive, his financial means were rather limited, and he questioned whether he would be able to support himself and his young wife, who also burdened him with her persistent jealousy. That is when the boring and unhappy life as a part of the Czar's court

¹²² "А душу твою люблю ещё более твоего лица" [I love your soul even more than I love your face.] (Valentin Savin, op. cit.)

¹²³ "Отказ на мгновение свел меня с ума, в ту же ночь я уехал в армию" (Ibid.)

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Yuri Druzhnikov, op. cit., 8.

started for Pushkin. In order to maintain those relationships Natal'ia had to attend the balls, which meant additional expenses for the poet. He could not bare the burden of the monotonous Court life anymore, which lead to the Czar's stern disapproval and discontent with him. Pushkin spent the six years during which he was married to Natal'ia constantly worrying about his financial means and whether he would be able to support his wife and their four children. He traveled and wrote much, but his literary career could barely provide the necessary finances for the survival of the family. The poet's concerns about the future were growing over the years and his mood was becoming more and more gloomy and pessimistic. This can be seen in the letters he wrote to his wife as well as in the poem "Пора, мой друг, пора!", which was most likely written in 1834 after the poet tried to resign and return to the countryside. Pushkin's attempt to publish his own journal "Современник" ("Contemporary") in 1836 was not successful and only contributed to his growing debts. Around that time Pushkin started hearing rumors amongst his relatives and friends that his wife had an affair with Gekkern-Dantes. The duel took place on January 27th 1837 in the Chernaia rechka area in the outskirts of St. Petersburg. The poet died two days later.¹²⁶

The life with Natal'ia did not only bring challenges, sorrow, and gloomy expectations in Pushkin's life. It also brought him happiness. In a diary entry from 1831 Daria Fikel'mon said that it is obvious that Pushkin is very much in love with Natal'ia,¹²⁷ whose poetic beauty penetrated Daria's heart.¹²⁸ Pushkin deeply admired his wife and was a jealous

¹²⁶ Valentin Savin, op. cit.

¹²⁷ "Он очень в неё влюблен" [He is very much in love with her] (Ibid.)

¹²⁸ "Поэтическая красота г-жи Пушкиной проникает до самого моего сердца" [The poetic beauty of Mrs. Pushkin penetrates my heart.] (Ibid.)

husband. When he traveled for work, he could not spend even a day without her. Parting with her he wrote, “Farewell my beauty, my muse, my idol, my wonderful treasure, where will I see you again...”¹²⁹ Each letter carries his great love, admiration, sorrow, and his neverending worries. About Natal’ia Pushkin said, “My wife is wonderful, and the more I live with her, the more I love this gentle, clean, good being, whom I in no way deserved from God.”¹³⁰

I claim that the 1829 poetic drama “Rusalka,” which is much longer, darker, and more complex than his early poem “Rusalka,” is not just a reflection of the overwhelming gloominess in Pushkin’s life that resulted from challenges that he was facing at the time, such as being observed by the authorities, not being allowed to leave the country, exile, censorship, and declining health, but also of Pushkin’s multiple relationships and experiences with women while trying to find his partner in life, which immensely enriched his understanding of women’s internal worlds. In my opinion Pushkin’s diverse experiences that he had with women since 1820 are reflected both in the 1829 “Rusalka” and in the fact that he left the poetic drama unfinished.

The unfinished poetic drama “Rusalka” tells about the love between a miller’s daughter and a prince. The work begins with the miller’s daughter waiting with her father at the mill for her beloved prince to come visit her. After the prince finally arrives he tells her that

¹²⁹ “Прощай, моя красавица, мой кумир, прекрасное моё сокровище, когда же я опять тебя увижу...” [Farewell my beauty, my idol, my wonderful treasure, when will I see you again...] (Ibid.)

¹³⁰ “Жена моя прелесть, и чем доле я с ней живу, тем более люблю это милое, чистое, доброе создание, которого я ничем не заслужил перед Богом.” [My wife is wonderful and the more time I spend with her the more I love this nice, pure, good creature, that I do not deserve.] (Ibid.)

their affair is over since he has to marry someone from his social class. The miller's daughter is very hurt and begs the prince to reconsider his decision. She shares with him that she is pregnant with his child. Even this news cannot change the prince's decision and he leaves, giving the miller's daughter jewelry and a bag full of gold for her father. The desperate, abandoned miller's daughter throws herself in the river depths. At the prince's wedding a mysterious, sweet voice sings about an abandoned girl who drowned because of her unfortunate love. In the mysterious voice the prince recognizes the miller's daughter and sends his servants to catch her. A few years pass after the prince's wedding and he finds himself strangely drawn to the forest, the river, and the old mill where he used to meet with the miller's daughter. However, when he goes back he finds a gruesome, dark, and deadly picture. The old mill and the garden are abandoned and the path is almost lost. The miller has lost his mind and wanders around the forest thinking that he is a crow. The prince feels overwhelming sorrow, guilt, and remorse. He asks the old miller to come to the castle and live with him there, but the miller claims that it is his granddaughter, rusalochka (the little rusalka), that takes care of him. The prince realizes that he truly loved the miller's daughter and that he had carelessly given up his happiness with her. Meanwhile in the river depths the powerful and stern rusalka queen gives orders to her fellow rusalki. The reader learns that after the miller's daughter threw herself in the river depths, she was transformed into a powerful rusalka queen who now rules over the rusalki, one of whom is her own daughter "rusalochka" (a little rusalka.) The rusalka sends her daughter rusalochka to the shore with the instructions to approach her father, the prince, tell him who she is and let him know that her mother is waiting for him. After rusalochka leaves, the rusalka

announces that for years she has been waiting for her revenge and her moment has finally come. The work ends when the prince first sees his daughter rusalochka.

As stated before, in my opinion Pushkin's diverse experiences that he had with women after 1820 are reflected in the 1829 "Rusalka" and in the fact that he left the poetic drama unfinished.

One can start noticing these parallels from the beginning of the work. The way the miller's daughter was anxiously awaiting the prince, the way she worried that he was eaten by a bear in the woods or maybe did not love her anymore reminds one of the young Pushkin at the Lyceum nervously staring at the distant road and waiting to see his beloved Bakunina approaching. The miller's daughter says:

Ах, наконец ты вспомнил обо мне!
 Не стыдно ли тебе так долго мучить
 Меня пустым жестоким ожиданием?
 Чего мне в голову не приходило?
 Каким себя я страхом не пугала?
 То думала, что конь тебя занес
 В болото или пропасть, что медведь
 Тебя в лесу дремучем одолел,
 Что болен ты, что разлюбил меня —
 Но слава богу! жив ты, невредим
 И любишь все по-прежнему меня;
 Не правда ли?

[Akh, at the end you remembered about me!/ Weren't you embarrassed to torment me so long/ With empty, cruel anticipation?/ What didn't come to mind?/ What fears didn't I scare myself with?/ I thought that your horse threw you off/ In a swamp or off a cliff, that a bear/ Attacked you in a dark forest/ /That you were sick and fell out of love with me/ But thank God! You're alive and well/ And you love me just like before/ Isn't that true?]

This scene also reminds one of the multiple letters that Anna Vul'f sent to Pushkin expressing her love, begging him to respond, and worrying about why she had not heard back from him in so long.

The next scene in which the prince abandons the pregnant and loving miller's daughter despite her pleas to not do so also resembles a number of similarities with Pushkin's life. The pain and disappointment from being rejected and abandoned that Pushkin caused to both the pregnant serf girl from Mikhaylovskoye and to the devoted and loving Anna Vul'f can be seen in this scene. The miller's daughter reminds one of Anna Vul'f, who begged for Pushkin's love and tried multiple times to earn his attention with love confessions, bitter insults, and stories about other admirers, in the way she reacts right after the prince tells her that they must part. The miller's daughter promises that she would do anything—she would dress like a boy, go to war, if only she could see her beloved prince.

Кто нас разлучит? разве за тобою
Идти вослед я всюду не властна?
Я мальчиком оденусь. Верно буду
Тебе служить, дорогою, в походе
Иль на войне — войны я не боюсь —
Лишь видела б тебя. Нет, нет, не верю.
Иль выведать мои ты мысли хочешь,
Или со мной пустую шутку шутишь.

[Who will separate us? As if/ I can't follow you everywhere?/ I'll dress like a boy. I'll be loyal to you/ and serve you on the road and on a quest/ Or at war- I'm not afraid of war-/ If only I could see you. No, no, I don't believe./ You're either misleading my thoughts/ Or playing a cruel joke on me.]

Following these unsuccessful attempts to stay with the prince, the miller's daughter confesses to him that she is pregnant, to which he reacts by saying that it is his duty to marry a woman from his class and promises that he might come visit her and the baby.

Да!.. вспомнила: сегодня у меня
Ребенок твой под сердцем шевельнулся.

Князь
Несчастливая! как быть? хоть для него

Побереги себя; я не оставлю
 Ни твоего ребенка, ни тебя.
 Со временем, быть может, сам приеду
 Вас навестить. Утешься, не крушися.
 Дай обниму тебя в последний раз.

[Yes!...I remembered: today/ Your child moved under my heart.

The prince

Poor one! What happened?/ At least for it/ take care of yourself; I won't leave/ Your child
 or you./ With time maybe I will come/ and visit you. Don't be upset, don't break down./
 Let me hug you one last time.]

This situation reminds one of the affair that Pushkin had with the serf girl during his exile in Mikhailovskoe. The serf girl, just like the miller's daughter, did not belong to Pushkin's class and could not hope for a long-term relationship with the poet. As Pushkin explained in his letter to Viazemsky, whom he asked for help, he was not careful enough and got the girl pregnant. He could not marry her and could not take care of the child. This is why he sent her with some money to Viazemsky asking him to send the girl to Pushkin's estate in the countryside and if the child turned out to be a boy, to send him to a boarding school. It is clear from the letter that Pushkin felt guilt and remorse for what he did to the girl, but it is also clear that that was all Pushkin was willing to do to help her and the child; class boundries did not allow for anything else.

The following scene in which the prince gives the miller's daughter jewelry and a bag of gold for her father also bears resemblance with events from Pushkin's life. The headband and the pearl necklace that the prince gives the miller's daughter upon their separation as a way for her to remember him remind of the expensive ring that Elizaveta Vorontsova gave Pushkin upon their forceful separation which Pushkin wore until his death and which his mentor and friend Zhukovsky took off of his dead finger.

возьми на память
 Повязку — дай, тебе я сам надену.
 Еще с собой привез я ожерелье —
 Возьми его.

[Take as a memory/ A headband- let me put it on you/ Also I brought a pearl necklace-/ Take it.]

After the prince leaves, the miller's daughter is overwhelmed by sadness and anger.

Да кто ж его невеста? на кого
 Он променял меня? уж я узнаю,
 Я доберусь. Я ей скажу, злодейке:
 Отстань от князя, — видишь, две волчихи
 Не водятся в одном овраге.

[Who will be his wife? For whom/ Did he exchange me? I'll find out,/ I'll get to her. I'll say to the cruel woman:/ Leave the prince alone- you see two wolfs/ Can't live at the same space.]

In the next part of the poetic drama, the women's impressive power, strength, independence, and depth, and the complexity of thoughts and emotions that Pushkin experienced during his post-1820 relationships are reflected in the way the miller's daughter rebels against what the men (her father and the prince) want her to do—to be grateful for the gold and the jewelry and submissively accept the prince's unfair decision. It may also be reflected in the independent decision she makes to jump into the unknown realm of the water depths, which leads to her transformation into a powerful queen of all rusalki who at the end holds the prince's life in her hands. The miller's daughter rebels against the norms and traditions of a society governed by men and creates her own ritual of independence. If a traditional wedding is seen as a ritual of transferring power over the woman from the father to the husband, then what the miller's daughter does after the prince's departure is a reversal of a wedding—a ritual of separation from men, from both

her father and the prince, of assuming full power over herself, and of becoming independent. This ritual of independence is driven by the miller's daughter's extreme pain and anger. She starts by reciting to her father what looks like distorted wedding vows. Instead of expressing her love for her future husband, her gratitude to her father, and her hopes to be happy for the rest of her life, the miller's daughter blames herself for letting the prince go, threatens his future wife, reveals the prince's evil plan to buy her silence with gold, and states that her death is her father's fault.

И мог он,
 Как добрый человек, со мной прощаться,
 И мне давать подарки — каково! —
 И деньги! выкупить себя он думал,
 Он мне хотел язык засеребрить,
 Чтоб не прошла о нем худая слава
 И не дошла до молодой жены.
 Да, бишь, забыла я — тебе отдать
 Велел он это серебро, за то,
 Что был хорош ты до него, что дочку
 За ним пускал таскаться, что ее
 Держал не строго... Впрок тебе пойдет
 Моя погибель.

[He could/ like a good man say his farewell to me/ And give me gifts—for what!/ And money! Buy himself off,/ Tie my tongue with silver,/ So that he doesn't get ill fame/ And his young wife doesn't find out./ See I forgot to give you/ this silver from him for/ being good to him and for letting your daughter/ throw herself at him/ and for not being strict with her.../ My death is your fault.]

Then the miller's daughter moves to the second stage of her independence ritual.

In a wedding, the bride and her family receive gifts from the groom. It is a symbolic way for the groom to 'buy' the bride from her father and is another way of transferring power and control over the woman from one man to another. After the bride and groom exchange wedding vows headbands are placed on their heads symbolizing their eternal union and the bride's submission to her husband. The miller and his daughter received gifts from the

prince—a pearl necklace, a headband, and a bag full of gold, but those were not wedding gifts; those were gifts of separation. The miller did not receive a gift from a grateful bridegroom for raising and protecting his daughter in the right way. He received a payback from a lover because he did not protect his daughter and let her give away her most valuable treasure—her virginity (Беречь свою девическую честь—/Бесценное сокровище [Keep your virginity-/The most valuable treasure])—to the prince, and thus allowed her to be taken advantage of. The miller's daughter uses the gifts which were supposed to remind her of the prince and forever connect her to him to symbolically destroy these reminders and that connection, and to be “reborn” as an independent and powerful woman. First she takes off the pearl necklace, comparing it to a snake that is suffocating her:

Ох, душно!
Холодная змия мне шею давит...
Змеей, змеей опутал он меня,
Не жемчугом.

(Рвет с себя жемчуг.)

[I'm suffocating!/ A cold snake grabbed me by the throat../ Snake, snake put he on my neck,/ Not a necklace./ (Tears the necklace off.)]

Then she throws the headband into the river foreshadowing her own suicide. The headband for her, just like the necklace, is a symbol of her shame and guilt, of her destroyed hopes, of her broken heart, and of the way both her father and beloved prince mistreated her and took advantage of her:

(сымает с себя повязку)

Вот венец мой,
Венец позорный! вот чем нас венчал
Лукавый враг, когда я отреклася
Ото всего, чем прежде дорожила.
Мы развенчались. — Сгинь ты, мой венец!
(Бросает повязку в Днепр.)

[(Takes the headband off)/ Here's my headband,/ my shameful headband! Here's with what we got married/ by the Cunning enemy, when I renounced/ Everything that I valued before/ We separated—Die my headband!/ (Throws the headband in the Danube.)]

I claim that the *Лукавый враг*, the Devil, that she refers to who used that shameful headband to marry her to the prince can be seen as a reference to her father, who supported her relationship with the prince and was trying to use it for his own financial advantages. Her final words, “We are divorced—die my headband”, become a powerful declaration of her separation from the men who used her—the prince and her father, and of her assuming control over her life and gaining her independence. Her jumping in the river and thus ending her earthly life can be seen as a symbolic rebirth in another realm where she is no longer a submissive, used, and rejected miller's daughter, but a powerful and independent queen.

The next scene of the poetic drama describes the prince's wedding. The prince gets married to a woman who is suitable for his class, but the memories of the miller's daughter keep haunting him. This may be seen as a reflection of Pushkin's guilty conscience over abandoning the serf girl whom he made pregnant and possibly over the harsh way in which he treated Anna Vul'f who gave him nothing but love and devotion. At the wedding the prince hears a sweet, mysterious voice singing about the sad story of an abandoned and mistreated girl who drowned while cursing her beloved. In that voice the prince recognizes the miller's daughter and the echo of his own guilty consciousness from the past.

The last part of the poetic drama “Rusalka” takes place a few years after the wedding. It describes the prince's return to the forest and to the mill, and it introduces the reader to the transformed rusalka and to her daughter rusalochka. This last part, just like the other parts of the poetic drama, reflects a number of experiences from Pushkin's life. Pushkin's

experience with unfortunate love, loneliness, insecurity, rejection, and pain based on his rocky relationships with Ekaterina Ushakova and Anna Olenina and the first two years of courting Natal'ia Goncharova are reflected in the way the prince suffers, feels lost, and immensely misses his true love—the miller's daughter, whom he had lost forever. The servants, upon their return to the castle, announce that the prince remained by himself by the Danube. The prince is walking through the woods and finds the place where the mill used to be. It no longer operated, the road to it was lost, and no one had worked in the garden for a long time.

Вот мельница! Она уж развалилась;
Веселый шум ее колес умолкнул;
Стал жернов — видно, умер и старик.
Дочь бедную оплакал он недолго.
Тропинка тут вилась — она заглохла,
Давно-давно сюда никто не ходит;
Тут садик был с забором, неужели
Разросся он кудрявой этой рощей?
Ах, вот и дуб заветный, здесь она,
Обняв меня, поникла и умолкла...
Возможно ли?..

[Here's the mill! It broke already;/ The joyful sound of the wheels can no longer be heard;/ Obviously the old miller died as well./ Cried over his poor daughter not for long./ There was a road here- no more,/ For a while no one walked here;/ There was a garden here/ Akh, here's the old oak tree, here she/ hugged me, bowed, and grew quiet.../ Is it possible?...]

The leaves from the old oak tree fall off like ashes and as a result the tree stands in front

of the prince naked and black.

Идет к деревьям, листья сыплются.
Что это значит? листья,
Поблекнув, вдруг свернулись и с шумом
Посыпались как пепел на меня.
Передо мной стоит он гол и черен,
Как дерево проклятое.

[Walking to the tree, the leaves were falling/ What does this mean? The leaves,/ Suddenly turned down and with noise/ Fell down like ashes on me./ In front of me it stands black and naked/ Like a cursed tree.]

The beautiful places that the prince knew now bear the token of destruction, death, and decay. This becomes a representation of the transformation of prince's internal world—before, when he was with the miller's daughter, he was happy and he felt love, and now that she is gone he is overwhelmed by sadness, loneliness, and guilt. The old miller, just like nature that surrounds him, has also become a subject of death and decay and has lost his mind (“Несчастный, он помешан. Мысли в нем/ Рассеяны, как тучи после бури” [Poor miller, he has lost his mind. His thoughts/ Are vague like clouds after a storm]), and in a way had become one with nature claiming that he is the crow that lived there (“Я здешний ворон” [I'm the crow that lives here])). Upon seeing how the old miller had lost not only his mill and his garden, but also how the loss of his daughter had led to him losing his mind, the prince is overwhelmed once again by guilt and remorse.

И этому все я виною! Страшно
 Ума лишиться. Легче умереть.
 На мертвеца глядим мы с уважением,
 Творим о нем молитвы. Смерть равняет
 С ним каждого. Но человек, лишенный
 Ума, становится не человеком.
 Напрасно речь ему дана, не правит
 Словами он, в нем брата своего
 Зверь узнает, он людям в посмеянье,
 Над ним всяк волен, бог его не судит.
 Старик несчастный! вид его во мне
 Раскаянья все муки растравил!

[This is all my fault!/ It is scary/ To lose one's mind. It is easier to die./ We look at dead people with respect,/ We pray over them. Death makes/ everyone equal. But a person without a mind/ Becomes not a person./ His speech and words are in vain/ In him a brother/ would a beast recognize/ Everyone has power over him and God doesn't judge him./ Poor old man! The way he looked/ Poisoned all of my regrets with suffering.]

The prince's grief, suffering, and loneliness can be clearly seen in his words, which describe how an unknown force is pulling him to these sad shores and how everything there

reminds him of the past and of the sad love story of his youth. The prince remembers that there, once love used to meet him—free, passionate love. He recognizes that he was happy and that he acted like a madman when he gave up his happiness. The meeting with the old miller brought back sad thoughts and dreams.

Невольно к этим грустным берегам
 Меня влечет неведомая сила.
 Все здесь напоминает мне бывшее
 И вольной красной юности моей
 Любимую, хоть горестную повесть.
 Здесь некогда любовь меня встречала,
 Свободная, кипящая любовь;
 Я счастлив был, безумец!.. и я мог
 Так ветрено от счастья отказаться.
 Печальные, печальные мечты
 Вчерашняя мне встреча оживила.
 Отец несчастный! как ужасен он!
 Авось опять его сегодня встречу,
 И согласится он оставить лес
 И к нам переселиться...

[Unconsciously to these sad shores/ An unknown force is pulling me/ Here everything reminds me of the past/ And of the favorite, even though sad novel of my free youth/ Here a long time my love met me/ Free, boiling love;/ I was happy, madman!..that I could/ so carelessly give up happiness/ Sad, sad dreams/ That the meeting from yesterday brought back to life./ Poor father! How horrible he was!/ I hope to see him again today/ And that he will agree to leave the forest/ And to move in with us...]

As already mentioned, in the way the prince suffers and regrets his past decisions, one can see Pushkin's guilty conscience from abandoning the serf girl and his unborn child and possibly from the harsh way in which he treated Anna Vul'f who gave him nothing but love and devotion. However, the prince's deep pain and desperation also remind one of Pushkin in his moments of suffering, pain, and loneliness while staring at the empty distant road hoping to see Bakunina, after being rejected the opportunity to have deeper and more meaningful relationships with Anna Olenina and Ekaterina Ushakova, and while waiting

in anticipation for two years before being allowed to marry the love of his love Natal'ya Goncharova.

After Pushkin describes the prince's pain and suffering over the fact that he lost the love of his life, he introduces the reader to the miller's daughter who is transformed into a powerful rusalka queen and her daughter rusalochka. The miller's daughter is described by the other rusalki as their queen and as their strict sister.

Ожидает нас царица,
Наша строгая сестра.

[The queen is waiting for us/ Our strict sister.]

It is revealed that after jumping into the Danube the miller's daughter became a powerful and cold rusalka—the queen of all other rusalki living in the castle at the bottom of the river.

С той поры,
Как бросилась без памяти я в воду
Отчаянной и презренной девчонкой
И в глубине Днепра-реки очнулась
Русалкою холодной и могучей,

[From the time when/ I threw myself in the water/ Desperate and abandoned girl/ And at depths of the Danube I woke up/ A cold and powerful rusalka.]

The powerful maternal aspect of the rusalka not only as a mother to one specific rusalochka [Rusalka's daughter], but as a mother and a leader to all other rusalki may reflect Pushkin's experience with powerful mother figures such as Ekaterina Karamzina, Praskov'ia Osipova, Elizaveta Khitrovo, who all had young, charming daughters whom he befriended (Zizi Osipova, Dolly Fikel'mon), but who also accepted him as a son and showed him the gentle nature of motherly love and protection. One gets the same feeling from the rusalka's orders to the other rusalki.

Оставьте пряжу, сестры. Солнце село.
 Столбом луна блестит над нами. Полно,
 Плывите вверх под небом поиграть,
 Да никого не трогайте сегодня,
 Ни пешехода щекотать не смейте,
 Ни рыбакам их невод отягчать
 Травой и тиной, ни ребенка в воду
 Заманивать рассказами о рыбках.

[Leave the yarn. The sun set./ The moon is shining over us./ Swim to the top to play under the sky./ Don't bother anyone today,/ Don't dare to tickle the passerbys, / Don't replace their fish/ with grass, and don't tempt the children to come to the water/ With stories about fish.]

The young, pretty rusalochka, the rusalka's daughter from the prince, can be seen as an embodiment of Pushkin's friendships with the young, charming, and full of life Raevsky sisters, Zizi Osipova, Elizaveta Ushakova. She is the one that takes care of her grandfather—the old miller.

Да, за мною
 Присматривать не худо. Стар я стал
 И шаловлив. За мной, спасибо, смотрит
 Русалочка.

[Yes, they do/ take care of me fairly well. I got old/ And absent-minded. Of me, thank you, takes care/ Rusalochka.]

Rusalochka spent the whole day looking for the gold that he wanted to find, and after not being able to find it, she did not want to disappoint him and brought him colorful seashells, which made him very happy.

На землю выходила
 Я к дедушке. Все просит он меня
 Со дна реки собрать ему те деньги,
 Которые когда-то в воду к нам
 Он побросал. Я долго их искала;
 А что такое деньги, я не знаю.
 Однако же я вынесла ему
 Пригоршню ракушинок самоцветных.
 Он очень был им рад.

[I came to the shore/ To grandfather. He asked me/ To bring the money from the bottom of the river/ Which a long time ago he threw to us./ I looked for it a long time ago;/ And what money is I don't know./ I brought him/ colorful seashells./ They made him very happy.]

Upon seeing her the prince calls her a “wonderfully beautiful child” (“прекрасное дитя”).

Pushkin never finished the poetic drama “Rusalka.” The last scene that the reader sees is the rusalka instructing her daughter, rusalochka, to go up to the shore where she would see a man, who is her father, and to reveal her identity to him. If the man asks whether the rusalka remembers him, the rusalka wants her daughter to answer that she still loves him and she awaits him.

Он сам; к нему нежнее приласкайся
И Расскажи все то, что от меня
Ты знаешь про свое рождение; также
И про меня. И если спросит он,
Забыла ль я его иль нет, скажи,
Что все его я помню и люблю
И жду к себе. Ты поняла меня?

[It's he; approach him gently/ And tell him everything that you/ Know from me about your birth; as well as/ About me. If he asks/ If I forgot him or not, tell him,/ That I still remember him and love him/ And wait for him to come to me. Did you understand me?]

After the rusalochka leaves, the rusalka reveals that for seven years, since she jumped in the water, she had been thinking about her revenge every day, and it now seems like her time had come.

Прошло семь долгих лет — я каждый день
О мщение помышляю...
И ныне, кажется, мой час настал.

[Seven long years passed—every day I/ Thought about revenge.../ And finally it seems like my time came.]

The last lines of the poem deal with rusalochka coming out on the shore and the prince asking her where she came from.

Русалочка выходит на берег.

Что я вижу!

Откуда ты, прекрасное дитя?

[Rusalochka came out to the shore./ What do I see!/ Where did you come from, wonderfully beautiful child?]

The reader never finds out whether the prince follows rusalochka to the river depths, whether he and the rusalka meet, and whether she was actually seeking revenge, or she truly still loved him and missed him.

In my opinion, the enigmatic position in which Pushkin leaves the reader in the poem may display a return of Pushkin's basic anxiety over what happens to women when they have power, which was discussed earlier in this chapter. The female figure goes from being defenseless, helpless, and of low social status (a miller's daughter) to being a powerful, stern queen. She transitions from the earthly realm where she was dominated and manipulated by men—the prince and her father both physically and emotionally—into the underwater realm where she is the absolute ruler who dominates over both humans and the other rusalki. She chooses who lives and who dies. Being placed in this position of high power, the rusalka queen reminds one of the powerful *grandes dames* of the eighteenth century and specifically of Catherine the Great. The rusalka, just like the ghostly Countess from “The Queen of Spades”, is a threatening, other-worldly being who lurks in the shadows, seeks revenge and wants to destroy the male character who hurt her. “The Queen of Spades” is a complete work and the ending is deadly for the male character. However, the short story is not a work that focuses on romantic love; it focuses on greed and the extent to which it can influence and control the human mind. “Rusalka” focuses on

romantic love and this is precisely why it remains unfinished. I suggest that the fact that Pushkin never revealed what happened with the prince and the rusalka shows the poet's ambivalent position on where love would take him in his own personal life—to a life of family bliss or to his grave. As already discussed above, he very much loved and adored his Madonna—his wife Natal'ia—and he could not spend even a day without her. However, after getting married the poet had to face multiple challenges and problems that he never managed to solve, such as growing financial concerns, as inability to support the family, failed jobs, and the burning jealousy he constantly felt for his wife, which eventually took his life. His own experiences with women may have made the poet more sympathetic and less one-dimensional than when he was a youth.

Mikhail Lermontov

Mikhail Lermontov, the “ночное светило русской поэзии”¹³¹, is one of the most controversial figures in Russian literature. The first section of this chapter focuses on Lermontov’s character—a unique combination between a threatening and wild “demonic” side marked by skepticism, pessimism, and cynicism, and a beautiful and gentle soul that showed Lermontov’s soft human side. I will describe the different aspects of Mikhail Lermontov’s character and explore possible reasons for them. In the second section of this chapter I look at Lermontov’s experiences with and views on romantic love, which had a strong influence on his works. In the third section of this chapter I discuss three of Lermontov’s works—“Rusalka” (1836), “Morskaia Tsarevna” [“Princess of the sea”] (1841), and “Demon” (1830-1839), in which Lermontov uses human and non-human figures to express his distinctive vision on the possibilities of lasting love between individuals. The portrayal of the union between human and non-human characters in these works is an expression of Lermontov’s two-sided nature, which turned the poet’s life into a never-ending struggle between the beauty of his human soul and the cynicism, skepticism, and pessimism of his “demonic” side. The fact that these works are not describing or addressing specific people, unlike Lermontov’s ordinary love lyrics, gave the poet the opportunity to imagine and speculate on different scenarios about his own internal quest for overcoming his “demonic” side through the power of true love. However,

¹³¹ “the moon of Russian poetry” (D. S. Merezhkovsky, *М. Ю. Лермонтов. Поэт сверхчеловечества* [*M. Y. Lermontov. The poet of superhumanity.*] (СПб.: РХГИ, 2002. -- (Русский путь)) at http://az.lib.ru/m/merezhkowskij_d_s/text_0090-1.shtml.)

influenced by his unfortunate experiences with true love in life, Lermontov could never envision a happy ending in his works. The fates of his characters parallel the poet's life, where he always remained separated from his beloved ones and never had the chance to fully feel and understand the purifying and life-giving effect of a lasting union with them. Whether he saw himself as human or as demonic, Lermontov always placed the imagined partners in his poetry at opposing extremes, either human or inhuman, where they remained separated by a wide void and could not understand, recognize, and help each other.

Lermontov, the Man of Dualities, or as David Powelstock puts it “a vulnerable lover and a bitter cynic,” combined in his character the beauty of a gentle human soul and the rage, cynicism, and emptiness of a demon.¹³² He confused, fascinated, repulsed, and scared his contemporaries with his appearance, actions, thoughts, and emotions. Lermontov's contemporaries saw him as a unique hybrid of the dark, heavy, hypnotizing persona of a demon and the loving, good soul of a great leader of men questing to become superhuman; between the “пошлость”¹³³ of the “великий злодей”¹³⁴ and the greatness of the “великий и могучий дух,”¹³⁵ between the “свинство”¹³⁶ of the “лишний человек”¹³⁷ and the “мужественная, печальная мысль”¹³⁸ of a genius who suffered greatly and forever remained misunderstood.

¹³² David Powelstock, “Introduction” in *Becoming Mikhail Lermontov: The Ironies of Romantic Individualism in Nicholas I's Russia* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 3.

¹³³ “vulgarity” (D. S. Merezhkovsky, op. cit.)

¹³⁴ “a great villain” (Ibid.)

¹³⁵ “great and powerful spirit” (Ibid.)

¹³⁶ “beastliness” (Ibid.)

¹³⁷ “superfluous man” (Ibid.)

¹³⁸ “manly and sorrowful thought” (Ibid.)

Lermontov's "demonic" side can be seen in both his appearance and behavior. Based on his contemporaries' letters and memoirs, Lermontov resembled a crooked frog with a fiery, demonic gaze. In his "Воспоминание о Лермонтове" ("Memoir about Lermontov") A. M. Merinsky, one of Lermontov's classmates and friends, described Lermontov as not remarkably tall or handsome, and even unattractive.¹³⁹ A.M. Miklashevsky, another one of Lermontov's classmates, in "Михаил Юрьевич Лермонтов в заметках его товарища" ("Mikhail Yurevich Lermontov in the notes of his friends") remembered that in sixth grade the other students gave Lermontov the nickname "the frog."¹⁴⁰ Lermontov is presented as disproportionate, short, with slouchy and broad shoulders that could barely support his big head, and crooked legs. In "Литературные и житейские воспоминания" ("Memoirs from literature and life") Ivan Turgenev described Lermontov's figure as one that created an unpleasant sensation based on the time he met the poet at the house of the famous Petersburg countess Shakhovskaia.¹⁴¹ Many remembered the poet's unearthly, fiery, dark,

¹³⁹ "Лермонтов, как сказано, был далеко не красив собою и в первой юности даже неуклюж." ["Lermontov, as was said, was fairly unattractive and in his youth even ungainly."] (A. M. Merinsky, "Воспоминание о Лермонтове" ["Memoir about Lermontov"] in *М. Ю. Лермонтов в воспоминаниях современников* [*M. Y. Lermontov in his contemporaries' memoirs*] (М.: Худож. лит., 1989), 170-177, at <http://lermontov.niv.ru/lermontov/vospominaniya/vospominaniya-64.htm>)

¹⁴⁰ "Всем нам товарищи давали разные прозвища. В памяти у меня сохранилось, что Лермонтова, не знаю почему, прозвали лягушкою." ["All of us were given nicknames. I remember that Lermontov, I do not know why, was called the frog."] (A. M. Miklashevsky, "Михаил Юрьевич Лермонтов в заметках его товарища" ["Mikhail Yurevich Lermontov in the notes of his friend"] in *М. Ю. Лермонтов в воспоминаниях современников* [*M. Y. Lermontov in his contemporaries' memoirs*] (М.: Худож. лит., 1989), 144-148, at <http://lermontov.niv.ru/lermontov/vospominaniya/vospominaniya-68.htm>)

¹⁴¹ "Вся его фигура, приземистая, кривоногая, с большой головой на сутулых широких плечах, возбуждала ощущение неприятное" ["His whole figure, squatting, with crooked legs, with a big head on the slouching, broad shoulders, aroused an unpleasant sensation."] (I. S. Turgenev, "Литературные и житейские воспоминания" ("Memoirs from literature and life") in *М. Ю. Лермонтов в воспоминаниях*

heavy gaze. Ivan Turgenev said, “In Lermontov’s appearance there was something sinister and tragic; some kind of a gloomy and evil power, brooding contempt and passion emanated from his dark face, from his big and unmoving eyes. Their heavy gaze strangely did not correspond to the expression of his almost childishly tender and protruding lips...but the existing power was obvious to everyone. It is known that he, to a certain extent, described himself in Pechorin. The words ‘His eyes did not smile when he smiled’ etc.—really described him.”¹⁴² A. M. Merinsky, like Turgenev, remembered Lermontov as a brunette with pale-yellowish face, and dark coal-like eyes, the gaze of which, as Lermontov described Pechorin’s gaze, could be very heavy at times.¹⁴³ Merezhkovsky claimed that if Lermontov stared at someone, that person had to leave the room; no one was able to handle the power of his gaze, while for women Lermontov’s eyes were hypnotizing and “had a magical influence.”¹⁴⁴

Lermontov’s behavior, characterized by prevailing skepticism, pessimism, and cynicism, was also seen by many as demonic and provoked controversial comments and reactions from his contemporaries. Before he died, Vladimir Solovev called Lermontov’s life an

современников [*M. Y. Lermontov in his contemporaries’ memoirs*] (М.: Худож. лит., 1989), 296-297, at <http://lermontov.niv.ru/lermontov/vospominaniya/vospominaniya-90.htm>)

¹⁴² “В наружности Лермонтова было что-то зловещее и трагическое; какой-то сумрачной и недоброй силой, задумчивой презрительностью и страстью веяло от его смуглого лица, от его больших и неподвижно-темных глаз. Их тяжелый взор странно не согласовался с выражением почти детски нежных и выдававшихся губ... но присущую мощь тотчас сознавал всякий. Известно, что он до некоторой степени изобразил самого себя в Печорине. Слова «Глаза его не смеялись, когда он смеялся» и т. д.—действительно, применялись к нему.” (Ibid.)

¹⁴³ “Лермонтов был брюнет, с бледно-желтоватым лицом, с черными как уголь глазами, взгляд которых, как он сам выразился о Печорине, был иногда тяжел.” (А. М. Merinsky, op. cit.)

¹⁴⁴ “имели магнетическое влияние” (D. S. Merezhkovsky, op. cit.)

“unbroken thread of bad deeds”¹⁴⁵ and in his disapproval, he went as far as saying that Lermontov’s soul became a home for a whole family of demons.¹⁴⁶ The poet’s stormy episodes of “пошлость” and “свинство”—his debauchery at military school, the beastliness, the swinishness, and the hooliganism with women,¹⁴⁷ his refusal to accept and follow the norms and rules of polite society and his persistent attacks directed at everything and everyone that he saw as untruthful or unnatural caused many to perceive him as wild, unpredictable, rude, offensive, threatening, and dirty. Officer Sinitsyn, one of Lermontov’s acquaintances from military school, kept memories of the poet that were far from flattering, “I, as you know, like to have things in order...And then suddenly out of nowhere one of our friends from school stormed in, smoking, dropping ashes everywhere, while I’m showing him the ashtray, and on top of that tossing his damn cigar in my flower pots, and after all without any mercy telling all kinds of dirty stories about St. Petersburg beauties willing to sell themselves, reciting the lowest French poems...We could not beg him enough for him to read something he wrote! Lazy, very lazy, and what he writes, he hides somewhere or burns while lightning the pipes of his hot-blooded Hussars.”¹⁴⁸ Count V. F. Adlerberg, one of Alexander II’s ministers, who personally knew Lermontov, exclaimed in

¹⁴⁵ “непрерывная цепь «злокачественных поступков» (Ibid.)

¹⁴⁶ “в душе его завелось целое демоническое хозяйство” (Ibid.)

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ “Я, вы знаете, люблю, чтобы у меня все было в порядке... А тут вдруг, откуда ни возьмись, влетает к вам товарищ по школе, курит, сыпет пепел везде, где попало, тогда как я ему указываю на пепельницу, и вдобавок швыряет окурки своих проклятых пахитос в мои цветочные горшки и, при всем этом, без милосердия болтает, лепечет, рассказывает всякие грязные истории о петербургских продажных красавицах, декламирует самые скверные французские стишечки... Небось, не допросишься, чтоб что-нибудь свое прочел! Ленив, пострел, ленив страшно, и что ни напишет, все или прячет куда-то, или жжет на раскурку трубок своих же сорви-голов-гусаров.” (Ibid.)

the same manner, “You can’t even imagine what a dirty man he was!”¹⁴⁹ Lermontov was also well known and feared for his brutal honesty, which was interpreted by many as extreme rudeness. In his article "Русская литература: Михаил Лермонтов" ("Russian Literature: Mikhail Lermontov") A. I. Herzen points out that Lermontov never spared anyone his true opinion of them, which by most was perceived as extremely malicious and was never forgiven,¹⁵⁰ while A. M. Merinsky comments that in school Lermontov mocked and was very critical of everything and everyone that he considered untruthful and unnatural and after that he took this habit to society for which he had many enemies and much unhappiness.¹⁵¹

Lermontov’s overwhelming skepticism, cynicism, and pessimism that dictated his dark and gloomy behavior can be seen both in his life and in his works. Even though we must acknowledge that some of this might reflect a Romantic pose, the consistency of such lyrics in Lermontov’s works also indicates that they derive from something truly felt in his soul. In the poem “Зачем семьи родной безвестный круг...” (“Why the unknown circle of the

¹⁴⁹ "Вы представить себе не можете, какой это был грязный человек!" (Ibid.)

¹⁵⁰ “он смело высказывался о многом без всякой пощады и без прикрас. Существа... задетые этим, никогда не прощают подобной искренности.” (A. I. Herzen, "Русская литература: Михаил Лермонтов" ["Russian Literature: Mikhail Lermontov"] in *М. Ю. Лермонтов в воспоминаниях современников* [*M. Y. Lermontov in his contemporaries' memoirs*] (М.: Худож. лит., 1989), 135-137, at <http://lermontov.niv.ru/lermontov/vospominaniya/vospominaniya-42.htm>)

¹⁵¹ “В юнкерской школе Лермонтов был хорош со всеми товарищами, хотя некоторые из них не очень любили его за то, что он преследовал их своими остротами и насмешками за все ложное, натянутое и неестественное, чего никак не мог переносить. Впоследствии и в свете он не оставил этой привычки, хотя имел за то много неприятностей и врагов.” [“In military school Lermontov was good with all of his friends, even though some of them did not like him at all because he persecuted them with his witticisms and his jokes at everything that was false, strained, and not natural, which he could not stand. After finishing school he did not give up this habit, despite the fact that because of this he had many problems and enemies.”] (A. M. Merinsky, op. cit.)

family...”) from 1830, Lermontov says that he is pitiful and sad and he lives without friendships, hopes, thoughts and strength. He is paler than the ray of the senseless moon that is crawling down his wall through the window.

Что ж. Ныне жалкий, грустный я живу
Без дружбы, без надежд, без дум, без сил,
Бледней, чем луч бесчувственной луны,
Когда в окно скользит он вдоль стены.¹⁵²

[So what. Pitiful, sad I live// Without friendships, without hopes, without thoughts, without strength,/ Paler than the ray of the insensitive moon,/ When it crawls through the window and down the wall.]

In the 1832 poem “Нет, я не Байрон, я другой...” (“No, I am not Bayron, I am someone else...”) Lermontov says that his end will be an early one and that in soul, like in an ocean, lies a heap of broken hopes.

Я раньше начал, кончу ране,
Мой ум немного совершит;
В душе моей, как в океане,
Надежд разбитых груз лежит.¹⁵³

[I started early, I will finish earlier,/ My mind will not accomplish much;/ In my soul, like in the ocean/ Lies a heap of shattered hopes.]

In the 1841 poem “Выхожу один я на дорогу...” (“I am going to the road by myself...”) Lermontov says that he is not awaiting anything from life.

Уж не жду от жизни ничего я,
И не жаль мне прошлого ничуть;¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Mikhail Lermontov, “Зачем семьи родной безвестный круг...” (“Why the unknown circle of the family...”)

¹⁵³ Mikhail Lermontov, “Нет, я не Байрон, я другой...” (“No, I am not Bayron, I am someone else...”)

¹⁵⁴ Mikahil Lermontov, “Выхожу один я на дорогу...” (“I am going to the road by myself...”)

[I am not expecting anything from life/ And I do not regret anything from the past;]

In the 1840 poem “И скучно и грустно...” (“It is dull and sad...”) Lermontov claims that life is boring and sad and there is no one to give your hand to. According to the poet when one looks around carefully, coldly, and objectively, one will see that life is an empty and stupid joke.

И скучно и грустно! - и некому руку подать
В минуту душевной невзгоды...
Желанья... что пользы напрасно и вечно желать?
А годы проходят - все лучшие годы!

Любить - но кого же? - на время не стоит труда,
А вечно любить невозможно...
В себя ли заглянешь? - там прошлого нет и следа,
И радость, и муки, и все там ничтожно.

Что страсти? - ведь рано иль поздно их сладкий недуг
Исчезнет при слове рассудка,
И жизнь, как посмотришь с холодным вниманьем вокруг -
Такая пустая и глупая шутка!¹⁵⁵

[It is dull and sad!—and there is no one to give your hand to/ In a moment when the soul is tormented.../ Wishes...What is the purpose of wishing forever in vain?/ And the years fly by—all the best years!// To love—but whom?—The effort is not worth the time,/ And it is impossible to love forever.../ When you look at yourself—there is no trace of the past,/ Happiness, sorrows, everything there is negligible.// What are passions?—sooner or later their sweetness/ will disappear when reason speaks,/ And life, when you look around with cold attention—/ is such an empty and foolish joke!]

I will briefly look at four possible reasons for Lermontov’s strong skepticism, cynicism, and pessimism—the poet’s childhood, the time he spent in military school, the times he lived in, and his feeling of loneliness and isolation from his contemporaries. Lermontov did not have an easy childhood, and all of his memoirists are in agreement that his

¹⁵⁵ Mikhail Lermontov, “И скучно и грустно...” (“It is dull and sad...”)

childhood left a deep mark on the rest of his life, and, in a way, he could never escape those turbulent and emotional times. Soloviev claimed that Lermontov started developing evil, even demonic, characteristics in his early childhood. In the gardens he broke the bushes and pulled out the best flowers. Soloviev also claimed that Lermontov got sincere satisfaction from killing flies and throwing stones at the chicken's legs.¹⁵⁶ One of the most significant events in Lermontov's childhood was the prolonged and heated conflict between his parents and his grandmother. In "Из колыбели замечательных людей" ("From lullabies of noteworthy people") P. K. Shugaev defines the relationships in the poet's family as complex and dramatic,¹⁵⁷ while M. Gillel'son in "Лермонтов в воспоминаниях современников" ("Lermontov in his contemporaries' memoirs") points out that "the early death of Lermontov's mother, the dramatic fights between the father and the grandmother, the stories about his grandfather's suicide at the New Year' Ball at Tarkhany undoubtedly influenced Lermontov's character and thus his works as well."¹⁵⁸ In what originally used to be the third stanza of a poem "Стансы" ("Stanzas"), which focused on a family tragedy, Lermontov wrote,

¹⁵⁶ "С детства обнаружили в нем черты злобы прямо демонической. В саду, он то и дело ломал кусты и срывал лучшие цветы, осыпая ими дорожки. Он с истинным удовольствием давил несчастную муху и радовался, когда брошенный камень сбивал с ног бедную курицу." (Quoted in D. S. Merezhkovsky, op. cit.)

¹⁵⁷ "мы читаем о сложных, драматических взаимоотношениях в семье Лермонтова" ["we read about the complex, dramatic relationships in Lermontov's family"] (P. K. Shugaev, "Из колыбели замечательных людей" ["From the cradle of noteworthy people"] at <http://www.lermontov.info/remember/shugaev.shtml>)

¹⁵⁸ "Ранняя смерть матери, разрыв между отцом и бабушкой, рассказы о самоубийстве деда на новогоднем балу в Тарханах, — все это, несомненно, повлияло на характер Лермонтова, а следовательно и на его творчество." (M. Gillel'son, "Лермонтов в воспоминаниях современников" ["Lermontov in his contemporaries' memoirs"] in *М. Ю. Лермонтов в воспоминаниях современников* [*M. Y. Lermontov in his contemporaries' memoirs*] (М.: Худож. лит., 1989), 5-30, at <http://lermontov.niv.ru/lermontov/kritika/gillelson/vospominaniya.htm>)

Я сын страдания. Мой отец
 Не знал покоя по конец.
 В слезах угасла мать моя;
 От них остался только я,
 Ненужный член в пиру людском,
 Младая ветвь на пне сухом—
 В ней соку нет, хоть зелена...¹⁵⁹

[I am the son of suffering. My father/ did not know peace until the end./ My mother died in tears;/ From them I am the only one left./ An unneeded member of people's festivities,/ A young branch on a dry trunk—/ There is no juice in it even though is it green...]

After a brief period of happiness at the “Blagorodnyi” boarding school and at Moscow University, where, according to Gillel'son, Lermontov had a large group of friends that had a very positive influence on the formation of the personality and the mindset of the young poet,¹⁶⁰ the gloomy Demon of skepticism spread his wings over Lermontov's life again. When he left the University, after deciding to not finish his education there, the poet spent two years in military school. Over those two years Lermontov created an icy shell of harshness and rudeness around the soft and gentle part of his soul. As Gillel'son puts it, “the dominance coming from the nature of his genius, but also his very sarcastic nature, the family problems, and the cynical and violent atmosphere at the military school defined

¹⁵⁹ Mikhail Lermontov, “Стансы” (“Stanzas”)

¹⁶⁰ “Ученым удалось установить, что в годы учения в пансионе и университете вокруг Лермонтова образовалась дружная группа передовых молодых людей, оказавших благотворное влияние на формирование личности и мировоззрения поэта.” (M. Gillel'son, op. cit.)

Lermontov's mindset and behavior.”¹⁶¹ His icy shell was his shield protecting him from the “пошлость” of the surrounding world; however it had a negative impact on his relationships with others and, according to Gillel'son, “became one of the reasons why his fight with Martynov ended not with champagne bottle, but with a fatal wound.”¹⁶²

Gillel'son points out that another reason for Lermontov's predominant skepticism, cynicism, and pessimism is that the time in which his generation lived was marked by the stigma of suppression and fear placed on people and the fact that people went through their gloomy lives full of doubts, rejections, and silence. Gillel'son quotes *О развумии революционных идей в России* (*On the development of revolutionary ideas in Russia*) in which Aleksandr Herzen points out that Lermontov belongs to the generation that was quite young and for this reason could not participate in the events of the Decembrist revolution. The people of that generation were forced to maintain silence, never show their tears, and bury their thoughts deep inside. Herzen paints a psychological portrait of Lermontov based on the general mood in Russia at that time. He says that “in order to breathe the air of that scary era, one had to adapt from early age to the sharp and constant wind, live with doubts that can not be solved, with sour truths, with their own weakness, with everyday insults and abuses; from early childhood one had to acquire the habit to hide everything that excited his/her soul, and not only not lose anything from what they kept in it, but on the

¹⁶¹ “Превосходство гениальной натуры, склонной саркастически отзываться о многом и многих, семейные неурядицы и, наконец, циничная атмосфера юнкерской школы определили модель жизненного поведения Лермонтова.” (Ibid.)

¹⁶² “ведь она была надежной броней, защищавшей его от пошлости окружавшей жизни; и она же осложнила его отношения с товарищами и явилась не последней причиной того, что ссора с Мартыновым закончилась не бутылкой шампанского, а смертельной раной...” (Ibid.)

contrary—express in silent anger everything that was in their heart.”¹⁶³ Herzen’s words become an accurate representation of Lermontov’s thoughts and feelings about his generation that he showed in the 1838 poem “Дума” (“Thought”).

Печально я гляжу на наше поколение!
Его грядущее — иль пусто, иль темно,
Меж тем, под бременем познания и сомнения,
В бездействии состарится оно.
Мы иссушили ум наукою бесплодной,
Тая завистливо от ближних и друзей
Надежды лучшие и голос благородный
Неверием осмеянных страстей.¹⁶⁴

[With sadness I am looking at our generation!/ Its future is either empty or dark./ Meanwhile under the burden of knowledge and doubt,/ It will grow old while not doing anything./ We dried up our minds with fruitless science,/ Hiding selfishly from friends/ Our best hopes and the noble voice/ Of passions mocked by unbelief.]

Another factor that contributed to Lermontov’s skepticism, cynicism, and pessimism was his overwhelming feeling of loneliness and isolation from his contemporaries based on their reactions to what they sensed to be different in him and thus unacceptable for them.

¹⁶³ “...чтобы дышать воздухом этой зловещей эпохи, надобно было с детства приспособиться к этому резкому и непрерывному ветру, сжиться с неразрешимыми сомнениями, с горчайшими истинами, с собственной слабостью, с каждодневными оскорблениями; надобно было с самого нежного детства приобрести привычку скрывать все, что волнует душу, и не только ничего не терять из того, что в ней схоронил, а, напротив, — давать вызреть в безмолвном гневe всему, что ложилось на сердце.” (Ibid.)

¹⁶⁴ Mikhail Lermontov, “Дума” (“Thought”)

In the poem “Папыс” (“Sail”) from 1832 Lermontov describes a lonely white sail in the fog of the deep sea, lost in a foreign land far away from home, as if he is describing himself—a stranger in a strange land.

Белеет парус одинокой
В тумане моря голубом!..
Что ищет он в стране далекой?
Что кинул он в краю родном?..¹⁶⁵

[A lonely white sail is seen/ Through the fog of the blue sea!.../ What is it looking for in this distant country?/ What did it leave at home?]

The motif of feeling lonely, ostracized, and abandoned appears again in the 1830 poem “Одиночество” (“Loneliness”).

Как страшно жизни сей оковы
Нам в одиночестве влачить.
Делить веселье -- все готовы:
Никто не хочет грусть делить.
Один я здесь, как царь воздушный,
Страдания в сердце стеснены,
И вижу, как, судьбе послушно,
Года уходят, будто сны;
И вновь приходят, с позлащенной,
Но той же старою мечтой,
И вижу гроб уединенный,
Он ждет; что ж медлить над землей?
Никто о том не покрутится,
И будут (я уверен в том)
О смерти больше веселиться,
Чем о рождении моем...¹⁶⁶

[How terrifying it is for us/ To drag in solitude/ The chains of life./ To share joy everyone is ready:/ No one wants to share sadness./ I am by myself here, like the king of air,/ Suffering kept in the heart./ I see, how following the course of fate,/ The years fly by, like dreams;/ And come back again with covered in gold,/ but the same old dream,/ And I see a lonely grave,/ It awaits; Why should I linger on earth?/ No one will be touched by that,/ And they will be (in this I am convinced)/ much happier about my death,/ than they were about my birth...]

¹⁶⁵ Mikhail Lermontov, “Папыс” (“Sail”)

¹⁶⁶ Mikhail Lermontov, “Одиночество” (“Loneliness”)

Lermontov wanted to separate himself from the human world to which he did not entirely belong. As Merezhkovsky puts it, the poet knew that the reason for his loneliness and isolation was the fact that he carried something non-human—wonderful or monstrous—which people would never accept and forgive.¹⁶⁷ This can be seen in the poem “Пророк” (“Prophet”) written in 1841.

С тех пор, как Вечный Судия
Мне дал всеведение пророка,
В очах людей читаю я
Страницы злобы и порока.

Провозглашать я стал любви
И правды чистые ученья, -
В меня все ближние мои
Бросали бешенно каменья.

Посыпал пеплом я главу,
Из городов бежал я нищий,
И вот в пустыне я живу,
Как птицы, даром Божьей пищи.

...

Когда ж чрез шумный град
Я пробираюсь торопливо,
То старцы детям говорят
С улыбкою самолюбивой:

"Смотрите, вот пример для вас!
Он горд был, не ужился с нами;
Глупец - хотел уверить нас,
Что Бог гласит его устами!

Смотрите ж, дети, на него,
Как он угрюм, и худ, и бледен!
Смотрите, как он наг и беден,
Как презирают все его!"¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ D. S. Merezhkovsky, op. cit.

¹⁶⁸ Mikhail Lermontov, “Пророк” (“Prophet”)

[From the time when the eternal judge/ Gave me the knowledge of a prophet/ In people's eyes I read/ The pages of malice and sin.// I started preaching love/ And the pure teachings of truth:/ And all those near to me/ Were angrily throwing stones at me.// I dropped ashes on my head/ And ran away from cities improverished/ And I live in the desert/ Like the birds; with the gift of God's food;///...// When through a noisy city/ I quickly make my way/ Old men tell children/ With a selfish smile:// "Look, here is an example for you!/ He was proud, he didn't get along with us:/ The fool wanted to convince us,/ That God was speaking through his mouth!// Children, look at him:/ How sad he is, and skinny and pale!/ Look at the way he walks around naked and poor,/ And at the way everyone has contempt for him!"]

However, Lermontov did not have only a “demonic” side. Many knew another side of him—his gentle, loving, loyal, and caring soul which shined through in the brief moments when a person or an event freed him from the heavy thoughts and the skepticism that haunted him throughout his life. According to one of Lermontov's friends, A. V. Druzhinin, and his article “Сочинения Лермонтова” (“Lermontov's compositions”) one had to get under Lermontov's icy shell of harshness and rudeness in order to be able to understand the treasures of love hidden in his rich nature.¹⁶⁹ During moments of illumination one became aware of the poet's unmatched talent and his “great and powerful spirit.”¹⁷⁰ In “Послесловия к переводу стихотворений Лермонтова” (“Afterword to the translation of Lermontov's poetry”) Fr. Bodenshtedt commented that those who “did not know Lermontov well enough to be able to forgive his flaws in favor of all of the wonderful qualities that prevailed in his personality, were often pushed away by him, because he too

¹⁶⁹ A. V. Druzhnin, “Сочинения Лермонтова” (“Lermontov's compositions”) in *М. Ю. Лермонтов в воспоминаниях современников* [*M. Y. Lermontov in his contemporaries' memoirs*] (М.: Худож. лит., 1989), 322-332, at <http://lermontov.niv.ru/lermontov/vospominaniya/vospominaniya-44.htm>.

¹⁷⁰ “великий и могучий дух” (Ibid.)

often gave free rein to his rather stinging wit.”¹⁷¹ Bodenshtedt pointed out that Lermontov “could be very calm and gentle, like a child, and in general, a meditative, often sad mood prevailed.”¹⁷² Similarly, V. Belinsky exclaimed that Lermontov had a very gentle soul.¹⁷³ Bodenshtedt emphasized that despite the fact that Lermontov was hurt many times by deceiving and untruthful friendships, and that many times his nomadic life pulled him away from true friendships, he always remained true and devoted to his friends, sharing both their happiness and difficulties.¹⁷⁴ Lermontov’s appreciation of true friendship and loyalty can be seen in one of his epigrams:

Есть люди странные, которые с друзьями
Обходятся как с сюртуками:
Покуда нов сюртук: в чести -- а там
Забыт и подарен слугам!..

[There are strange people, who deal with friends/ The same way they deal with coats:/ While the coat is new: it is in high honors – and then/ It is forgotten and gifted to the servants!...]

¹⁷¹ “Людей же, недостаточно знавших его, чтобы прощать его недостатки за прекрасные качества, преобладавшие в его характере, он отталкивал, так как слишком часто давал волю своему несколько колкому остроумию.” (Fr. Bodenshtedt, “Послесловия к переводу стихотворений Лермонтова” [“Afterward to the translation of Lermontov’s poetry”] in *М. Ю. Лермонтов в воспоминаниях современников* [*M. Y. Lermontov in his contemporaries’ memoirs*] (М.: Худож. лит., 1989), 365-371, at <http://lermontov.niv.ru/lermontov/vospominaniya/vospominaniya-23.htm>)

¹⁷² “Впрочем, он мог быть кроток и нежен, как ребенок, и вообще в его характере преобладало задумчивое, часто грустное настроение.” (Ibid.)

¹⁷³ “Какая нежная душа в нем.” (V. Belinsky, “Выдержки из писем и статей [о Лермонтове]” [“Excerpts from letters and articles [about Lermontov]”] in *М. Ю. Лермонтов в воспоминаниях современников* [*M. Y. Lermontov in his contemporaries’ memoirs*] (М.: Худож. лит., 1989), 300-304, at <http://lermontov.niv.ru/lermontov/vospominaniya/vospominaniya-20.htm>)

¹⁷⁴ “Несмотря на то что он много потерпел от ложных друзей, а тревожная кочевая жизнь не раз вырывала его из объятий истинной дружбы, он оставался неизменно верен своим друзьям и в счастье, и в несчастье...” (Fr. Bodenshtedt, op. cit.)

According to Gillel'son Lermontov's friends truly valued his friendship and for them it was above all other relationships they had.¹⁷⁵

As already mentioned, Lermontov's gentle, loving, and caring soul shined through in the brief moments of illumination when a person or an event freed him from the heavy thoughts, the pessimism, cynicism, and the skepticism that haunted him throughout his life. Merezhkovsky claimed that what could free Lermontov from his demonic side and illuminate the beauty of his soul was true love. True love provoked strong feelings that took over the poet's heart and allowed his soft, human side to take over.¹⁷⁶ Looking at Lermontov's works, letters, and memoirs as well as at the writings of his contemporaries and later critics, one can conclude that for Lermontov true love was a multidimensional life-giving force based on the lovers' ability to complement each other on both the physical and the platonic levels. In the 1831 poem "Моя душа, я помню, с детских лет..." ("My soul, I remember, since my young days...") Lermontov says that he can't define love, but it is the strongest passion.

Я не могу любовь определить,
Но это страсть сильнейшая! -- любить
Необходимость мне; и я любил
Всем напряжением душевных сил.
И отучить не мог меня обман;
Пустое сердце ныло без страстей,
И в глубине моих сердечных ран
Жила любовь, богиня юных дней;¹⁷⁷

[I can not define love,/ But it is the strongest of passions! – to love/ Is a necessity for me;
and I loved/ With all the strength of my spiritual forces./ And deceit could not stop me

¹⁷⁵ M. Gillel'son, op. cit.

¹⁷⁶ D. S. Merezhkovsky, op. cit.

¹⁷⁷ Mikhail Lermontov, "Моя душа, я помню, с детских лет..." ("My soul, I remember, since my young days...")

from doing so;/ The empty heart was sad without passions,/ And in the depth of the wounds of my heart/ Lived love, the goddess of my youthful days;]

Merezhkovsky pointed out that for Lermontov if lovers shared true love, they were able to connect and recognize each other not only on the physical level, but also on the platonic level—both their bodies and their souls became extensions of each other and functioned as one.¹⁷⁸ In the poem “Первая любовь” (“First love”) Lermontov tells how he fell in love with a girl that he saw in a dream when he was young.

Я видел женский лик, он хладен был как лед,
И очи -- этот взор в груди моей живет;
Как совесть душу он хранит от преступлений;
Он след единственный младенческих видений.
И деву чудную любил я...¹⁷⁹

[I saw a girl's face, it was cold as ice,/ And the eyes – this gaze still lives in my breast;/ Like conscience it preserves the soul from crime;/ It is the only trace of the vision from my young days./ And I loved the wondrous maiden...]

Merezhkovsky also claimed that according to Lermontov true love does not end with the lovers' physical death; it continues beyond the grave in heaven.¹⁸⁰ In the poem “Любовь мертвеца” (“Dead man's love”) the poet says that there is no separation.

Без страха в час последней муки
Покинув свет,
Отрады ждал я от разлуки —
Разлуки нет.¹⁸¹

[Without fear in the minute of last suffering/ Having left the world,/ I awaited comfort from separation—/ There is no separation.]

¹⁷⁸ D. S. Merezhkovsky, op. cit.

¹⁷⁹ Mikhail Lermontov, “Первая любовь” (“First love”)

¹⁸⁰ D. S. Merezhkovsky, op. cit.

¹⁸¹ Mikhail Lermontov, “Любовь мертвеца” (“Dead man's love”)

Merezhkovsky makes the point that Lermontov did not share the traditional Christian view of heaven—a realm of souls and no bodies. For Lermontov heaven was a realm beyond the earthly grave where both the bodies and the souls continued to exist, giving the lovers the opportunity to find and recognize each other and to remain together for eternity thus making each other immortal through their shared true love.¹⁸² In the 1829 poem “K....” (“To...”) Lermontov says that the grave will not chill his love.

Простите мне, что я решился к вам
 Писать. Перо в руке -- могила
 Передо мной. Но что ж? все пусто там.
 Все прах, что некогда она манила
 К себе. Вокруг меня толпа родных,
 Слезами жалости покрыты лица.
 И я пишу -- пишу -- но не для них.
 Любви моей не холодит гробница.
 Любви -- но вы не знали мук моих.¹⁸³

[Forgive me, that I decided/ to write to you. The quill is in my hand – the grave/ is in front of me. So what? Everything is empty there./ Everything is dust that once was enticing./ Around me is my family,/ Their faces covered in tears and sorrow./ And I write – write—but not for them./ My love will not be chilled by the grave./ Love – but you never knew my sorrows.]

In a way this also represents Lermontov’s idea of marriage—a union based on the understanding and recognition of true love.

Lermontov’s views on true love influenced and in a way defined his idea of Heaven and Hell. For him Hell was not a realm where sinful souls get punished for their unworthy earthly deeds. Lermontov saw Hell as the inability of the lovers to recognize each other

¹⁸² D. S. Merezhkovsky, op. cit.

¹⁸³ Mikhail Lermontov, “K....” (“To...”)

beyond their earthly graves or as their incompatibility on the physical or the platonic level. For Lermontov eternal loneliness led to painful and deadly numbness and emptiness, which defined Hell.¹⁸⁴ In the poem “Любовь мертвеца” (“A dead man’s love”) Lermontov describes the painful separation between a dead man trapped in heaven amongst souls with no bodies, and his beloved who is still alive on earth.

...Я видел прелесть бестелесных
И тосковал,
Что образ твой в чертах небесных
Не узнавал.
Что мне сиянье божьей власти
И рай святой?
Я перенес земные страсти
Туда с собой.
Ласкаю я мечту родную
Везде одну;
Желаю, плачу и ревную
Как в старину.
Коснется ль чуждое дыханье
Твоих ланит,
Моя душа в немом страданье
Вся задрожит.
Случится ль, шепчешь засыпая
Ты о другом,
Твои слова текут пылая
По мне огнем.
Ты не должна любить другого,
Нет, не должна,
Ты мертвецу, святыней слова,
Обручена,
Увы, твой страх, твои моленья,
К чему оне?
Ты знаешь, мира и забвенья
Не надо мне!¹⁸⁵

[...I saw the beauty of the ones without bodies/ And I grieved,/ That your image in the heavenly features/ I did not recognize./ What is the shining of God’s power/ and sacred Heaven to me?/ I brought the earthly passions/ There with me./ I cherish everywhere one

¹⁸⁴ D. S. Merezhkovsky, op. cit.

¹⁸⁵ Mikhail Lermontov, “Любовь мертвеца” (“Dead man’s love”)

native dream;/ I want, I cry, I'm jealous/ Like in the past./ If someone's alien breath touches your cheeks/ My soul in quiet torment/ trembles./ If it happens that you while falling asleep/ whisper of someone else,/ Your words bring/ fire to me./ You must not love another/ No, no you must not,/ You are betrothed to the dead man with holy words/ Alas, your fear, your prayers,/ What good are they?/ You know I need not peace and oblivion!]

In another poem, “Они любили друг друга так долго и нежно...” (“They loved each other so long and so gently...”) Lermontov describes a different scenario in which the lovers are unable to be with each other because they could not recognize each other beyond the grave.

Они любили друг друга так долго и нежно
С тоской глубокой и страстью безумно-мятежной!
Но, как враги, избегали признанья и встречи,
И были пусты и хладны их краткие речи.
Они расстались в безмолвном и гордом страданье,
И милый образ во сне лишь порою видали.

И смерть пришла: наступило за гробом свиданье...
Но в мире новом друг друга они не узнали¹⁸⁶

[They loved each other so long and so gently/ With deep sorrow and rebellious passion!/ But, just like enemies, they avoided confessions and meetings,/ And their brief conversations were empty and cold./ They separated in quiet and proud suffering/ And saw the dear face in dreams only now and then.// And death came: it was time for the meeting beyond the grave.../ But in the new world they could not recognize each other]

Despite the numerous affairs with glamorous society ladies that Lermontov had, he loved truly and sincerely only three times in his life. He had many admirers amongst the glamorous society ladies, but the affairs with them were treated by the poet with cold and distant boredom and sarcasm. Soloviev claimed that Lermontov's dismissive attitude

¹⁸⁶ Mikhail Lermontov, “Они любили друг друга так долго и нежно...” (“They loved each other so long and so gently...”)

towards most women was governed by the demon of lust that lived in his soul.¹⁸⁷ I claim that he could never truly love a society beauty because the way that these women covered their internal emptiness and dullness with shining shells and the loud fame of trophy couquettes made the blood of a man like Lermontov, who committed himself to taking the masks off and exposing their true faces, boil. The effect of these women on Lermontov was the opposite of what he was looking for—they thickened the ice around his soul and brought out his “demonic” side, strengthening his pessimistic outlook on life and society. These women represented certain social circles and a way of life that Lermontov, after having a chance to observe closely and understand well, was repulsed by. In a letter to his friend Maria Lopukhina written in the end of 1838 from St. Petersburg Lermontov claimed that he was the unhappiest man because he was forced to go to balls every day.¹⁸⁸ Lermontov said that the world that he had offended in his poems was trying to shower him with flattery and the most beautiful women are asking him for poems and then victoriously boast about them.¹⁸⁹ However, Lermontov could not enjoy the false flatteries and glamour of that world. He was very bored.¹⁹⁰ Lermontov admitted that in the past, when he was still taking his first steps in society and writing, he wanted to be accepted in that society, but at

¹⁸⁷ D. S. Merezhkovsky, *op. cit.*

¹⁸⁸ “Надо вам сказать, что я самый несчастный человек, и вы поверите мне, когда узнаете, что я каждый день езжу на балы...” [I must tell you that I am the most unhappy man, and you will believe me when you find out that every day I go to balls...] (“Письмо М. Ю. Лермонтова к Лопухиной М. А.” [“A letter from M. Y. Lermontov to M. A. Lopukhina”] at <http://www.all-poetry.ru/pisma35.html>)

¹⁸⁹ “Весь этот свет, который я оскорблял в своих стихах, старается осыпать меня лестью; самые хорошенькие женщины выпрашивают у меня стихи и хвастаются ими, как величайшей победой.” [This whole world, which I have offended in my poems, is doing its best to flatter me; the most beautiful women ask me for poems and boaster about them as if they are their greatest victory.] (Ibid.)

¹⁹⁰ “Тем не менее я скучаю.” [Despite all of this I’m bored.] (Ibid.)

that time the doors of the aristocratic salons were closed for him. Now that those doors opened for him as someone who had earned their right to be there, he could see the true face of those circles. All of the women were inviting him to their salons because they wanted to gather great people; everyone was curious about him, but Lermontov did not want that. He wrote that his innate laziness reigned supreme and he began to find these events and circles more than unbearable. Lermontov claimed that he had not seen that many low and funny things anywhere else and was convinced that at some point these “friends” and “admirers” would turn around and stab him in the back.¹⁹¹

For Lermontov, his society romances were marked by an initial fascination with women’s beauty followed by an overwhelming disgust with their stupidity and emptiness. In 1830

¹⁹¹ “было время, когда я в качестве новичка искал доступа в это общество; это мне не удалось: двери аристократических салонов были для меня закрыты; а теперь в это же самое общество я вхожу уже не как проситель, а как человек, добившийся своих прав; я возбуждаю любопытство, предо мною заискивают, меня всюду приглашают, а я и вида не подаю, что хочу этого; женщины, желающие, чтобы в их салонах собирались замечательные люди, хотят, чтобы я бывал у них, потому что я ведь тоже *лев*, да, я, ваш Мишель, добрый малый, у которого вы и не подозревали гривы. Согласитесь, что всё это может опьянить. К счастью, моя природная лень берет верх, и мало-помалу я начинаю находить всё это более чем несносным; но этот новый опыт принес мне пользу, потому что дал мне в руки оружие против этого общества, и если оно когда-нибудь станет преследовать меня клеветой (а это непременно случится), то у меня по крайней мере найдется средство отомстить; нигде ведь нет столько низкого и смешного, как там.” [There was time when I was new and wanted access to that society; this did not happen for me: the doors of the aristocratic salons were closed for me; and now I enter this very society no longer as a beggar, but as someone who has earned his rights; I make people curious, they ingratiate themselves before me, they invite me everywhere, and I show in no way that I even want this; women who want to have fabulous people gather at their salons want me to attend them because I am a *lion* too, yes, I, your Michel, the good boy, that you did not even suspect had a mane. Agree that all of this can be addictive. I am lucky because my natural laziness is stronger than anything and slowly I begin to find this more than unbearable; but this new experience was beneficial to me because it gave me a weapon against this society and if it ever tries to hurt me with slander (and this will happen for sure), I will have the means for revenge; there is no other place that is as funny as there.] (Ibid.)

Lermontov wrote a poem called “К глупой красавице” (“To the foolish beauty”) which shows his true opinion of the society beauties—just like death they are deceptively beautiful and fascinating from far away, but the foolishness and emptiness of their words quickly replaces the initial sweet dreams with either laughter or horror.

Тобой пленяться издали
 Мое все зрение готово,
 Но слышать боже сохрани
 Мне от тебя одно хоть слово.
 Иль смех иль страх в душе моей
 Заменит сладкое мечтанье,
 И глупый смысл твоих речей
 Оледенит очарованье...

Так смерть красна издалика;
 Пускай она летит стрелою.
 За ней я следую пока;
 Лишь только б не она за мною...
 За ней я всюду полечу,
 И наслажуся в созерцанье.
 Но сам привлечь ее вниманье
 Ни за полмира не хочу.¹⁹²

[To be enchanted by you from far away/ Is my vision ready,/ But Lord preserve me from hearing,/ One word from you./ Either laughter or fear in my soul/ Will replace the sweet dreams,/ And the foolish meaning of your words/ Will freeze the fascination...// Just like this death is beautiful from far away;/ Let her fly by like an arrow./ I will follow right behind it;/ As long as she does not follow me.../ Behind her I'll fly anywhere,/ And will admiringly observe./ But to attract her attention myself/ I would not want for half the world.]

The way Turgenev remembered Lermontov at the New Year Masked Ball in 1839 serves as another good illustration of Lermontov's attitude towards society beauties. Turgenev noticed that women did not leave Lermontov alone for a minute. A never-ending line of masks formed in front of Lermontov and each one wanted something from him. Lermontov did not even move and was quietly listening to their hysterical screams, turning his dark

¹⁹² Mikhail Lermontov, “К глупой красавице” (“To the foolish beauty”)

gloomy eyes from one to the next. According to Turgenev, Lermontov was probably deeply bored and annoyed and was suffocating in that tiny sphere where destiny had trapped him.¹⁹³

Lermontov's famous rocky affair with the society beauty Ekaterina Aleksandrovna Sushkova is an illustration of an attempt to love a glamorous society woman just because of her beauty, an attempt that was ultimately destroyed by the incompatibility between Lermontov's and Ekaterina's true individual identities. When they first met, in the spring of 1830, Lermontov was impressed by the remarkable appearance of the eighteen-year-old beauty from the capital. The writer Vera Zhelikhovskaia described Ekaterina as follows: "lean waist, beautiful expressive facial features, black eyes over which many lost their minds, magnificent, pitch-black hair."¹⁹⁴ Even though she was seen by many as a very vain and shallow girl and, as she stated, the goal of her strong presence in society was to find a dazzling match,¹⁹⁵ Lermontov was fascinated by her beauty. Their romance reached its peak in the summer of 1830. Lermontov dedicated eleven love poems to Sushkova, which

¹⁹³ "Внутренно Лермонтов, вероятно, скучал глубоко; он задыхался в тесной сфере, куда его втокнула судьба. На бале дворянского собрания ему не давали покоя, беспрестанно приставали к нему, брали его за руки; одна маска сменялась другою, а он почти не сходил с места и молча слушал их писк, поочередно обращая на них свои сумрачные глаза." [On the inside Lermontov probably was deeply bored; he was suffocating in the narrow world, where fate had thrown him. At the ball of the nobility they did not give him a break, and continuously kept coming to him, taking him by the hand; one mask replaced another, and he almost did not move from his place and quietly listened to their cries, turning his dark gaze on them one after the other.] (I. S. Turgenev, *op. cit.*)

¹⁹⁴ "стройный стан, красивая, выразительная физиономия, черные глаза, сводившие многих с ума, великолепные, как смоль волосы" (Lyudmila Makarova, "Жестокая игра поэта" ["The poet's cruel game"] at <http://zagadki-istorii.ru/lubov-95.html>)

¹⁹⁵ "Мне необходимо бывать много в свете для того, чтобы сделать блестящую партию." [I have to be appear in society a lot so I can find a dazzling match.] (Ekaterina Sushkova, "Первый въезд на бал" ["The first ball"] in *Zapiski [Notes]* [Saint Petersburg: 1870], 59.)

she accepted while openly showing her derisive and dismissive attitude towards a man she treated like child.¹⁹⁶ Lermontov and Ekaterina did not see each other for four years. When they met in 1834 Sushkova had already acquired the firm reputation of a “кокетка” (coquette) and was trying to convince one of Lermontov’s close friend, the young Aleksey Lopukhin, to marry her.¹⁹⁷ After four years of separation Lermontov’s fascination with the coquette had completely vanished and he was able to see her true self. In a letter to Aleksey’s sister, Maria, he describes Ekaterina as a bat, the wings of which cling to everything she meets on the way. Lermontov admitted to Maria that there was time when he liked Ekaterina, but now she was almost forcing him to flirt with her. Lermontov pointed out that there was something in her manners, in her voice that was tough, uneven, broken—something that repelled.¹⁹⁸ After saving his friend from the marriage with Ekaterina by tormenting the pride of the old coquette,¹⁹⁹ Lermontov felt avenged for Ekaterina’s dismissive attitude towards his feelings from four years ago and for the tears he shed over

¹⁹⁶ “Сашенька и я, точно, мы обращались с Лермонтовым как с мальчиком, хотя и отдавали полную справедливость его уму... Такое обращение бесило его до крайности...” [Sashenka and I treated Lermontov like a child even though we admired his mind... This made him very angry...] (“Сушкова, Екатерина Александровна” [“Sushkova Ekaterina Aleksandrovna”] at http://www.tarhany.ru/lermontov/zhenschini_adresati_liriki_m_ju__lermontova/sushkova_ekaterina_aleksandrovna)

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ “Эта женщина — летучая мышь, крылья которой цепляются за все, что они встречают! — было время, когда она мне нравилась, теперь она почти принуждает меня ухаживать за нею... но, я не знаю, есть что-то такое в её манерах, в её голосе, что-то жесткое, неровное, сломанное, что отталкивает...” [This woman—a bat, whose wings are clinging to everything they meet!—there was time when I liked her, now she is almost forcing me to flirt with her... I don’t know, there is something in her manners, in her voice, something cruel, uneven, broken, that repels...] (Ibid.)

¹⁹⁹ “а я только помучил самолюбие старой кокетки” [I just tormented the pride of the old coquette] (Ibid.)

her²⁰⁰ and over her merciless and silly games that made a child's heart suffer.²⁰¹ Lermontov's last words to Ekaterina were, "Я ничего не имею против вас; что прошло, того не воротишь, да я ничего и не требую, словом, я вас больше не люблю, да, кажется, и никогда не любил" [I do not have anything against you; one can not bring back the past, and I am not demanding anything; In a word, I do not love you anymore and it seems I have never loved you.]²⁰²

In the poem "Все тихо—полная луна..." ("Everything is quiet—there is a full moon...") Lermontov says, "Любить? -- три раза я любил,/ Любил три раза безнадежно" [To love?—I loved three times/ Three times I loved hopelessly]. Merezhkovsky points out three main experiences with romantic love that Lermontov had in his life and all three times he felt not only a physical, but also a platonic connection with the other person.²⁰³ These three girls were able to complement Lermontov's individual identity by taming his demonic side, his skepticism, and his pessimism. They were able to penetrate the icy shell around his soul and to let its soft, gentle, good, and loving light shine through. All three females were not famous and glamorous society beauties; they were simple, earthly, imperfect, and some of them remained forever nameless. However, even though Lermontov admitted that he felt true love for these females, he remained distant and separated from all three of them. He never had the chance to experience and understand

²⁰⁰ "Итак вы видите, что я хорошо отомстил за слезы, которые кокетство mlle S. заставило меня пролить 5 лет назад" [And so you see that I had my revenge for the tears which Ms. S.'s coquettish behavior made me shed 5 years ago] (Ibid.)

²⁰¹ "она заставила страдать сердце ребёнка" [she made a child's heart suffer] (Ibid.)

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ D. S. Merezhkovsky, op. cit.

the full effect of a lasting union with his beloved, which is reflected in the three works that will be discussed later in this chapter.

Based on the entry he wrote on July 8, 1830, Lermontov had what appears to be not only his first experience of being in love, but also one of the most real and intense experience with romantic love he ever had when he was only ten years old. The first time he was taken to the Caucasus, Lermontov fell in love with a little girl who came to play with his cousins. Lermontov said that his passion for this girl was strong and burning, despite the fact that both of them were children, since then he had never experienced love, passion, and excitement like that. This girl undoubtedly touched his soul. She made his heart tremble and his legs shake. He cried for no reason, wanted to see her, and when she came he refused to go in the room, and ran away afraid that the beating of his heart and his shaking voice would give away his secret which even he did not understand. Lermontov never found out who she was and where she came from, and never asked because he was afraid that he would be asked why and how he remembers her, when everyone else already forgot or people would just not believe that she ever existed, and that would be heartbreaking for him. Lermontov remembered her blond hair and clear blue honest eyes claiming that he had never seen anything like that ever again, or it seemed that way to him because he never loved like this again. Lermontov said that this mystery, this paradise lost that he experienced so early, when he was only ten years old, would be on his mind until his last day.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ "Кто мне поверит, что я знал любовь, имея 10 лет от роду? К моим кузинам приходила одна дама с дочерью, девочкой лет девяти. Я ее видел там. Я не помню, хороша собою была она или нет... Один раз я вбежал в комнату. Она была тут и играла с кузиною в куклы: мое сердце затрепетало, ноги подкосились. Я тогда ни о чем еще не имел понятия, тем не менее это была страсть сильная, хотя и ребяческая;

Five years later, at the age of fifteen, Lermontov admitted that when he was twelve he fell in love with another nameless girl who was two years older than he. She, just like the little girl he fell in love with in the Caucasus, provoked very strong feelings that took over the young poet's heart and soul. Influenced by these strong feelings Lermontov did something very uncharacteristic of him—he stole a blue ribbon from the girl.²⁰⁵ Later on Lermontov expressed his amazement at how stupid and naïve he was. However, until his

это была истинная любовь; с тех пор я еще не любил так... Надо мной смеялись и дразнили... Я плакал потихоньку, без причины; желал ее видеть; а когда она приходила, я не хотел или стыдился войти в комнату; я не хотел говорить о ней и убегал, слыша ее название (теперь я забыл его), как бы страхась, чтобы биение сердца и дрожащий голос не объяснили другим тайну, непонятную для меня самого. Я не знаю, кто была она, откуда. И поныне мне неловко как-то спросить об этом: может быть, спросят и меня, как я помню, когда они позабыли; или подумают, что брежу, не поверят в ее существование -- это было бы мне больно!.. Белокурые волосы, голубые глаза быстрые, непринужденность -- нет, с тех пор я ничего подобного не видал, или это мне кажется, потому что я никогда так не любил, как в тот раз... И так рано, в 10 лет. О, эта загадка, этот потерянный рай до могилы будут терзать мой ум!.." [Who would believe me that I got to know love when I was ten years old? A lady and her daughter who was about nine years old used to visit my cousins. I saw her there. I do not remember whether she was good-looking or not... One time I ran into the room. She was there and was playing with dolls with my cousin: my heart trembled, my legs started shaking. Then I did not have the slightest idea of what was happening; nevertheless it was strong passion, despite the fact that it was a child's passion; this was true love; since then I have not yet loved like this... They laughed at me and teased me... I quietly cried without any reason; I wanted to see her; and when she came, I did not want to or was embarrassed to go into the room; I did not want to talk about her and ran away upon hearing her name (now I have forgotten it), as if I was afraid that the beating of my heart and my trembling voice would give my secret away to others, a secret that I myself could not understand. I do not know who she was and where she was from. And even now it is uncomfortable to ask about it: maybe they will ask me why I remember when they have long forgotten; or they will think I am making it up and will not believe that she ever existed—that would hurt me!... Blond hair, blue, clear eyes, innocence—no, since then I have not seen anything like it again, or maybe it seems so to me, because I have never loved the way I loved that time... And so early, being 10 years old. Oh, this mystery, this paradise lost, will torment my brain until I die...] (Ibid.)

²⁰⁵ "1830. Мне 15 лет. -- Я однажды, три года назад, украл у одной девушки, которой было 17 лет и потому безнадежно любимой мною, бисерный синий шнурок." [1830. I am 15 years old.—Three years ago I stole a bright blue ribbon from a girl who was 17 years old and with whom I was hopelessly in love.] (Ibid.)

last day he kept not only his memories about that nameless girl, but also the blue ribbon that he stole from her many years ago.²⁰⁶

Lermontov's relationship with Varvara Lopukhina marks the third and last time the poet fell in love, and it was his longest and most stable romantic experience that influenced much of his life and many of his works. Since the letters between Lermontov and Varvara were destroyed by her husband Bakhmetev, the main sources that provide information about their relationship are the letters between Varvara's sister Maria and the poet, other materials, such as paintings, that Varvara was able to secretly give to her friend Alexandra Vereshtagina, the letters between Alexandra and Lermontov, and the memoirs of the poet's cousin Shan-Girey who was a direct witness of the relationship and its tremendous influence on Lermontov's life and works.

Varvara Lopukhina was very different from the glamorous, empty, and artificial society beauties that Lermontov was repulsed by. Varvara met Lermontov in the summer of 1831 when she came to Moscow and Lermontov happened to ride next to her on the way to the Simonov Monastery. At that point Varvara was sixteen years old and for most of her life she had lived in a village.²⁰⁷ "She...had not yet lost the freshness of her rural blush nor the village simplicity and naturalness. This made her very much unlike the Moscow ladies who had everything rehearsed and planned—every gesture, pose, smile."²⁰⁸ Varvara's freshness,

²⁰⁶ "Он и теперь у меня хранится. -- Как я был глуп!" [I still keep it.—How stupid I was!] (Ibid.)

²⁰⁷ "Лермонтов и Варвара Александровна Лопухина" ["Lermontov and Varvara Aleksandrovna Lopukhina"] at <http://lermontov.niv.ru/lermontov/bio/lermontov-i-lopuhina.htm>

²⁰⁸ "Она...еще не успела утратить ни свежести деревенского румянца, ни сельской естественности и простоты. Это делало ее не похожей на московских барышень, у которых все было рассчитано: каждый жест, поза, улыбка." (Ibid.)

simplicity, and naturalness were distinct and they stood out, just like Lermontov himself. They were very attractive for Lermontov since in those characteristics he could see the life-giving energy that his soul—tired and bored by the deadly falsity of high society—was looking for. Shortly after they met, in 1832 Lermontov wrote the poem “Она не гордой красотой...” (“Not with her proud beauty...”) in which, according to N. Brodsky, Lermontov juxtaposes Varvara’s lively and appealing characteristics to the characteristics of the shallow society beauties,²⁰⁹

Она не гордой красотой
Прельщает юношей живых,
Она не водит за собою
Толпу вздыхателей немых.
И стан ее — не стан богини,
И грудь волною не встает,
И в ней никто своей святыни,
Припав к земле, не признает.
Однако все ее движенья,
Улыбки, речи и черты
Так полны жизни, вдохновенья,
Так полны чудной простоты.
Но голос душу проникает,
Как вспоминанье лучших дней,
И сердце любит и страдает,
Почти стыдясь любви своей.²¹⁰

[Not with proud beauty/ She tempts young men,/ She is not followed/ By a crowd by
mute sighers./ And her waist/ Is not that of a goddess/ And her bosom does not rise like a
wave/ And in her no one recognizes her holiness/ When kneeling on the ground./
However, all her movements,/ Smiles, words, and features/ Are so full of life,
inspiration,/ So full of wonderful simplicity;/ Yet (her) voice penetrates the soul,/ Like a
remembrance of better days/ And the heart loves and suffers,/ Almost embarrassed by its
love.]

²⁰⁹ “М. Ю. Лермонтов: Она не гордой красотой...” at
<https://www.stihi.ru/2014/03/26/9316>.

²¹⁰ Mikhail Lermontov, “Она не гордой красотой...” (“Not with her proud beauty...”)

In those characteristics Lermontov could see not only what he had been longing for for so long, but he could also see a reflection of himself—his inability to play games and pretend, his brutal honesty, and his love for the raw beauty and freshness of nature, which he could see on Varen'ka's face.

Varvara was not famous for her fascinating beauty and did not have the reputation of a flirtatious coquette looking for a glamorous husband like Ekaterina Sushkova. The first things that people noticed in Varen'ka were not her flawless lean waist or her magnificent black hair. They saw her soft, good, smart, and wonderfully simple soul shining through her lively facial expressions, her gentle smile, her big bright eyes, and her sweet words. A. P. Shan-Girey remembers that Lermontov “was passionately in love with a girl (Varvara) who was young, sweet, smart, poetic, and admirable.”²¹¹ He also remembered that children made fun of Varvara because she had a birthmark on her forehead, but she, being the good person that she was, never got angry.²¹² Varvara was passionate, enthusiastic, and poetic. The seclusion of the village where she grew up and the novels that she read made her dreamy, but this dreaminess was balanced by her natural liveliness and sociability. She did not talk about her tendency to dream and was ashamed of it as if it was a weakness. She

²¹¹ “был страстно влюблен в молоденькую, милую, умную, как день, и в полном смысле восхитительную В. А. Лопухину; это была натура пылкая, восторженная, поэтическая и в высшей степени симпатичная” (“Лермонтов и Варвара Александровна Лопухина”, *op. cit.*)

²¹² “Как сейчас помню ее ласковый взгляд и светлую улыбку; ей было 15--16 лет, мы же были дети и сильно дразнили ее; у нее на лбу над бровью чернелось маленькое родимое пятнышко; и мы всегда приставали к ней, повторяя: “У Вареньки родинка, Варенька уродинка!” Но она, добрейшее создание, никогда не сердилась.” [I still remember her gentle gaze and her bright smile; she was 15 or 16 years old, we were children and made fun of her a lot; on the forehead over her eyebrow she had a small, black birthmark; and we always went to her repeating: “Varen'ka has a birthmark, Varen'ka has a birthmark!” But she, the most gentle being, never got angry at us.] (*Ibid.*)

had blond hair and black eyes, which made her very charming. Every change in her moods, every feeling and thought, were reflected on her lively face.²¹³

Just like Lermontov, Varvara was always honest about the way she felt and what she thought. She, just like her beloved poet, could not hide her sincere emotions behind a mask, could not be hypocritical, and could not play silly polite games. When compared to the “пошлость” and “свинство” of high society, this made Varvara very earthly and admirably simple, and could be seen as one of the main reasons for Lermontov’s strong love. In her he saw a true match for his individual identity.

Despite the strong feelings that the young lovers had for each other, Varvara’s family, especially her father Alexander Nikolaevich Lopukhin and her sister Maria, were opposed to them getting married. In May 1835 Varvara’s family married her to a wealthy and much older landowner—Nikolai Federovich Bakhmetev. Count M. D. Buturlin pointed out that it was obvious that Varen’ka was not happy in her marriage and on top of that Bakhmetev turned out to be very jealous and forbade his wife to even mention Lermontov.²¹⁴ He also ordered her to destroy all of her letters from Lermontov.²¹⁵ In 1835 Lermontov was in St. Petersburg in military school, where according to the memoirs of Shan-Girey his feelings

²¹³ “Варенька была пылкая, восторженная, поэтическая натура. Сельское уединение и чтение романов сделали ее мечтательной. Но эта мечтательность умерялась природной живостью, веселостью и общительностью. Свою склонность помечтать она не выказывала, а, наоборот, стыдилась как слабости. Была блондинка с черными глазами. Это придавало ей особую прелесть. Каждая перемена настроения, мимолетное чувство и мелькнувшая мысль отражались на ее подвижном лице.” (Ibid.)

²¹⁴ “Утверждают, что Варвара Александровна не была счастлива в замужестве, тем более что Н. Ф. Бахметев оказался большим ревнивцем и запретил жене даже говорить о Лермонтове.” (*Записки графа М. Д. Бутурлина* [Count M. D. Buturlin’s Notes] T.1 (M: Русская усадьба, 2006), 651.)

²¹⁵ David Powelstock, op. cit., 175.

for Varvara temporarily grew weaker because of the environment and the wild life of the students. However, Lermontov's feelings for Varvara came back immediately when he learned about the unexpected wedding of his beloved.²¹⁶ Shan-Girey was present in the spring of 1835 when Lermontov found out that Varvara was marrying Bakhmetev. They were playing chess when Lermontov got the letter. While he was reading it his expression changed greatly and he got very pale. Shan Girey became alarmed for his cousin, but Lermontov handed him the letter and left the room.²¹⁷ Varvara's and Lermontov's friendship continued after her wedding in 1835, and they never stopped loving each other and suffering from the fact that they were separated. When Varvara and her husband came back to St. Petersburg from abroad in 1838 Shan-Girey asked her how she was doing and her honest answer was that "she was living according to God's will, but she thought and felt the way she used to back in the old days."²¹⁸ When Lermontov was sending Varen'ka the poem "Demon" he angrily crossed out the letter B multiple times (standing for Varen'ka's married name—Bakhmeteva) and put L (standing for her maiden name—

²¹⁶ "чувство к ней Лермонтова было безотчетно, но истинно и сильно... в начале своем оно возбудило взаимность...но...впоследствии, в Петербурге, в гвардейской школе временно заглушено было новою обстановкой и шумною жизнью юнкеров тогдашней школы, по вступлении в свет новыми успехами в обществе и литературе; но мгновенно и сильно пробудилось оно при неожиданном известии о замужестве любимой женщины..." (А. Р. Shan-Girey, "М. Ю. Лермонтов" ["М. Y. Lermontov"] in *М. Ю. Лермонтов в воспоминаниях современников* [*M. Y. Lermontov in his contemporaries' memoirs*] (М.: Худож. лит., 1989), 33-55, at <http://lermontov.niv.ru/lermontov/vospominaniya/vospominaniya-2.htm>)

²¹⁷ "Мы играли в шахматы, человек подал письмо; Мишель начал его читать, но вдруг изменился в лице и побледнел; я испугался и хотел спросить, что такое, но он, подавая мне письмо, сказал: „вот новость — прочти“, и вышел из комнаты." [We were playing chess, a person gave him a letter; Michel started reading it, but suddenly his facial expression changed and he grew pale; I got scared and wanted to ask what was going on, but he, handing me the letter, said: "This is news—read", and left the room.] (Ibid.)

²¹⁸ "Живем как бог послал, а думаем и чувствуем как в старину." (Ibid.)

Lopukhina).²¹⁹ Lermontov symbolically expressed his rejection of traditional marriage and of the way his beloved Varen'ka was forced into a union that was not based on mutual true love, but was simply a wise business transaction.

Varen'ka and everything that reminded Lermontov of her and of his love for her, tamed his “demonic” side and brought out his soft, gentle, and loving side. After her wedding Varvara got very ill. In 1838 Shan-Girey saw her for a last time and said that his heart painfully shrank when seeing her so pale and thin and when realizing that there was not anything left from Varen'ka that he used to know. Only her eyes kept their glow and were as gentle as before.²²⁰ Varvara and Bakhmetev had several children, but only their daughter Ol'ga survived. After a long period of separation Lermontov met Varvara and Ol'ga on his way back from exile in 1838. Merezhkovsky points out that Lermontov looked at the way the illness had changed Varvara and caressed the little Ol'ga for a long time. At the end he started crying and went to a different room where he wrote the heartfelt poem “Ребёнку” (“To a child”).²²¹ In the poem Lermontov exclaimed that the years were flying by, and suffering had changed Varvara's face prematurely; however faithful dreams had preserved her image in his heart (“Увы! года летят;/ Страдания её до срока изменили,/ Но верные мечты тот образ сохранили/ В груди моей”). Merezhkovsky speculates that the discord between Lermontov's smart heavy gaze and the childishly mysterious expression on his

²¹⁹ “Посылая Вареньке список “Демона”, Лермонтов в посвящении поэмы с негодованием несколько раз перечеркнул букву Б. -- Бахметевой и поставил Л. — Лопухиной” (D. S. Merezhkovsky, op. cit.)

²²⁰ “Боже мой, как болезненно сжалось моё сердце при её виде! Бледная, худая, и тени не было прежней Вареньки, только глаза сохранили свой блеск и были такие же ласковые, как и прежде.” (A. P. Shan-Girey, op. cit.)

²²¹ D. S. Merezhkovsky, op. cit.

lips disappeared, and at that time his face looked exactly like the face of his mother. There was heavenly wisdom in his eyes and earthly suffering from love on his lips.²²²

According to Shan-Girey, Lermontov's feelings for Varen'ka were unaccountable, but true and strong and he kept them until his last day.²²³ After the poet's death in 1841 Varvara's unstable health got even worse. In 1841 her sister Maria wrote that the latest news about Varvara's health were very sad and she had refused to continue with her treatments in Russia and abroad. Maria guessed that this decision was influenced by Lermontov's death.²²⁴ It might be that Varvara could finally see the opportunity to be with her true love in the realm beyond their earthly graves and that is why she chose not to fight for her earthly life anymore. In 1851 Varvara died.

Varvara had a crucial influence not only on Lermontov's life, but on his works as well. Lermontov dedicated many poems to Varvara, and this reflected his infatuation with the

²²² “Должно быть, в эту минуту лицо его было особенно похоже на лицо его матери: исчез разлад между слишком умным, тяжелым взором и "детски неясным выражением губ"; в глазах была небесная мудрость, а в губах земная скорбь любви.” (Ibid.)

²²³ “Чувство к ней Лермонтова было безотчётно, но истинно, сильно, и едва ли не сохранил он его до самой смерти своей” (А. Р. Shan-Girey, op. cit.)

²²⁴ “Последние известия о моей сестре Бахметевой поистине печальны. Она вновь больна, её нервы так расстроены, что она вынуждена была провести около двух недель в постели, настолько была слаба. Муж предлагал ей ехать в Москву — она отказалась, за границу — отказалась и заявила, что решительно не желает больше лечиться. Может быть, я ошибаюсь, но я отношу это расстройство к смерти Мишеля.” [The last news about my sister Bakhmeteva was truly sad. She is sick again and her nerves are so upset that she had to spend about two weeks in bed; she was that weak. Her husband offered her the chance to go to Moscow—she refused, going abroad—also refused, and said that she does not want to continue her medical treatment. Maybe I am wrong, but I relate this to how upset Michel's death made her.] (M. A. Lopukhina, “Из писем к А. М. Верещагиной-Хюгель” [“From the letters to A. M. Vereshtaginoi-Huygel”], in *М. Ю. Лермонтов в воспоминаниях современников* [*M. Y. Lermontov in his contemporaries' memoirs*] (М.: Худож. лит., 1989), 478, at <http://lermontov.niv.ru/lermontov/vospominaniya/vospominaniya-56.htm>)

beauty of her soul and character, the life-giving effect she had had on him, his recognition of the way they connected and complemented each other, his hopes for a future together, his eternal remembrance of and longing for her, and his unquestionable devotion to their love. Lermontov addressed the poem “Нет, не тебя так пылко я люблю...” (“No, not you I love so ardently...”) to Ekaterina Bykhovets, although Varvara was the main source of inspiration for it. In 1841 Bykhovets wrote that at that point Lermontov was passionately in love with Varvara and Bykhovets thought that the poet paid attention to her only because in her appearance she reminded him of Varvara and that his favorite topic of conversation was always Varen’ka.²²⁵ In the poem Lermontov addressed Bykhovets, saying that he is talking to a friend from his youth and that in her features he was looking for someone else’s features; in her living mouth he was looking for a mouth that had been quiet for a long time; and in her eyes he was looking for the fire of dim eyes.

Нет, не тебя так пылко я люблю,
 Не для меня красы твоей блистанье:
 Люблю в тебе я прошлое страданье
 И молодость погибшую мою.

Когда порой я на тебя смотрю,
 В твои глаза вникая долгим взором:
 Таинственным я занят разговором,
 Но не с тобой я сердцем говорю.

Я говорю с подругой юных дней,
 В твоих чертах ищу черты другие,

²²⁵ “Он был страстно влюблён в В. А. Бахметеву...я думаю, он и на меня обратил внимание оттого, что находил во мне сходство, и об ней его любимый разговор был.” [He was passionately in love with V. A. Bekhmeteva...I think that he paid attention to me only because he thought I looked like her and his favorite conversation was always about her.] (Lyubov’ Pavlova, “Екатерина Быховец” [“Ekaterina Byhovets”] in *Влияние матери Лермонтова на его любовный выбор* [The influence of the mother on Lermontov and on his love life] at <https://www.chitalnya.ru/work/1158734/>)

В устах живых уста давно немые,
В глазах огонь угаснувших очей.²²⁶

[No, not you I love so ardently,/ The glow of your beauty is not for me:/ In you I love past suffering/ And my dead youth.// When I look at you/ And I penetrate your eyes with a lengthy gaze:/ I am busy with a secret conversation,/ But not to you is my heart talking.// I am talking to a friend from my youth/ In your features I am looking for someone else's features/ In the living mouth for a mouth that has been quiet for a long time/ In the eyes for the fire of extinguished eyes.]

The poem “Сашка” (“Sashka”) written in 1835-1836 is another work that shows Lermontov's eternal remembrance of Varvara, sweet and painful at the same time. He describes a young, fresh, lively, attractive girl and says that her name is Variusha (Варюша). After he gives her this name, Lermontov says the he would prefer to give her a different name because every time he says this name a memory hisses and crawls along the veins of his heart just like a snake crawls amidst ruins. When those memories come, he gets sad, angry, or scolds the whole house. Lermontov concludes that in order to avoid misfortune he will rename Variusha to Parasha.

Она звалась Варюшею. Но я
Желал бы ей другое дать название:
Скажу ль, при этом имени, друзья,
В груди моей шипит воспоминанье,
Как под ногой прижатая змея,
И ползает, как та среди развалин,
По жилам сердца. Я тогда печален,
Сердит, молчу или браню весь дом
И рад прибить за слово чубуком.
Итак, для избежанья зла, мы нашу
Варюшу здесь перекрестим в Парашу.²²⁷

[Her name was Variusha. But I wish/ to give her a different name:/ If I say this name, friends,/ In my chest a memory hisses,/ Like a snake pressed under a foot/ And it crawls as if amongst ruins,/ Along the veins of my heart. Then I become sad,/ angry, and I keep quiet or scold the whole house/ And I would be happy to beat someone with stick just for

²²⁶ Mikhail Lermontov, “Нет, не тебя так пылко я люблю...” (“No, not you I love so ardently...”)

²²⁷ Mikhail Lermontov, “Сашка” (“Sashka”)

one word./ And so in order to avoid misfortune we our/ Variusha here will rename Parasha.]

Not long before he died, Lermontov wrote the poem “Валері́к” (“Valerik”) which was dedicated to the one of the most famous battles of the Caucasian War in which Lermontov participated—the battle at the Valerik river in 1840. In the poem Lermontov addresses his beloved Varvara Lopukhina.²²⁸ This work became his last earthly testimony of his unquestionable and eternal love and devotion to Varvara and his promise that he would wait for her beyond the grave. In the poem Lermontov said that he remembered her and he would never be able to forget her because he loved her greatly and loved her for a long time. He had to pay for the days of joy and bliss with suffering and worries, and he killed the last flower of life with cold contemplation. He forgot love and poetry, but he could never forget her.

Но я вас помню — да и точно,
Я вас никак забыть не мог!
Во-первых, потому, что много,
И долго, долго вас любил,
Потом страданием и тревогой
За дни блаженства заплатил;
Потом в раскаянье бесплодном/

²²⁸ Vladimir Butromeev, “Григорий Григорьевич Гагарин” [“Grigorii Grigor’evich Gagarin”] in *Эпоха становления русской живописи* [*The era of formation of Russian painting*] (Moscow: Olma Media Group, 2014), 296.

Влачил я цепь тяжелых лет;
 И размышлением холодным
 Убил последний жизни цвет.
 С людьми сближаясь осторожно,
 Забыл я шум молодых проказ,
 Любовь, п о э з и ю , — но вас
 Забыть мне было невозможно.²²⁹

[But I remember you—yes exactly,/ I could never forget you!/ In the first place because a lot/ And for long, long I loved you,/ Then with suffering and the worries/ I paid for the days of bliss;/ Then in fruitless remorse/ I dragged the chain of heavy years;/ And with cold thought/ Killed the last flower of life./ I was careful about becoming close with people,/ I forgot the sound of youthful pranks/ Love, *poetry*,—but you/ To forget I never could.]

Varvara also served as a prototype for many of Lermontov's characters and plots. The character Countess Vera Ligovskaia²³⁰ from *Countess Ligovskaia* very much reminds one of Varvara since she carries the most notable characteristics of Varen'ka—blond hair and large, dark, deep eyes—that most remembered her by.²³¹ Varvara's niece O. N. Trubetskaia said, "С портрета, оставшегося у меня в Москве, глядят большие, кроткие темные глаза, и весь облик её овеян тихой грустью" ["From the portrait that I have of her in

²²⁹ Mikhail Lermontov, "Валерик" ("Valerik")

²³⁰ "Княгиня Вера Дмитриевна была женщина 22 лет, среднего женского роста, блондинка с черными глазами, что придавало её лицу какую-то оригинальную прелесть" [Countess Vera Dmitrievna was a 22-year-old woman, of medium height, with blond hair and dark eyes, which gave her face unique beauty.] (Mikhail Lermontov, Chapter 4 in *Countess Ligovskaia* at <http://mikhailermontov.ru/knyaginya-ligovskaya-04.htm>)

²³¹ Р. А. Вискватii, "М. Ю. Лермонтов. Жизнь и творчество" ("М. Yu. Lermontov. Life and works") in *Лермонтов М. Ю. Собрание сочинений* (Lermontov, M. Yu. *Collected works*) (М., 1891. Т. 6.), 30.

Moscow her large, calm, dark eyes look at me and her face carries quiet sorrow.”²³² Vera from *Hero of Our Time* has a birthmark like the one Varvara had. In the first draft Vera’s birthmark was over the eyebrow like Varvara’s, but later Lermontov moved it to the cheek.²³³ Lermontov also painted numerous portraits of Varen’ka.

To sum up, for Lermontov, true love was multidimensional and was based on the ability of the two individuals to connect and complement each other on the physical and the platonic level. Love did not end with earthly death; if the lovers were able to recognize each other beyond the grave they continued to exist together through their love, which defined heaven for Lermontov. Hell was eternal loneliness—the inability of the lovers to recognize each other or their inability to connect on all levels and thus being trapped in a forced or false union. Lermontov’s adoration of the raw, earthly, magnificent beauty of nature is a part of his understanding of love. His multiple short-lived affairs with empty and dull, but glamorous society beauties, their circles and way of life brought out Lermontov’s demonic side and strengthened his pessimism, sarcasm, and gloomy view on life. Lermontov was truly in love three times. All three females that Lermontov loved touched his soul and left a lasting mark on it. They were able to tame the poet’s “demonic” side and to provoke strong feelings that took over the poet’s heart and let his loving, gentle, soft, human side shine through. However, the poet remained forever separated from all three women and could never feel or understand the effects that a lasting union with his true love would have had on him. These women’s positive effect on Lermontov was

²³² О. Н. Trubetskaia, *Отрывки из семейной хроники* [*Excerpts from a family chronicle*] (Русская литература: журнал, 1990. № 2.), 183.

²³³ N. P. Pakhomov, *Подруга юных лет Варенька Лопухина* [*The friend from the early years Varen’ka Lopukhina*] (М.: Советская Россия, 1975), 18.

temporary, and his inability to keep them led to the unavoidable return of the poet's demonic side marked by even gloomier shades of pessimism, skepticism, and cynicism.

In all three works that I discuss in the next part of this chapter—"Rusalka" (1836), "Morskaia tsarevna" (1841), and "Demon" (1830-1837), Lermontov uses couples that consist of human and non-human figures to express his distinctive vision on the possibilities of lasting love between individuals. As already discussed Lermontov's character was a unique blend of his "demonic" side and his loving human soul. The struggle between these opposing sides remained constant throughout the poet's life—he had dark episodes of "пошлость" and "свинство" and of overwhelming skepticism, pessimism and cynicism, but he also had moments of illumination when, inspired by the life-giving power of true love, his soft, gentle soul shined through. Unlike his regular love lyrics that addressed or decribed a specific person, these three works, through the use of both supernatural and human figures, became an opportunity for Lermontov not only to express the dual nature of his character, but also to imagine and develop different scenarios for his own quest for true love that would ideally reconcile the two opposing sides and bring him peace and harmony. But as we shall see, this quest could never be fulfilled. The way Lermontov imagines the human and the supernatural beings in the works is based on the two extremes interwoven into his character. The poet positions the male character at one of the extremes and the female character at the other one, and this perhaps reflects his idea of an ideal partnership based on the partners' ability to complement and balance each other. Lermontov chooses for the male to be a human figure in "Rusalka" and "Morskaia Tsarevna", and a supernatural being (a demon)—in "Demon", and he respectively positions the female in the other extreme—a supernatural being (a rusalka) in "Rusalka" and

“Morskaia Tsarevna” and a human being in “Demon.” In all three works Lermontov explores the themes of the life-giving force of true love and of the deadliness of a union in which the partners do not recognize and can not complement each other. As already shown in this chapter Lermontov himself experienced both the powerful illumination of true love that brought out his soft human side and the pain of the “demonic” side prevailing in him and pushing him deeper down into the gloomy depths of skepticism and cynicism when he was with the wrong type of women (society beauties) or realized that he had lost forever the woman he truly loved. None of the works has a happy ending and none of the couples is capable of finding true love. In each case Lermontov’s imaginary quest for love, peace, and happiness had a dark, pessimistic ending marked by death, loneliness, separation, and pain. I claim that these skeptical imaginary outcomes in his works are influenced by what he experienced in real life—he either had brief meaningless romances with women he could not relate to or he got separated from the females he truly loved. The two girls that he loved when he was ten and twelve remained nameless, sweet, distant memories that he never saw again. The poet was denied the opportunity to marry Varvara, and after her wedding with Bakhmetev she turned into a distant subject of Lermontov’s adoration until his tragic death. Lermontov forever remained the lonely, gloomy Demon, an observer that could not relate to either people or angels. His own fairy tale never had a happy ending—he never experienced and fully understood a lasting union with someone that he truly loved, and thus he could not imagine that happy ending in his works either.

The two works that deal with the figure of the rusalka—the short poems “Rusalka” and “Morskaia Tsarevna” have much in common. In both works Lermontov takes one of the partners, the human in “Rusalka” and the rusalka in “Morskaia Tsarevna,” out of their

respective domains and shows what happens when they are placed in the domain of the other partner, which is foreign to them. The characteristics of the rusalka as a folklore figure are key in understanding why she can not be a suitable partner for the human male and what she stands for in these poems.

The poem “Rusalka” was written in 1836—two years after Lermontov took his revenge on the shallow society coquette Ekaterina Sushkova and about a year after Varen’ka’s and Bekhmetev’s wedding. It consists mostly of the rusalka’s sad song about her hopeless passion for a *витязь*—a human warrior brought to her underwater home from a foreign land by the waves.

Русалка плыла по реке голубой,
Озаряема полной луной;
И старалась она доплеснуть до луны
Серебристую пену волны.

И шумя и крутясь, колебала река
Отраженные в ней облака;
И пела русалка — и звук ее слов
Долетал до крутых берегов.

И пела русалка: «На дне у меня
Играет мерцание дня;
Там рыбок златые гуляют стада,
Там хрустальные есть города.

«И там на подушке из ярких песков,
Под тенью густых тростников,
Спит витязь, добыча ревнивой волны,
Спит витязь чужой стороны.

«Расчесывать кольца шелковых кудрей
Мы любим во мраке ночей,
И в чело и в уста мы, в полуденный час,
Целовали красавца не раз.

«Но к страстным лобзаньям, не знаю зачем,
Остается он хладен и нем;
Он спит, — и склонившись на перси ко мне,

Он не дышит, не шепчет во сне!..»

Так пела русалка над синей рекой,
 Полна непонятной тоской;
 И, шумно катясь, колебала река
 Отраженные в ней облака.

[A rusalka was swimming in the blue river,/ lit by the full moon;/ And she was trying to splash up to the moon/ The silver foam of the wave.// Whispering and weaving, the river was rocking/ The reflections of the clouds;/ And the rusalka sang—and the sound of her words/ Reached the steep shores.// And the rusalka sang: “On the bottom at my home/ The glow of the day plays/ There gold fish swim in groups/ And there are crystal cities.// “And there on a pillow from bright sand,/ Under the shade of thick reeds/ *А витязь* sleeps, the catch of a jealous wave,/ *А витязь* sleeps who belongs to a distant land.// “To caress the rings of his silk curls/ In the darkness of the night we love/ And on his forehead and on his mouth at noon/ I have kissed the handsome man more than once.// But to the passionate kisses, I do not know why,/ He remains cold and mute;/ He sleeps—and leaning on my bosom towards me,/ He does not breathe, does not whisper in his sleep!..”// This is how the rusalka sang over the blue river,/ Full of inexplicable grief,/ And loudly rolling, the river was rocking/ The reflections of the clouds.]

The inability of the lovers to connect and share the life-giving power of true love can be explained by the folkloric characteristics of the rusalka figure—an internal emptiness and inability to create beauty. The fact that the human is trapped in her domain, which is merely a distorted foreign reflection of the human world, also plays a key role in understanding why the two figures could not find a happy ending.

By definition the rusalka is an “unquiet dead”—a female that became a supernatural being by embracing death. The rusalka has flawless beauty, but is also empty on the inside. She is characterized by internal emptiness on two levels. Since she is an “unquiet dead” she does not have a soul—the key element that separates humans from supernatural beings and the dead from the living. Also because she is an “unquiet dead” the rusalka can not have children, which means that she can not create life and beauty. Lermontov’s brief meaningless affairs with society beauties were characterized by his initial attraction to their beautiful shell followed by his immediate disgust with their internal emptiness, stupidity,

and shallowness. These women, who remind one of the rusalka character, brought out Lermontov's demonic side and strengthened his gloomy skepticism and sharp cynicism about people and life. The women that Lermontov truly loved were not rusalki. What he saw in them was not their long, black hair or slender waist. He loved them because of the life-giving effect their presence and their words had on him; their internal beauty illuminated and awakened his soul and made it shine over his demonic side. What he noticed in them was the clear, big, honest, lively eyes—windows to the soul, and the positive character traits that complemented him and made him a better being—simplicity, truthfulness, freshness, goodness, kindness, patience, ability to forgive, dreaminess, and intelligence. The rusalka lacks all of these characteristics. As a dead being she can't inspire and create life and, as someone who does not have a soul, can not touch and awaken a human soul. This is why the human male—the *витель*—remains deaf and mute to her caresses and kisses, just as Lermontov remained deaf and mute to the silly attempts of the empty coquettes who lined up waiting to touch him and flirt with him.

«Расчесывать кольца шелковых кудрей
Мы любим во мраке ночей,
И в чело и в уста мы, в полуденный час,
Целовали красавца не раз.

«Но к страстным лобзаньям, не знаю зачем,
Остается он хладен и нем;
Он спит, — и склонившись на перси ко мне,
Он не дышит, не шепчет во сне!...»

[“To caress the rings of his silk curls/ In the darkness of the night we love/ And on his forehead and on his mouth at noon/ I have kissed the handsome man more than once.// “But to the passionate kisses, I do not know why,/ He remains cold and mute;/ He sleeps—and leaning on my bosom towards me,/ He does not breathe, does not whisper in his sleep!...”]

As mentioned before one of Lermontov's biggest fears was that the lovers would not be able to recognize each other in the life after death, which would mean that they are doomed to eternal loneliness. In the poem "Rusalka" the rusalka and the *вмязь* clearly can not establish a connection and can not recognize each other in the life beyond the grave. Lermontov saw heaven as an eternal union between the lovers' bodies and souls who are able to recognize each other in the afterlife. However, the rusalka, being an "unquiet dead", does not have a soul and thus establishing a deep connection between her and the *вмязь* becomes impossible. The impossibility of their platonic union has a physical manifestation which is shown through the ways their bodies interact. Lermontov thought that when two people are truly in love their bodies feel like extensions of each other and function as one. The bodies of the rusalka and the *вмязь* remain separate and independent of each other not only spatially, but also functionally. The rusalka actively tries to establish a physical connection with the *вмязь* through hugging, caressing, and kissing, but the *вмязь* never responds. It becomes impossible for the human and the inhuman to connect on both the physical and the platonic levels, which for Lermontov means that they do not belong together and can never be united through true love.

As discussed previously, the first time Lermontov fell in love was when he was ten years old and he was enchanted by the little girl who came to play with his cousins. In his article "Лермонтов" ("Lermontov"), Alexander Dolinin points out that Lermontov's first experience with romantic love coincided with the first time he was ever taken to the Caucasus where he witnessed the raw, breathtaking beauty of the area's nature. Since this trip, for his whole life Lermontov's soul was awakened and inspired by the fresh, magnificent beauty of nature the same way it was awakened and inspired by true romantic

love.²³⁴ According to Merezhkovsky, for Lermontov nature felt like an extension of his own self, just like a beloved woman. Nature and true love had the same effect on Lermontov—they tamed his “demonic” side and made him feel like he was reborn as a better human being.²³⁵ As described in the Introduction, according to Russian folklore one of the main characteristics of the rusalka is her connection with nature. However, the rusalka, a dead being with an eternally empty womb, is not associated with nature’s life-giving beauty and freshness. The rusalka represents the dark and threatening side of nature that people do not understand and thus fear. This side of nature does not give life and light; its darkness takes lives away. It is a distorted reflection of the side of nature Lermontov adored, a realm that is foreign and hostile to humans. It can not be the realm of true love. If a human gets trapped in that dimension of nature it would not be life-giving for them; it would be suffocating and deadly.

In the poem, the rusalka’s realm, where the *вирязь* is trapped, is the river depths. The poem begins with the beautiful picture of the blue river lit by the full moon and the rusalka trying to reach the moon with the silver foam of the waves.

Русалка плыла по реке голубой,
Озаряема полной луной;
И старалась она доплеснуть до луны
Серебристую пену волны.

[A rusalka was swimming in the blue river,/ lit by the full moon;/ And she was trying to splash up to the moon/ The silver foam of the wave.]

²³⁴ A. S. Dolinin, “Лермонтов” (“Lermontov”) at http://az.lib.ru/l/lermontow_m_j/text_0010.shtml.

²³⁵ D. S. Merezhkovsky, op. cit.

The rusalka's realm is made visible through the moonlight. The idea of her world being a pale reflection of the beauty of the real world clearly comes up in the next stanza, which is the second stanza of the poem, and is repeated again in the last stanza of the poem.

И шумя и крутясь, колебала река
Отраженные в ней облака

.....
И, шумно катясь, колебала река
Отраженные в ней облака.

[Whispering and weaving, the river was rocking/ The reflections of the clouds;/... And loudly rolling, the river was rocking/ The reflections of the clouds.]

The reflections of the moon and the clouds from the night sky that the river moves around and the playful twinkling reflection of the sun during the day (“На дне у меня/ Играет мерцание дня” [On the bottom at my home/ The glow of the day plays]) create a feeling that the rusalka's realm is magical, unreal, and other-worldly, a place that reflects the real beauty of nature, but also changes and distorts it and makes it unearthly and distant. This is a place of schools of gold fish, crystal cities, pillows made from bright sand, and thick reed shades—an unearthly realm so foreign to the human that it seems hostile and threatening.

Там рыбок златые гуляют стада;
Там хрустальные есть города;
И там на подушке из ярких песков
Под тенью густых тростников

[There gold fish swim in groups/ And there are crystal cities.// “And there on a pillow from bright sand,/ Under the shade of thick reeds]

This is a realm that the human can not recognize and relate to, and thus this underwater world, a distorted reflection of the real world, cannot have a life-giving effect on the *виртуальность*. The poem's underwater world may be reminiscent of the world of high society that Lermontov described less than two years later in a letter to Varvara's sister Maria. In 1836 Lermontov was still an active participant in the life of high society, but could already feel that he was in a way trapped in a world so foreign to him with its dullness, shallowness, and falsity—a world that he found hostile and threatening in the sense that it would undoubtedly at some point turn against him. This world suffocated Lermontov and made him even more skeptical and cynical, unlike the beauty of the Caucasus which made him feel alive, powerful, and inspired.

In the poem “Rusalka” Lermontov imagines an impossible union between a human and a supernatural being in which the dead human is trapped in the supernatural being's realm and the supernatural being is unable to wake him up. They can not connect and complement each other like true lovers do and are not able to recognize each other in the life beyond the grave, which dooms both of them to spending eternity in Lermontov's hell—eternal loneliness. The fact that they are unable to form a harmonious union of true love at the end can be explained by the fact that Lermontov wrote the poem shortly after the love of his life, Varen'ka, was forced to marry Bekhmetev in 1835. Also at that point Lermontov was clearly seeing and understanding the true nature of society coquettes such as Sushkova—an attractive shell the inside of which is dead. Even though Lermontov tried to imagine a scenario for a realm of eternal happiness, even in the fictional world of his work he could not escape from the overwhelming pessimism in his real life caused by the loss of his

beloved to someone else, and the meaningless dull affairs with society coquettes that only sharpened his pain and slowly killed him on the inside.

In 1841, five years after he wrote “Rusalka” and also the year of his tragic death, Lermontov wrote another poem, “Морская царица” (“The Sea Princess”), in which the poet once again explored the possibility for a relationship between a human male and a supernatural female—a prince and a rusalka.

В море царевич купает коня;
 Слышит: «Царевич! взгляни на меня!»
 Фыркает конь и ушами прядет,
 Брызжет и плещет и дале плывет.
 Слышит царевич: «Я царская дочь!
 Хочешь провести ты с царевною ночь?»
 Вот показалась рука из воды,
 Ловит за кисти шелковой узды.
 Вышла молодая потом голова,
 В косу вплелась морская трава.
 Синие очи любовью горят;
 Брызги на шее, как жемчуг, дрожат.
 Мыслит царевич: «Добро же! постой!»
 За косу ловко схватил он рукой.
 Держит, рука боевая сильна:
 Плачет и молит и бьется она.
 К берегу витязь отважно плывет;
 Выплыл; товарищей громко зовет:
 «Эй вы! сходитесь, лихие друзья!
 Гляньте, как бьется добыча моя...
 Что ж вы стоите смущенной толпой?
 Али красы не видали такой?»
 Вот оглянулся царевич назад:
 Ахнул! померк торжествующий взгляд.
 Видит, лежит на песке золотом .
 Чудо морское с зеленым хвостом;
 Хвост чешуею змеиной покрыт,
 Весь замирая, свиваясь, дрожит;
 Пена струями сбегает с чела,
 Очи одела смертельная мгла.
 Бледные руки хватают песок;
 Шепчут уста непонятный упрек...
 Едет царевич задумчиво прочь.
 Будет он помнить про царскую дочь!

[The prince is washing his horse in the sea/ And hears: “Prince! Look at me!”/ The horse snorts and moves its ears,/ It splashes and plashes and swims further away./ The prince hears: “I am a princess!/ Would you like to spend the night with a princess?”/ An arm comes out of the water/ And catches the silk reins of the horse./ Then a young head comes out,/ With seaweed woven into the braid./ The blue eyes are burning with love;/ The water drops on the neck tremble like pearls./ The prince is thinking: “Ok! Just wait!”/ He caught her by the braid with his hand./ He is holding her, the battle hand is strong:/ She is crying and begging, and twisting./ The *вмязь* is swimming to the shore;/ He came out; he starts loudly calling his friends:/ “Hey, you! Come here, bold friends!/ Look at how my treasure is twisting.../ Why are you standing awkwardly like this?/ You have not seen beauty like this?”/ The prince looked back:/ And exclaimed! His triumphant gaze disappeared./ He sees lying on the golden sand/ A sea monster with a green tail;/ The tail is covered by serpent scales/ The whole body was dying out, twisting, trembling;/ Foam was running down its forehead,/ The eyes were covered in deadly fog./ The pale hands are grabbing the sand;/ The mouth is whispering and blaming.../ The prince rides away deep in thought./ He will remember the princess!]

In this poem the supernatural female is taken out of her realm and placed in the realm of the human male, which causes an unexpected transformation leading to her death. Once again Lermontov, influenced by his growing skepticism and pessimism, described an impossible union between incompatible partners that could not have a happy ending. This poem can be seen in a way as a continuation of “Rusalka” because in “Morskaia Tsarevna” Lermontov gives the reason why true love between beings of different worlds is impossible—the real identity of the supernatural being is monstrous and thus incompatible with the beauty of the human soul.

I claim that “Morskaia Tsarevna” recalls Lermontov’s poem “К глупой красавице” (“To the foolish beauty”), which, as previously mentioned, he wrote in 1830. When he wrote “К глупой красавице” Lermontov was fifteen years old and in the midst of his rocky romance with the famous society beauty Sushkova, during which she was very dismissive about his feelings and made the heart of the young boy cry. In “К глупой красавице” the

poet took his revenge. He showed the dull and empty true self of society coquettes who looked attractive from far away but once their ugly interior was exposed through their words, the poet wanted to run away from them as he would run away from death. “Morskaia Tsarevna” serves a similar purpose and in this way becomes a continuation of “Rusalka.”

In the 1836 poem “Rusalka” we see the dead but beautiful rusalka in her element—the lake, where the *вунязь* is trapped. It is clear that under these circumstances they would never find true love, even though Lermontov does not give a specific reason for that. Not long before he died in 1841 Lermontov revisited the idea of a union between a human male and a supernatural female as if he wanted to explore the other possibility in order to maybe finally find peace and closure. Using the powerful hands of his prince, the poet pulls the rusalka out of her realm and brings her into the human world. However, the ending is similar to the ending of “Rusalka”—the union between the prince and the rusalka is impossible. In “Morskaia Tsarevna” Lermontov clearly shows the reason for that: it is the monstrous nature of the rusalka that she hides under her beautiful appearance and seductive words. As already shown, between 1836 and 1841 Lermontov’s pessimism and skepticism about the true nature of high society and the women that lived in that world continued to grow. In his 1838 letter to Varvara’s sister Maria he exposed the falsity, shallowness, dullness, and maliciousness of high society hidden under its glamorous and attractive shell. One year later, in 1839, Turgenev saw the poet at the New Year’s Ball, trapped by society ladies who were lining up to touch him and flirt with him, to which he remained completely numb. Based on Lermontov’s sorrowful expression, Turgenev could see that these women were making the poet suffocate and suffer. When in 1841 Lermontov’s prince pulled the rusalka out of the sea he had a clear idea why she and the prince could never be together—

under her beautiful seductive appearance lies not a beautiful human soul, but a monstrous interior which Lermontov could expose only if he brought her to his realm—the world of poetry.

The rusalka that Lermontov describes in his 1841 poem is different from his 1836 one, which clearly shows that over the course of five years he had gained more insight and understanding of the society ladies and had grown more skeptical about them and their world. In his 1836 poem Lermontov does not describe the appearance of the rusalka. What one imagines about it is based on folklore. Her sad song in the poem about her hopeless passion for the prince, her constant attempts to wake him up without being able to understand that he is dead, and the way in which she plays with the waves and tries to reach the moon make her character look naïve, childish and in a way even appealing. The 1841 rusalka is much more sexual, seductive, aggressive, and threatening. She has a young head with seaweed in her hair. Her blue eyes burn with love and the drops are dangling like pearls on her neck.

Слышит царевич: «Я царская дочь!
Хочешь провести ты с царевною ночь?»
Вот показалась рука из воды,
Ловит за кисти шелковой узды.
Вышла младая потом голова,
В косу вплелась морская трава.
Синие очи любовью горят;
Брызги на шее, как жемчуг, дрожат.

[The prince hears: “I am a princess!/ Would you like to spend the night with a princess?”/
An arm comes out of the water/ And catches the silk reins of the horse./ Then a young head
comes out,/ With seaweed woven into the braid./ The blue eyes are burning with love;/ The
water drops on the neck tremble like pearls.]

She tempts the prince with an invitation to spend the night with her—a king’s daughter. Unlike the rusalka from the poem “Rusalka” to whom the dead prince was brought by the waves, the rusalka from “Morskaia Tsarevna” tries to bring the prince to herself by grabbing the reins of his horse. Lermontov did not directly expose what was hidden under the shell of his 1836 rusalka and did not describe any aspect of her in an unappealing, ugly, or monstrous way. One intuits her internal emptiness, the lack of a soul, and her inability to create beauty based on the folkloric characteristics of the rusalka. Lermontov confirms these implications in his 1841 rusalka by clearly showing the horrifying interior hidden beneath the beautiful appearance—a sea monster with a green tail covered in snake skin that was shaking, squirming, and slowly dying out; foam was coming down her forehead and there was deadly fog in her eyes; her pale hands were grabbing the sand and she was whispering an incomprehensible reproach.

The society ladies, based on the way Lermontov saw them, have a lot in common with his 1836 rusalka, but even more so with the rusalka from “Morskaia Tsarevna”. Like the rusalka in the water, the coquettes, when kept in their realm of comfort—high society—looked beautiful and glamorous. The water drops glistening around the rusalka’s neck remind one of an expensive pearl or diamond necklace that the coquettes used to wear at balls. Like the rusalka who tried to lure the prince in by offering him to spend the night with her, the coquettes were aggressively hunting for suitable husbands, trying to seduce them and then put the chains of marriage around them at all costs. As mentioned previously, Lermontov described Sushkina as a bat that tries to grab in its nails everything and everyone that it flies by. Just like the rusalka who was hiding her scary green tail under the water and was trying to deceive the prince by showing him only her attractive side, those

women were trying to hide their internal emptiness behind their shining, long hair, slender, seductive waists, and beautiful and fashionable clothes and jewelry.

In order to be able to expose the rusalka's true monstrous identity Lermontov has to pull her out of her world, which she knows well, feels comfortable in, and can manipulate in any way she wants—a world that is foreign and threatening to the human, makes him feel weak, and eventually kills him. This is what happened to the prince trapped in the bottom of the lake in the 1836 poem and this is also what Lermontov himself experienced when trapped in high society. Through the powerful hands of his prince, Lermontov drags the rusalka out of her world—water or high society, into his world—land or poetry. This is the world that Lermontov knows well, feels powerful in, and can govern. This world is also completely foreign to the rusalka due to her internal emptiness and inability to understand it, and just as her world is deadly to the human, his world turns out to be deadly for her. While the prince is unaware of what would happen to his sea beauty once he pulls her out of the water and puts her on the sand, Lermontov had already seen the horrifying transformation at least once with Sushkova. After being seduced and lured in by her beautiful looks and realizing how shallow and lowly her interior was, he revealed it to his young friend Aleksey Lopukhin who was about to fall into the trap of marrying her. He did so by putting the coquette in his world—the world of the novels that, as he wrote in a letter to his friend Vereshchagina, he no longer wrote, but made and lived.²³⁶ Knowing

²³⁶ “Когда Лопухин вернулся в Москву, Лермонтов в письме Верещагиной (весной 1835 г.) рассказал о ходе своей интриги с Сушковой, заключив повествование так: «Теперь я не пишу романов — я их делаю.» [When Lopukhin returned to Moscow, Lermontov in a letter to Vereshchagina (spring, 1835) told about his game with Sushkova, ending the story with “Now I do not write novels—I make them.”] (“Sushkova Ekaterina Aleksandrovna”, op. cit.)

Sushkova's flaws and weaknesses, he skillfully dragged her into his novel's plot, the end of which was similar to the end of "Morskaia Tsarevna." Sushkova could not change the fact that at the end Lermontov had exposed her unappealing side and saved his friend Lopukhin. "Morskaia Tsarevna" and "Rusalka" show that Lermontov was unable to imagine a union between a supernatural female and a human male in either one of these realms because of a fundamental incompatibility stemming from the internal emptiness and monstrous nature of the inhuman female figure that could not connect with and complement the human soul.

Lermontov also explored the possibility of a union between a supernatural *male* and a human *female*. He did so in the poem "Demon," which he wrote between 1831 and 1839. As already discussed, in 1823 Aleksandr Pushkin wrote a poem "Demon," which marked the beginning of a new, much darker stage in his life, full of skepticism, doubt, and inability to feel love, freedom and creativity as freely anymore. Lermontov's "Demon" has a very similar feeling of skepticism, hopelessness, internal emptiness, and aimless, lonely, eternal existence. The poet tried to imagine a union between two beings from different realms—the supernatural Demon and the human girl Tamara, in which the Demon needed Tamara's love in order to escape the dark and torturous endless cycle of loneliness, misery, and internal death. However, in the end, the lovers, unable to connect and recognize each other, were separated forever. I claim that the poem "Demon" represents the poet's profoundly personal view of the impossibility of finding a lasting union in love.

Lermontov worked on the poem “Demon” for about ten years. The first version, which Lermontov started when he was fourteen years old, was completed around 1833-1834.²³⁷ Lermontov kept changing and developing the main male and female characters, but despite that, according to the critics, the early versions of the poem had a vague philosophical nature, the characters were not individualized, and the main male character was consciously coordinated with the poet (“Like my demon, I’ve been chosen by evil.”)²³⁸ After coming back from the Caucasus Lermontov made revisions to the poem. The first time that the poem’s plot is related to the Caucasus’ people and nature is in the version that Lermontov wrote in the first half of 1838, shortly after his return from Georgia. This version, version VI, was completed in September 1838. It is known as the Lopukhin version and was gifted to Varvara with a dedication. After this, while getting ready to publish the poem, Lermontov kept making revisions. He did not change the character of the Demon, but provided a new ending—the angel saves Tamara’s soul. This marked the creation of revision VII on December 4, 1838. The later changes that Lermontov made are mostly related to censorship and to some of the Demon’s monologues, which turned them into a major accomplishment of Russian poetry.²³⁹ I claim that the changes that Lermontov made to the poem (the first version of which was completed in 1833-1834) after his return from

²³⁷ “Коментарий к поэме” (“Commentaries to the poem”) in “Михаил Лермонтов: Демон” (“Mikhail Lermontov: Demon”) at <http://www.all-poetry.ru/poema12.html>.

²³⁸ “Поэма носила отвлеченно-философский характер, действие разворачивалось в условной обстановке, образы героев, в особенности монахини, не были индивидуализированы, центральный образ был сознательно соотнесен с лирическим героем («Как демон мой, я зла избранник».)” [The poem had a vague philosophical nature, the action took place in an abstract environment, the characters, especially the nuns, were not individualized, the main character was consciously coordinated with the lyric persona (“Like my demon, I’ve been chosen by evil.”)] (Ibid.)

²³⁹ Ibid.

exile in 1838, both in terms of the main characters and the plot, are influenced by the course his relationship with Lopukhina took after her marriage to Bakhmetev in May 1835.

As already mentioned, the 1838 revision VI of the poem was dedicated to Varvara Lopukhina. At first Lermontov dedicated it to V. A. B.—Varvara Bakhmeteva, but then scratched out the B. multiple times and replaced it with L., which stood for Varvara’s maiden name Lopukhina.²⁴⁰ In the 1838 version’s dedication, Lermontov expresses his concerns that his forgetful, but never forgotten friend (Varvara) might not be able to remember the past and would no longer be touched by the heavy words pouring from his heart,

Я кончил — и в груди невольное сомненье!
 Займет ли вновь тебя давно знакомый звук,
 Стихов неведомых задумчивое пенье,
 Тебя, забывчивый, но незабвенный друг?
 Пробудится ль в тебе о прошлом сожаленье?
 Иль, быстро пробежав докучную тетрадь,
 Ты только мертвого, пустого одобренья
 Наложешь на нее холодную печать;
 И не узнаешь здесь простого выраженья
 Тоски, мой бедный ум томившей столько лет;
 И примешь за игру иль сон воображенья
 Больной души тяжелый бред...²⁴¹

[I finished —and there is an involuntary doubt in my chest!/ Will you be touched again by the sounds you have known for so long,/ The meditative singing of unknown verses,/ You, forgetful, but never forgotten friend?/ Will regret for the past awaken in you?/ Or quickly running through the tiresome notebook/ Will you put the cold stamp of dead, empty approval on it/ And you will not recognize the simple expression/ of sorrow, which has oppressed my poor mind for so many years;/ And you will take as a game or a dream of the imagination/ The heavy ravings of a sick soul...]

²⁴⁰ D. S. Merezhkovsky, op. cit.

²⁴¹ “Демон, редакция 8 сент. 1838 г (Редакция 6)” [“Demon”, version from September 8, 1838 (Version 6)] at <http://lermontov.niv.ru/lermontov/text/demon/demon-1838.htm>.

This 1838 skeptical and pessimistic dedication sharply contrast with the dedication to the 1831 version III of the poem in which Lermontov describes an angelic Madonna and claims that he owes not only his happiness, but everything to her and that through her the gloomy Genius was resurrected and was able to feel innocent joys, to hope, and to dream of the heavens,

Прими мой дар, моя мадона!
 С тех пор как мне явилась ты,
 Моя любовь мне оборона
 От порицаний клеветы.
 Такой любви нельзя не верить,
 А взор не скроет ничего:
 Ты не способна лицемерить,
 Ты слишком ангел для того!
 Скажу ли? — предан самовластью
 Страстей печальных и судьбе,
 Я счастьем не обязан счастью,
 Но всем обязан я — тебе.
 Как демон, хладный и суровый,
 Я в мире веселился злом,
 Обманы были мне не новы,
 И яд был на сердце моем;
 Теперь, как мрачный этот Гений,
 Я близ тебя опять воскрес
 Для непорочных наслаждений,
 И для надежд, и для небес.²⁴²

[Accept my gift, my Madonna!/ From the time when you appeared to me,/ My love is a defense/ from the censures of slander and lies./ It is impossible not to believe such love,/ And the look will not hide anything:/ You are not capable of deceit,/ And you are too much of an angel for that!/ Should I say it? —faithful to/ the tyranny of sorrowful passions and fate,/ I do not owe my happiness to happiness,/ But I owe everything to you./ Like a demon, cold and stern/ I was having fun in the world through evil,/ Deceptions were not new to

²⁴² “Демон: Поэма, 1831 г (Редакция 3)” [“Demon”: Poem, 1831 (Version 3)] at <http://lermontov.niv.ru/lermontov/text/demon/demon-1831-3.htm>.

me/ And poison was in my heart;/ Now, like this gloomy Genius,/ Being close to you I was resurrected/ For innocent joys,/ For hopes, and for heaven.]

As discussed before, in 1831 Lermontov had just met the young, dreamy Varvara who had arrived from the countryside and still carried the raw freshness and beauty of nature. Lermontov immediately fell in love with her, and with this in mind it is not surprising that the 1831 dedication paints an optimistic, uplifting picture of the gloomy Demon being resurrected by the life-giving presence and love of his Madonna. However, these hopes were shattered by Varvara's family who did not see the young poet as a suitable match and married her to Bakhmetev four years later in 1835.

As discussed before, Lermontov's and Varvara's feelings for each other never changed over the years despite their separation. I claim that the "I finished—and there's an involuntary doubt in my chest" 1838 dedication can be seen as an expression of the poet's sadness, anger, frustration, and doubts that he experienced at times following Varvara's wedding in 1835. He addresses his "forgetful but not forgotten friend" and questions whether the familiar sound of poetry would awaken in her longing for the past or she would quickly look at it with a dead, empty approval, would not recognize in it the simple expression of his sadness, which his mind had been oppressed by for so many years, and would take for a game or a dream of the imagination what is actually the heavy ravings of a sick soul. However, as shown earlier in the chapter, Varvara's and Lermontov's souls never stopped communicating and understanding each other, and she was always able to tame his "demonic" side. Their love was stronger than the earthly obstacles that life put in front of them. The only thing that could truly separate them was death.

In 1839, when the final version of the poem was completed, Lermontov already knew that Varvara was very ill and had seen the devastating effects the illness had on the beloved

charming features that he remembered during their secret meeting in 1838. I claim that in the poem “Demon,” through the development of the relationship between a supernatural male character and a human female character, Lermontov explores the scenario of the lovers’ inability to recognize each other beyond the human’s earthly grave because the human soul is forgiven and taken away to a heavenly realm, which is forever closed to the supernatural character due to his monstrous nature and the unforgivable sins he had committed.

The main character in the poem “Demon”, the sorrowful exiled Demon (“печальный Демон, дух изгнания”), reminds one a lot of Lermontov’s description of himself prior to meeting his Madonna from the poem’s 1831 dedication—a cold and stern demon, having fun through evil, using lies and deceits, surrendering to the poison that lay in his heart. The Demon, the one “long-since outcast” (“Давно-отверженный”) used to be a “pure cherubim” (“чистый херувим”) with whom “comets flying on their station/ rejoiced to exchange a salutation/ of welcome and of love” (“Когда бегущая комета/ Улыбкой ласковой привета/ Любила поменаться с ним”), and who “when he believed and loved/ the happy first-born of creation/ knew no evil, no doubt” (“Когда он верил и любил,/ Счастливый первенец творенья!/ Не знал ни злобы, ни сомненья.”). However, the “pure cherubim” could not resist temptation and sinned. For this he was banned from heaven and rejected by his old friends. The Demon “for a short time guided mankind’s thought/ and briefly taught them the ways of sin/ And discredited all that was noble/ And abused everything beautiful;/ in a short time...[he] easily extinguished the flame of pure/ belief in them” (“И я людьми недолго правил./ Греху недолго их учил,/ Все благородное бесславил,/ И все прекрасное хулил;/ Недолго... пламень чистой веры/

Легко навек я залил в них...”). Evil left the Demon deeply bored and he saw the world that he ruled as empty and dull. His “proud soul” (“гордый дух”) is even unable to appreciate the grand beauty of nature and the magnificence of the product of his Maker’s will,

И дик и чуден был вокруг
Весь божий мир; но гордый дух
Презрительным окинул оком
Творенье бога своего,
И на челе его высоком
Не отразилось ничего.

[And wild and marvelous was the whole/ divine landscape, but that proud soul cast a contemptuous eye on / the product of his Maker’s will;/ And on his lofty forehead / Nothing was reflected.]

Nothing that the Demon sees can touch his soul and bring new feelings or new strength to him,

В груди изгнанника бесплодной
Ни новых чувств, ни новых сил;
И все, что пред собой он видел,
Он презирал иль ненавидел.

[In the barren soul of this exile/ There were no new feelings, no new forces./ And everything that he saw before him/ He either scorned or execrated.]

As already shown, according to the poem’s 1831 dedication, Lermontov was resurrected through the Madonna’s angelic presence and love, and he owed everything not to happiness, but to her. The Demon in the poem tried to attain resurrection in the same way—through his beloved Tamara’s presence and love. Tamara reminds one a lot of Varvara and could be seen as the poet’s remembrance of the qualities that he cherished in her. As previously discussed Varvara had blond hair and dark eyes, which made her very charming. Tamara is described as a breathtaking beauty.

Клянусь, красавица такая
Под солнцем юга не цвела.

[I swear it, never did such beauty/ blossom beneath the southern sun.]

When Lermontov and Varvara first met in 1831 she had just arrived from the village where she lived for sixteen years and she still carried the raw freshness, liveliness, and beauty of nature and village life, which was particularly attractive to Lermontov. The way Lermontov describes Tamara establishes her strong bond and connection with the Caucasian nature around her, which, as already pointed out, Lermontov had adored since visiting the Caucasus for a first time when he was ten years old. When Tamara is first introduced to the reader, she is at her father's house with her friends awaiting the arrival of her soon-to-be-husband so they can get married.

Гудал сосватал дочь свою,
На пир он созвал всю семью.
На кровле, устланной коврами,
Сидит невеста меж подруг

[For Gudal has betrothed his girl/ He had called her whole family to the feast./ Up on the roof, covered in rags,/ The bride sits amidst her friends.]

While waiting Tamara “takes up her tambourine and swings/ it around her head in one hand in sweeping-wide/ circles” (“...- и бубен свой/ Берет невеста молодая./ И вот она, одной рукой/ Кружа его над головой”), starts to dance. In the description of Tamara's dance Lermontov intertwines multiple references to nature. He compares her to a gliding bird.

То вдруг помчится легче птицы

[She suddenly rushes more lightly than a bird.]

She also reminds one of a young, scared deer.

То остановится, глядит -
И влажный взор ее блестит
Из-под завистливой ресницы;
То черной бровью поведет,

[she stops, she looks/ and her moist eyes shine/ from underneath envious lashes/ and now she twitches a dark brow]

Her “heavenly foot” (“божественная ножка”) sliding (“скользит”) and swimming (“плывёт”) along the carpet reminds one of a fish or a snake. Just as Lermontov immediately fell in love with Varen’ka, “an unattainable woman of unique qualities,”²⁴³ once the Demon sees Tamara, so different and unique, he immediately falls in love with her. The Demon saw Tamara and her potential love as a way to be in a way reborn, to see meaning in his meaningless existence, to be able to feel and be happy again, and to rediscover his soul.

И Демон видел... На мгновенье
Неизъяснимое волненье
В себе почувствовал он вдруг.
Немой души его пустыню
Наполнил благодатный звук -
И вновь постигнул он святыню
Любви, добра и красоты!..
И долго сладостной картиной
Он любовался - и мечты
О прежнем счастье цепью длинной,
Как будто за звездой звезда,
Пред ним катились тогда.

[And he did see her...In an instant,/ An inexplicable agitation/ he suddenly felt within himself./ His dumb soul’s emptiness was slowly,/ filled with loud chords of blissful sound-/and once again he reached that holy shrine/ of love, goodness, and beauty!.../ And long he gazed, with fascination/ at the sweet picture; and dreams/ Of former happiness rolled before him/ In a long chain, like star after star.]

²⁴³ David Powelstock, op. cit., 174.

However, unlike Lermontov's and Varvara's story, the Demon's and Tamara's story had a devastating ending for the Demon—the forgiven soul of his beloved human is taken into a heavenly realm that he can never enter because of his monstrous nature and the unforgivable sins he had committed. I claim that the kiss that the Demon gives to Tamara that leads to Tamara's death in the poem can be seen as the equivalent of Varvara's illness, which, as witnessed by both Lermontov and Shan-Girey, was causing her charming features to fade away and was slowly killing her. Varvara's illness was not directly caused by Lermontov and was not his fault, but it came as a consequence of the circumstances that surrounded Varen'ka and the poet—the excessive suffering and pain that she went through because of her strong love for him, their inability to be together, and her unhappy marriage to the jealous and abusive Bakhmetev. The fact that the poet might have felt responsible for Varvara's deteriorating health and his attempt to apologize for all the pain and suffering that she went through on his account may be detected in the poem “Ребенку” (“To the child”) which, as already discussed, he wrote in 1838 when he met the ill Varvara and her daughter Ol'ga while coming back from exile. In the poem he directly addresses the child:

О грезах юности томим воспоминаньем,
 С отрадой тайною и тайным содроганьем,
 Прекрасное дитя, я на тебя смотрю...
 ...
 А ты, ты любишь ли меня?
 Не скучны ли тебе непрошенные ласки?
 Не слишком часто ль я твои целую глазки?
 Слеза моя ланит твоих не обожгла ль?
 Смотри ж, не говори ни про мою печаль,
 Ни вовсе обо мне... К чему? Ее, быть может,
 Ребяческий рассказ рассердит иль встревожит...
 Но мне ты всё поверь. Когда в вечерний час,
 Пред образом с тобой заботливо склонясь,
 Молитву детскую она тебе шептала,

...

И все знакомые родные имена
 Ты повторял за ней,— скажи, тебя она
 Ни за кого еще молиться не учила?
 Бледнея, может быть, она произносила
 Название, теперь забытое тобой...
 Не вспоминай его... Что имя?— звук пустой!
 Дай бог, чтоб для тебя оно осталось тайной.
 Но если как-нибудь, когда-нибудь, случайно
 Узнаешь ты его — ребяческие дни
 Ты вспомни, и его, дитя, не прокляни!

[About the dreams of youth we remember,/ With secret joy and secret shuddering,
 Beautiful child, I look at you/.../And you, do you love me?/ Aren't you bored by the
 caresses that you did not ask for?/ Am I not kissing your eyes too often?/ Didn't my tear
 burn your cheeks?/ Don't talk about my sadness nor at all about me...Why? Maybe she/
 will be upset or worried by your child's story/ But believe all I say. When in the evening/
 In front of the icon with you she kneeled down/ And whispered a child's prayer to
 you/.../And all the familiar names/ You repeated after her—tell me, didn't she/ teach you
 to pray about someone else as well?/ Growing pale, maybe she pronounced/ a name, now
 forgotten by you.../ Don't remember it...What is a name?—an empty sound!/ I pray to
 God that it forever remains a secret to you./ But if ever, somehow,/ you accidentally learn
 that name—remember the days of your childhood/ And, child, do not curse it!]²⁴⁴

For Lermontov, Varvara's illness was something that could take her away from him forever
 just as the Demon's kiss takes Tamara away from the Demon forever.

Он жег ее. Во мраке ночи
 Над нею прямо он сверкал,
 Неотразимый, как кинжал.
 Увы! злой дух торжествовал!
 Смертельный яд его лобзанья
 Мгновенно в грудь ее проник.
 Мучительный, ужасный крик
 Ночное возмутил молчанье.
 В нем было все: любовь, страданье.

²⁴⁴ The poet's evocation of the child's mother possibly praying for the name of someone (who is presumably her old lover, not the child's father) recalls the episode in *Demon* (Part II, stanza VI) when Tamara wants to pray to the saints, "But her heart prays to *him*" (the Demon) ("Святым захочет ли молиться —/ А сердце молится *ему*")

Упрек с последнею мольбой
И безнадежное прощанье -
Прощанье с жизнью молодой.

[...He set her blazing./ In the gloom of night, he glittered above her/ Irresistible as a dagger,/ Alas the evil spirit triumphed! In an instant the fatal/ poison of his kiss pierced her breast/ A cry resounded, tortured, fierce/ troubling the nocturnal stillness/ In it was everything: love, suffering/ A reproach with a last prayer/ and then a hopeless farewell/ A farewell to young life.]

Lermontov admired Varvara's flawless angelic nature and saw himself, the sinful demon, unworthy of her. As discussed before, for Lermontov true love goes beyond the grave and the lovers are able to recognize each other and connect in the realm that comes after earthly life. Through the characters of the supernatural Demon and the human Tamara, Lermontov explores the scenario of the lovers not being able to recognize each other beyond the grave because the human soul belongs to the heavenly realm, which is forever closed to the sinful, monstrous demon.

After her death Tamara's human soul is liberated from the "earth's corrupt attire" ("С одеждой бренною земли/ Оковы зла с нее ниспали") and her "sinful soul" ("грешная душа") is carried away from the material world by "one of the sacred angels/ in the expanse of blue ether" ("В пространстве синего эфира/ Один из ангелов святых"). While the Angel "with sweet words of consolation/ and hope scattered all her doubt;/ all trace of crime and tribulation/ with flowing tears he washed out" ("И сладкой речью упования/ Ее сомненья разгонял,/ И след проступка и страданья/ С нее слезами он смывал"), the angry Demon flew up to them. He demands what he thinks is his—Tamara—the key to his salvation and rebirth, "She's mine!" ("Она моя!"). However, at this point the lovers are taken out of the material, corrupt earthly realm where Tamara could not stop thinking about the mysterious and charming stranger over whom "love is winning", whose "soul is

opened to the good” (“И входит он, любить готовый,/ С душой, открытой для добра”), and who had “[thought] that the desired time for a new life had arrived” (И мыслит он, что жизни новой/ Пришла желанная пора”). Lermontov extracts them from the earthly realm where the Demon was able to temporarily suppress his monstrous side, basing his hope for salvation and rebirth on a union with Tamara, and he shows what happens beyond the grave where the demon’s monstrous side comes out due to his realization that he and Tamara can never be together beyond the grave—“a hellish soul from the abyss” (“из бездны адский дух”), “as mighty as the roaring/ whirlwind” (“могущ, как вихорь шумный”), shining “as lightning” (“как молнии струя”), who cries “proudly in insane audacity” (“И гордо в дерзости безумной”). The description of the Demon reminds one of the frightening description of the rusalka from “Morskaia Tsarevna” after she is taken out of the water and turns into a scary monster that suffers in agony.

The Demon is too changed for Tamara to recognize (“Но, боже! - кто б его узнал?” [But, Lord—who would have recognized him?]) just as the Prince cannot recognize the monster that used to be a beautiful king’s daughter asking him to spend the night with her. Tamara sees a figure that looks with “a malevolent gaze, how full he was of poison” (“Каким смотрел он злобным взглядом,/ Как полон был смертельным ядом”); she sees someone who “breathed out the coldness of the grave” from his “motionless expression” (“И веяло могильным хладом/ От неподвижного лица”). The Demon knows that this is the end of his hopes for salvation and rebirth—after her death Tamara’s human soul is forgiven and is taken to Heaven from which he is banned and where he would never be able to join her because of his demonic nature and his unforgivable sins. This realization exposes his true self and turns him into the monster that he was trying to suppress and

change. The fact that he breathes out the coldness of a grave shows that his inside is once again empty and dead, that the world continues to be deaf and mute for him, and he lacks exactly what has remained of her—a human soul, sinful, but also truthful and heavenly.

The Angel knows that Tamara sees the Demon's true colors and chases the "dark spirit of doubt" ("мрачный дух сомненья") away from his heavenly kingdom. Tamara is liberated from "evil's thrall" ("Оковы зла с нее ниспали") and her soul belongs to Heaven ("давно ее мы ждали!" [we have waited for her for a long time!]). The way the Angel describes Tamara reminds one a lot of the way Lermontov described Varvara and her soul. It becomes obvious that it is not just that Tamara and the monstrous Demon are not suitable for each other; they are complete opposites.

Ее душа была из тех,
 Которых жизнь - одно мгновенье
 Невыносимого мученья,
 Недостигаемых утех:
 Творец из лучшего эфира
 Соткал живые струны их,
 Они не созданы для мира,
 И мир был создан не для них!

[Her soul was one of those/ For whom life is one moment/ Of unbearable torment,/ Of unattainable comforts:/ The Creator wove their live strings/ From the finest ether,/ They were not created for the world/ And the world was not created for them!]

Her forgiven and peaceful soul will live forever by giving its love to God, and God will give His love back to it: "she suffered and she loved-/ and heaven has opened up for love" ("Она страдала и любила -/И рай открылся для любви!"). Tamara is flying away to Heaven in the tight embrace of the Angel merging "in the radiance of the sky" ("В сиянье неба"). The Demon, "the tempter" ("искуситель"), is left in the same eternal state of emotional numbness that he was found in at the beginning of the poem, and also in what

Lermontov would see as Hell—unable to be recognized and accepted by the one he loved, rejected, and alone, with “no love, no hope.”

И проклял Демон побежденный
Мечты безумные свой,
И вновь остался он, надменный,
Один, как прежде, во вселенной
Без упования и любви!..

[And the vanquished Demon cursed/ His mad dreams,/ And again he was left arrogant,/ Alone, as before, in the universe/ Without hope and love!]

The Demon reminds one of the rusalka from the poem “Rusalka”—forever lonely and hopelessly in love with her dead prince who would never respond to her kisses and caresses.

Mikhail Lermontov, the Man of Dualities, combined in his character a threatening and wild “demonic” side marked by skepticism, pessimism, and cynicism, and a beautiful and gentle soul that showed his soft human side. Through the portrayal of the union between human and non-human characters in the three works discussed in this chapter—“Rusalka” (1836), “Morskaia Tsarevna” [“Princess of the sea”] (1841), and “Demon” (1830-1839)—Lermontov imagined and speculated on different scenarios about his own internal quest for overcoming his “demonic” side through the power of true love. However, influenced by his unfortunate experiences with true love in life, Lermontov could never envision a happy ending to his works. The outcomes for the lovers in all three works parallel the poet’s life, where he always remained separated from his beloved ones—the little girl that played with his cousin, the girl that he stole the blue ribbon from, and the charming and dreamy Varvara Lopukhina. Lermontov never had the chance to feel fully and understand the purifying and life-giving effect of a lasting union with the women he truly loved and this is why the

partners in his works, either human or inhuman, remained separated by a wide void and could not understand, recognize, and help each other.

Vasily Zhukovsky

This chapter focuses on Vasily Zhukovsky and his work *Undina*. The plot of Zhukovsky's work has the same model as the works of Pushkin and Lermontov that were discussed in the previous chapters—*Undina* tells the story of the relationship between the human knight Huldbrandt and the mermaid Undina. However, Zhukovsky offers a different vision of the nature and role of a water spirit than Pushkin and Lermontov. While Lermontov used the idea of a relationship between a human and a supernatural being to explore the impossibility of finding a lasting union of love, and Pushkin used the idea of an interaction between human and supernatural characters to speculate on the true nature of women and on their role in men's lives, Zhukovsky used the idea of a union between a human and a supernatural being in order to describe the ideal union of true love in which the partners help and lead each other on the challenging path to spiritual growth, to peace and harmony, and to God.

This chapter consists of three main sections. In the first section I describe the personal life of Vasily Zhukovsky—a “sentimental dreamer and proponent of virtue,”²⁴⁵ based on his works and letters, memoirs and letters of his contemporaries, and recent criticism. I discuss Zhukovsky's three main experiences with love—the tragic romance with his “quiet angel” Maria Protasova, the chivalrous adoration of his Fair Lady, Alexandra Feodorovna, and the marriage with the Madonna that descended from the heavens Elizabeth Reutern. I show how each one of those experiences contributed to the development of Zhukovsky's

²⁴⁵ Ilya Vinitsky, “Introduction,” in *Vasily Zhukhovsky's Romanticism and the Emotional History of Russia* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 6.

views on both life and writing. An understanding of these views is crucial for an understanding of his works and characters since Zhukovsky firmly believed that poetry is a virtue with a moral and ethical purpose and that the true poet should live the same way he writes because being moral and being talented should be inseparable on the path to spiritual self-perfection and to the heavenly light and God. In the second section of this chapter I discuss the relationship between Zhukovsky and Friedrich Heinrich Karl de la Motte, Baron Fouqué and provide a summary of Fouqué's work *Undine*. In the third section I focus on Zhukovsky's work *Undina* and I specifically discuss the way the poet builds and presents the character of Undina—as a unique hybrid between a human soul and an inhuman essence of a water spirit that takes the unusual role of a protagonist instead of the traditional role of an antagonist. I believe that this is unique in Russian literature. I will show that the uniqueness of the character is due to the fact that in *Undina*, Zhukovsky combined his ideas and dreams of the ideal female figure with his need and hope for one. This is not merely the result of Zhukovsky translating Fouqué's work, the ideas of which were influenced by German Romanticism. As I will show, Zhukovsky's work is an original reworking of Fouqué's themes and I will underscore the uniqueness of the work to Russian culture and literature by highlighting the differences between Fouqué's and Zhukovsky's works both in form and content and by discussing Zhukovsky's contemporaries' reactions to his work.

In the Introduction to *Vasily Zhukovsky's Romanticism and the Emotional History of Russia*, Ilya Vinitsky calls Vasily Zhukovsky “the father of Russian Romanticism, an outstanding poet and translator, the creator of the first aesthetic philosophy in Russian literature, which influenced several generations of Russian authors from Pushkin and

Gogol to Vladimir Solov'ev and Alexander Blok.”²⁴⁶ Zhukovsky proudly saw himself as Karamzin's student and a teacher to many that started writing after him, including the brilliant Alexander Pushkin.²⁴⁷ Zhukovsky's creative and public activity covers over half a century and is closely connected with both the history of Russian culture and with Russia's political history.²⁴⁸ According to Vinitsky Zhukovsky's “psychological profile was and remained a product of the Alexandrine age (1801-1825), which was characterized by an exalted sentimentalism and utopian rationalism, a love of solitude and passionate thirst for public service, an orientation toward the West and an enthusiasm for the national, the understanding of Russian history as part of European history and faith in the messianic role of Russia in Providence's mysterious plan.”²⁴⁹ In the essay “Воспоминание и я—одно и то же” (“Memory and myself—it is the same thing”), the introduction to *В. А. Жуковский в воспоминаниях современников* (*V. A. Zhukovsky in his contemporaries' memories*), Lebedeva and Yanushkevich point out that Zhukovsky's poetry created a very specific model of the emotional culture of the people from that era,²⁵⁰ while Belinsky

²⁴⁶ Пя Vinitsky, op. cit., 3.

²⁴⁷ “Как писатель я был учеником Карамзина; те, кои начали писать после меня, называли себя моими учениками, и между ними Пушкин, по таланту и искусству, превзошел своего учителя.” [As an author I was Karamzin's student; the ones that began to write after me called themselves my students and Pushkin among them; in talent and art he surpassed his teacher.] (Ibid.)

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 7.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 4.

²⁵⁰ “...поэзия Жуковского, не столько выразившая в себе определенную историко-литературную эпоху, сколько создавшая очень определенную модель эмоциональной культуры человека этой эпохи... личности Жуковского и его поэзии, самому верному зеркалу, отражающему личность человека.” [Zhukovsky's poetry, not so much expressing in itself a certain historic and literary era, as much as creating a very definite model of the emotional culture of the person of that era... of Zhukovsky's personality and his poetry, the most trustworthy mirror reflecting one's personality.] (Aleksandr Yanushkevich and Ol'ga Lebedeva, “Воспоминание и я—одно и то же” [Memory and myself—it is the same thing] in *В. А. Жуковский в*

commented that Zhukovsky's poetry reflects a whole period of moral and ethical development for Russian society.²⁵¹ Zhukovsky knew that his works set him apart from most of his contemporaries and showed the ethical and moral side of his character²⁵² and believed that because of the way he lived and wrote, he deserved the approval of his contemporaries.²⁵³

In a letter to Turgenev from February 1, 1815 sent from Moscow, Zhukovsky reveals his firm belief that one should live the same way one writes because both living and writing share the same goal and the same perfection, and that being moral should be inseparable from being talented. Zhukovsky says that the mistakes in what he wrote, noticed by either him or others, do not defeat his enthusiasm, but make him hope that he will write something better.²⁵⁴ Throughout his whole life Zhukovsky rigorously defended his convictions about

воспоминаниях современников [*V. A. Zhukovsky in the memoirs of his contemporaries*] at <http://old.russ.ru/krug/20000120-pr.html>)

²⁵¹ “В. Г. Белинский недаром заметил, что поэзия Жуковского—это "целый период нравственного развития нашего общества.” [Not in vain did V. G. Belinsky note that Zhukovsky's poetry is a “whole period of the ethical development of Russian society.”] (*Ibid.*)

²⁵² “То, что я писал, смею сказать, говорит ясно о моем характере нравственном.” [What I wrote, I dare to say, speaks clearly of my ethical and moral character.] (*Ibid.*)

²⁵³ “С этой стороны имею право на одобрение моих современников.” [On that I deserve the approval of my contemporaries.] (*Ibid.*)

²⁵⁴ “А я себе часто говорю (не знаю только, буду ли в состоянии исполнить): "Живи, как пишешь!" То есть и в том и другом одинакая цель и одинакое совершенство. Чтобы человек моральный не был несходен с человеком с талантом. Самые замечаемые мною ошибки и замечаемые другими ошибки в том, что я написал, только пробуждают во мне надежду написать что-нибудь лучшее, а нимало не отымают у меня бодрости.” [Often I tell myself (I just don't know if I'll be able to achieve it): “Live like you write!” In both there is the same goal and the same perfection. So that a *moral person* is not different from a *talented person*. The mistakes that both I and others see the most in what I wrote only give me hope to write something better and don't take my enthusiasm away] (“Два письма Александру Тургеневу” [“Two letters to Aleksandr Turgenev”] at http://az.lib.ru/z/zhukowskij_w_a/text_0470.shtml)

the moral and the ethical purpose of both life and poetry and the idea of poetry as yet another expression of one's unquestionable dedication to virtue.²⁵⁵ These views and convictions were not simply a phase in Zhukovsky's life; they were his lifelong philosophy that he never betrayed. In a letter to Nicholas I written on March 1, 1830—fifteen years after the letter to Turgenev, Zhukovsky once again expressed his firm dedication to pure thoughts and actions in both his life and his writing.²⁵⁶ Another confirmation of the fact that Zhukovsky remained true to his ideas about life and poetry for his whole life comes from Academician Alexander Nikolaevich Veselovsky, who at the beginning of the twentieth century wrote a study of Zhukovsky's life called *V.A. Zhukovsky. The Poetry of Feeling and of the Heart's Imagination* (*V.A. Zhukovskii: poeziia chuvstva i serdechnego voobrazheniia*, 1903; published in 1904) In this study Academician Veselovsky says that in Zhukovsky's poetic world view there is what the scholar metaphorically calls "truth of mood": "the world changed around the poet, but he always remained the same—a sentimental dreamer and proponent of virtue."²⁵⁷

Zhukovsky believed that his works were a true monument to his life.²⁵⁸ In the 1819 poem "Невыразимое" ("Inexpressable") he discusses the soul's everlasting pursuit to understand and get closer to the light coming from above and the presence of the Creator in his creation. This poem becomes a good representation of the way the poet always aimed

²⁵⁵ "поэзия есть добродетель." [Poetry is virtue.] ("Письмо П. А. Вяземскому" [A letter to P. A. Vyazemsky] at http://az.lib.ru/z/zhukowskij_w_a/text_0560oldorfo.shtml)

²⁵⁶ "Я жил как писал: оставался чист и мыслями, и делами." [I lived like I wrote: remained clean in thoughts and deeds.] ("Два письма Александру Тургеневу," op. cit.)

²⁵⁷ Илья Vinitsky, op. cit., 6.

²⁵⁸ "Стихи мои останутся верным памятником моей жизни..." ("Письма Николаю I и к А. Х. Бенкендорфу" ["Letters to Nicholas I and to A. Kh. Benkendorf"] at http://az.lib.ru/z/zhukowskij_w_a/text_0560.shtml)

for the high, dream-like, ideal heavenly realm “beyond the clouds” both in his life and in his works.

Сия сходящая святыня с вышины,
Сие присутствие создателя в создание --
Какой для них язык?.. Горе душа летит,
Все необъятное в единый вздох теснится... ²⁵⁹

[All this light coming from heaven,/ This presence of the Creator in the creation--/
What is their language?...The soul is sorrowfully flying,/ All the unembraceable is
squeezed into one breath...]

In a letter to Nicholas I, Zhukovsky points out that during his writing career he did not betray his nature with any immoral or unethical deeds towards his colleagues and his audience, he did not have any conflicts, did not idolize fame and success, and wrote about what was coming from his heart.²⁶⁰ The way Zhukovsky lived his personal life is very similar to the way he chose to approach his writing career. In June 1805 when he first moved to the Protasov's house, Zhukovsky wrote in his diary that he does not need much and all he wants is a calm, innocent life. The poet wished that he would never be in need and that he and his mother would not be unhappy and would have everything they needed.

²⁵⁹ Vasily Zhukovsky, "Невыразимое" ("Inexpressable,") 1819.

²⁶⁰ “Этот характер не был унижен никаким недостойным поступком; ссылаюсь на всех, кто знает меня лично, и на публику, которая с этой стороны отдала мне справедливость. Во все это время моего авторства я ни с кем не имел литературных ссор...; не отвечал ни на одну писанную против меня критику, не заводил партий, ибо писал не для ничтожного, купленного интригами успеха, а просто по влечению сердца, которое искренно выражалось в моих сочинениях; не искал похвалы, ибо презираю всякую выисканную происками похвалу.” [This character was not humiliated by any immoral deeds; I refer to everyone who knows me personally and to the public which on that account was just to me. During all this time of professional work I didn't get into literary fights with anyone...; I didn't answer to a single criticism that was written against me, didn't start groups, didn't write for the lowly success, bought through intrigues, but I was led by my heart's desires, which was sincerely reflected in my compositions; I didn't seek praise and despised every insincere praise.] (“Письма Николаю I и к А. Х. Бенкендорфу,” *op. cit.*)

He also wanted to have some pleasures, possible for everyone, rich or poor; pleasures that would come from a busy, balanced, and consistent work and from calm, moral family life. And if it is God's will—the company of a true friend or faithful wife would be his relaxing oasis. He did not ask for greater happiness than that.²⁶¹ When compared to the romantic biographies of some of his contemporaries, Zhukovsky's life was not rich in events: he did not perform feats of heroism on the battlefield, he did not rebel against society, he experienced neither exile nor imprisonment, he fought no duels, he did not lose his fortune in a card game, nor did he seduce other men's wives.²⁶² Vinitzky makes the point that according to some, based on the period when Zhukovsky lived, the lack of these events in his life could be seen as a deficiency, but certainly it is an important characteristic that sets him apart from the other authors from that period and influences his identity as an author.

²⁶¹ “Я не требую слишком многого, — запишет он в дневнике в июне 1805 года, только приехав в Белев и поселившись в доме Протасовых. — Хочу спокойной, невинной жизни. Желаю не нуждаться. Желаю, чтобы я и матушка были не несчастны, имели все нужное. Хочу иметь некоторые удовольствия, возможные всякому человеку, бедному и богатому, удовольствия от занятий, от умеренной, но постоянной деятельности, наконец, от спокойной, порядочной семейственной жизни. И — если бы дал бог! — общество верного друга или верной жены будет моим отдохновением. Избави меня боже от больших несчастий, и я не буду искать большого счастья!” [I don't need much—he would write in his diary in June 1805, just having come to Belev and moving in into Protasov's house.—I want a calm, innocent life. I want to not have needs. I want for my mother and I to not be unhappy, and to have everything we need. I want to have some pleasures accessible to everyone, poor and rich, pleasure from activities, from moderate, but constant activity, finally from calm, orderly family life. And if that is God's will—the society of a loyal friend or loyal wife to be my oasis. Save me, God, from great unhappiness, and I wouldn't desire for greater happiness!] (Elena Arsen'evna, *Роман в стихах и письмах о невозможном счастье: (Мария Протасова – Василий Жуковский)* [*Novel in verse and letters about impossible happiness (Maria Protasova—Vasily Zhukovsky)*] at <https://litlife.club/br/?b=128470&p=2, 2.>)

²⁶² Ilya Vinitzky, op. cit., 9.

Love as a moral expression of devotion and admiration of an ideal—the beloved, the country, or religion, became a central theme in Zhukovsky's works. In the poem "Кольцо души девицы..." ("A maiden's soul's ring") Zhukovsky exclaims, "Love, love is what I want..."²⁶³ and in the letter to Nicholas I the poet says that looking at his works he can confidently state that he expressed complex thoughts and sincere feelings centered around the theme of love—love for his faith and love for the country.²⁶⁴ This same idea of sincere, devoted, and moral love became a central theme in Zhukovsky's personal life as well. Vinitsky points out that Russian writers fell in love and married before and after Zhukovsky, but he was the first one to create out of the history of his feelings an integrated religious-psychological doctrine that was to exercise significant influence on the development of Russian love poetry and aesthetics.

Throughout his life Zhukovsky focused on the moral and spiritual dimension of love. Ilya Vinitsky claims that for Zhukovsky the main goal of marriage was for the husband and wife to help each other's spiritual self perfection and growth along the path of the Heavenly Father through their mutual love and devotion.²⁶⁵ There is plenty of textual evidence supporting the fact that for Zhukovsky love and family were a sacred life-giving realm, an internal church, which was crucial for one's happiness, creativity, and meaningful existence. In the poem "Alima and Al'sim" Zhukovsky scorns the people for destroying

²⁶³ "Любви, любви хочу я..." [Love, love is what I want] (Vasily Zhukovsky, "Кольцо души девицы..." ["A maiden's soul's ring"])

²⁶⁴ "Смотря на страницы, мною написанные, скажу смело, что мною были пущены в ход и высокие мысли, и чистые чувства, и любовь к вере, и любовь к отечеству." [Looking at the pages I wrote I can honestly say that I expressed lofty thoughts, pure feelings and love for the faith and for the fatherland.] ("Письма Николаю I и к А. Х. Бенкендорфу," op. cit.)

²⁶⁵ Ilya Vinitsky, op. cit., 10.

Alima's and Al'sim's union of love and says that the only thing of real value on earth is to love.

Зачем, зачем вы разорвали
 Союз сердец?
 Вам розно быть! вы им сказали,-
 Всему конец.
 Что пользы в платье золотое
 Себя рядить?
 Богатство на земле прямое
 Одно: любить.²⁶⁶

[Why did you break/ The union of hearts?/ You would have things separate. You told them—/This is the end of it all./ What is the good in dressing yourself in a dress made of gold?/ Wealth on earth/ Means only one thing: to love.]

Zhukovsky continues by claiming that there is nothing worse in life than when two souls have become connected by him telling her that he wants her to be his and her telling him that she wants him to be hers and then this union of love is broken and forgotten because of someone else.

Когда случится, жизни в цвете,
 Сказать душой
 Ему: ты будь моя на свете;
 А ей: ты мой;
 И вдруг придется для другого
 Любовь забыть -
 Что жребия страшней такого?
 И льзя ли жить?²⁶⁷

[When it happens in life,/ To say with your soul/ To him: be mine in this world;/ And to her: and you mine;/ And suddenly it happens that you forget your love for the other one—/What is a worse fate than that?/ And is it worth living?]

²⁶⁶ Vasily Zhukovsky, "Alima and Al'sim," 1814.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

The poet claims that after the destruction of love it is not worth living anymore. In the poem “Happiness in a Dream” (“Счастье во сне”) Zhukovsky tells the story of two lovers walking along the road whose faces express sadness and their eyes are full of suffering. However, as soon as they kiss each other in the eyes and in the mouth, life and beauty blossom again in them.

Дорогой шла девица;
 С ней друг ее молодой;
 Болезненны их лица;
 Наполнен взор тоской.

Друг друга лобызают
 И в очи и в уста -
 И снова расцветают
 В них жизнь и красота.²⁶⁸

[A girl was walking on the road;/ With her her young lover;/ Their faces showed pain;/
 And their eyes were full of sorrow.// They kiss each other/ In the eyes and in the mouth—
 / And again blossom/ In them life and beauty.]

In the poem “Кольцо души девицы” (“A maiden’s soul’s ring”) a girl gave the main character a ring and said that he should keep it and for as long as wears it, she will be his. However, he went swimming in the sea and lost his ring. With the ring he lost his earthly happiness. He tried to find it, but in vain. After that they became strangers. The girl did not even look at him and his happiness sank with the ring to the bottom of the sea. At the end she felt sorry for him and came to him trying to say something, but she could not say anything. He exclaims that he needs her love and says that he will be looking for his ring and for his hope in the sea.

Кольцо души девицы

²⁶⁸ Vasily Zhukovsky, “Счастье во сне” (“Happiness in a Dream,”) 1816.

Я в море уронил:
С моим кольцом я счастье
Земное погубил.

Мне, дав его, сказала:
"Носи, не забывай;
Пока твое колечко,
Меня своей считай!"

Не в добрый час я невод
Стал в море полоскать;
Колько юркнуло в воду;
Искал... но где сыскать?!

С тех пор мы как чужие,
Приду к ней - не глядит,
С тех пор мое веселье
На дне морском лежит.

О, ветер полуночный,
Проснися! будь мне друг!
Схвати со дна колечко
И выкати на луг.

Вчера ей жалко стало,
Нашла меня в слезах,
И что-то, как бывало,
Зажглось у ней в глазах.

Ко мне подсела с лаской,
Мне руку подала,
И что-то ей хотелось
Сказать, но не могла.

На что твоя мне ласка,
На что мне твой привет?
Любви, любви хочу я...
Любви-то мне и нет.

Ищи, кто хочет, в море
Богатых янтарей...
А мне - мое колечко
С надеждою моей.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁹ Vasily Zhukovsky, "Кольцо души девицы," 1816.

[The maiden's soul's ring/ I dropped in the sea:/ With my ring my earthly happiness/ I killed.// Giving it to me she said:/ "Wear it, don't forget;/ While you own the ring/ I'll be yours!"/ In a unfortunate hour/ I was swimming in the sea;/ The ring fell in the water;/ I looked for it...but how to find it?!// Since this moment we are like strangers,/ I come to her—she is not looking at me,/ Since that moment my happiness/ Lies on the bottom of the sea.// Oh midnight wind,/ Wake up! Be my friend!/ Grab the ring from the bottom of the sea/ And bring it out to the meadow.// Yesterday she felt bad/ She found me in tears,/ And something/ Was burning her eyes.// She sat next to me gently,/ Gave me her hand,/ And wanted to/ Say something, but could not.// Why are you caressing me,/ Why are you greeting me?/ I want love, love.../And I don't have love.// Look for, whoever wants to/ Rich amber in the sea.../ And for me—my ring/ Together with my hope.]

In a letter to Gogol' from February 10, 1847 sent from Frankfurt Zhukovsky describes how his soul, by the mercy of God's will, found an even stronger connection to the world through the illuminative power of love and companionship. Zhukovsky explains that the reason the recent death of a dear friend, Yazykov would had upset him much more six years ago is that then he had not yet found his faithful companion—his wife Elizabeth, and thus the painful fear of eternal loneliness still haunted him. The blessing of his marriage destroyed forever the daunting possibility or expectation of loneliness for the poet.²⁷⁰

In the following section I will show that Zhukovsky held the women he loved in high esteem and viewed them as superior beings that he adored and knelt in front of. For him they were all spiritual sisters with whom he built an eternal bond and who helped him in different ways to advance on his way to spiritual growth and perfection. I will illustrate these points by discussing what the critics point out as the three most important and

²⁷⁰ “За шесть лет перед этим я бы это гораздо сильнее почувствовал при теперешнем печальном случае: но воля божия новыми свежими узами привязала мою душу к здешнему свету; они навсегда уничтожили для меня возможность *одиночества*, и горькое ощущение этого одиночества мне теперь недоступно.” [Six years ago this unfortunate event would have affected me in a much stronger way: but God's will tied my soul to this world with new, fresh ties; they forever destroyed for me the possibility of *loneliness*, and the sorrowful anticipation of that loneliness is now impossible for me.] (“Письма к Н. В. Гоголю” [“Letters to N. V. Gogol'”] at http://az.lib.ru/z/zhukowskij_w_a/text_0320.shtml)

influential experiences with romantic love the poet had—his forbidden love for a close relative, his secret feelings for his pupil—a married princess and a future empress of Russia, and the love of his “sunset years” for a girl twenty- seven years younger than he, who became his wife when he was fifty-eight.

According to Zhukovsky, until 1817 both his personal life and writing career were heavily dominated by his family.²⁷¹ Vinitsky points out that this period is marked by the mode of life of noble provincial families at the end of the eighteenth century, which is characterized by the central figure of the “kind father” or the loving mother, the patrimonial estate and familial traditions, the internal bonds among the members of the family, the growing role of women as guardians of the family heart and virtue, and the family rituals and holidays. Zhukovsky’s challenge came from the fact that he, being the illegitimate son of the wealthy Russian landowner Afanasy Bunin and his Turkish concubine, was not a legitimate member of the Bunin family. Zhukovsky fell in love with his much younger half-sister Maria Protasova—an innocent, and gentle girl. In 1805 when Zhukovsky first moved to the Protasov’s house he wrote in his diary that he is convinced that he would be happy with Maria because she is sensitive and smart and she would know the value of family happiness and would not be interested in society distractions.²⁷² His love for Masha

²⁷¹ “До 1817 года, с которого начал я находиться при особе государыни императрицы, я жил уединенно в кругу семейства и писал.” [Until 1817, when I started visiting the Empress, I lived a secluded life with my family and wrote.] (“Письма Николаю I и к А. Х. Бенкендорфу,” *op. cit.*)

²⁷² “Я был бы с нею счастлив, конечно!—напишет Жуковский на другой странице дневника.—Она умна, чувствительна, она узнала бы цену семейственного счастья и не захотела бы светской рассеянности.” [I would be happy with her, of course!—wrote Zhukovsky on another page of his diary—She is smart, sensitive, she would know the value of family happiness and would not be tempted by society absent-mindedness.] (Elena Arsen’evna, *op. cit.*, 3)

inspired Zhukovsky and sparked his creativity. Each year he wrote more, and more and in all of his works his adoration for Maria and his desire to marry her could be seen—“Стихи, сочиненные для альбома” (“Poems, created for an album”), “Песня” (“Song”), “К Нине” (“To Nina”), “К Филалету” (“To Filalet”), many translations of Goethe and Schiller, “Людмила” (“Lyudmila”), “Три сестры. Видение Минваны” (“Three sisters. Minvana’s vision”) and the article “Кто истинно добрый и счастливый человек?” (“Who is a truly good and happy person?”) in which he claims that one is truly good and happy only when one can enjoy family life.²⁷³ In the poem “Песня” (“Song”) he calls Masha his friend and his guardian angel. He says that she can’t be compared to anyone else and he loves her and her soul. He sees her features in every aspect of nature’s beauty. He adores her and praises her. His love for her is his only joy, she is his earthly gift, she gives life to his heart and she is the pleasure of his life.

Мой друг, хранитель-ангел мой,
О ты, с которой нет сравненья,
Люблю тебя, дышу тобой;
Но где для страсти выраженья?
Во всех природы красотах
Твой образ милый я встречаю;
Прелестных вижу — в их чертах
Одну тебя воображаю.
Беру перо — им начертать
Могу лишь имя незабвенной;
Одну тебя лишь прославлять
Могу на лире восхищенной:
С тобой, один, вблизи, вдали.
Тебя любить одна мне радость;
Ты мне все блага на земли,

²⁷³ “Кто истинно добрый и счастливый человек? Один тот, кто способен наслаждаться семейственной жизнью!” [Who is a truly good and happy person? Only that one who can enjoy family life.] (Ibid., 2)

Ты сердцу жизнь, ты жизни сладость...²⁷⁴

[My firend, my guardian angel,/ You who no one can be compared to,/ I love you, I breathe you;/ How to express passion?/ In all the beauty of nature/ I meet your dear image;/ When I see charming ones—in their features/ I only imagine you./ When I pick up my pen/ I can only draw/ Your unforgettable name/ With the admiring lyre:/ With you alone from close and from far away./ To love you is my only joy;/ You are all my good on earth,/ You’re the life of the heart, the sweetness of life...]

In another poem Zhukovsky explores the true meaning of love and marriage and says that the sacred title “spouses” should be protected like a heavenly gift by those who are truthful in their friendship and love with their souls.

Младенцем быть душой;
Счастливо созреть;
Не тела красотой,
...
Быть в дружбе неизменной;
Любя, душой любить;

Супруги сан священный,
Как дар небес, хранить...²⁷⁵

[To be young at heart;/ To happily see;/ Not the beauty of the body/.../To be in a loyal friendship;/ Loving, to love with one’s soul;/ The sacred title of spouse,/ To preserve like a gift from heaven...]

Masha fell in love with Zhukovsky and passionately wanted to marry him. However, the fact that they were considered relatives became a major obstacle. Even in the earlier stages of the relationship Zhukovsky had doubts and fears about the possible progression of their romance. In 1808 he wrote the poem “К Нине” (“To Nina”), which in reality addressed Masha, whom he called Nina in some of his earlier poems. In this poem Zhukovsky expressed his concern that their passionate love will die out and the soul will

²⁷⁴ Vasily Zhukovsky, “Песня” (“Song,”) 1808.

²⁷⁵ Elena Arsen’eva, *op. cit.*, 2.

fly away to an unknown land, abandoning in darkness the feeling which made it feel like God on earth.²⁷⁶

...Сей пламень любви
Ужели с последним дыханьем угаснет?
Душа, отлетая в незнаемый край,
Ужели во мраке то чувство покинет,
Которым равнялась богам на земле?

[... Will this flame of love/ Die out in a last breath?/ The soul flying away to an unknown land,/ Will it really throw away in darkness the feeling,/ By which it became equal to gods on earth?"]

Unfortunately, Zhukovsky's fears turned into reality when Masha's mother Katerina rejected his marriage proposal with the argument that a marriage between relatives—an uncle and a niece, is a sin and she would never allow it to happen. In a letter to the poet, she tells Zhukovsky that what he wants is incest and a sin. Katerina says that Masha must marry the surgery professor Johann Moier and Vasily has to go his separate way and must not play with her heart anymore.²⁷⁷ Katerina points out that it is not the first time she had mentioned this to Zhukovsky and will repeat it another hundred times—he must leave her and her daughter in peace.²⁷⁸ In the letter to Turgenev from February 1, 1815 mentioned before, Zhukovsky talks about his strong love for Maria (Masha) and their desire to share a life of happiness, which her mother refuses to them because of her inability to understand

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 6.

²⁷⁸ “Это кровосмешение! Это грех, грех! Маша должна выйти замуж за Мойера, а ты, Василий, иди своей дорогой, не смущай ее сердца. Не впервые тебе это говорю и еще хоть сто раз повторю — оставь мою дочь в покое!” [This is incest! This is sin, sin! Masha must marry Moier, and you, Vasily, must go your way and not play with her heart. I'm not saying this to you for a first time and will say it again a hundred times—leave my daughter in peace.] (Ibid.)

the true meaning of being a Christian, her failure to care about others' destiny the same way she cares about her own, and her selfishness through the icy eyes of which she views and judges the world. Zhukovsky talks about the growing void that he feels between him and his family and about the need to wear a mask around them and hide his real feelings and his real self, which he does not have to do in front of his friends.²⁷⁹ When the poet realized that a union between him and his niece would be impossible he wrote to her, "What did I want? To be happy with you. From this I have to remove just one word one to change it all. Let me be happy through you. It is all the same to me—your happiness or our

²⁷⁹ "Я люблю Машу (с тобою можно дать ей это имя), как жизнь. Видеть ее и делить ее спокойное счастье есть для меня все, и для нее также. Но характер матери не таков. Она не может возвыситься до этой чистой, благородной доверенности, на которую и я и Маша имели бы полное право, если бы только не принуждены были беспрестанно скрывать того, что у нас в душе... Брат, мы живем *вместе*, а между нами бездна недоверчивости. Христианство (по ее словам) заставляет ее отказать нам в нашем счастье, а того, что составляет характер христианки, она не имеет, той любви, которая заботится о чужой судьбе, как о собственной. Каждая минута напоминает мне только о том, чего я лишен, нет никакого вознаграждения... Мы не можем подойти друг к другу свободно. Это положение ужасно, а выйти из него нет силы. Боже мой! Я не могу хотеть и искать своего отдельного счастья. С вами, с друзьями сердца, с верными товарищами жизни, я был бы счастлив: то есть и уважал и делился бы всем, что есть хорошего в душе, без всякого принуждения; не было бы ужасной, противной сердцу необходимости носить на лице маску..." [I love Masha (you and I can call her by this name) like life. To see her and to share calm happiness with her is everything for me and for her as well. But her mother is not like this. She can not elevate herself to this clean, noble trust of which Masha and I are worthy, if only we did not have to hide all the time what is in our souls... Brother, we live *together*, but there is a huge gap of mistrust between us. Christianity (in her words) forces her to refuse us our happiness, but that which is the essence of a Christian woman, she doesn't have, that is—love which worries about other people's lives like one's own. Every minute reminds only that I'm not wanted and there is no reward... We can not go to each other freely. This situation is horrible and I have no strength to get out of it. My God! I can not want and look for my own separate happiness. With you, with the friends of my heart, with the true friends of life, I would be happy; I would respect you and share everything with you that is good in my soul without any compulsion; there would not be any terrible, repulsive need for me to wear a mask...] ("Два письма Александру Тургеневу", *op. cit.*)

happiness...My attachment to you now is completely selfless and thus more alive and better.”²⁸⁰ Masha married Johan Moier and in 1823, after giving birth to a dead son, she passed away.²⁸¹ Zhukovsky’s last poem dedicated to her carries his deep pain and sorrow, the eternal remembrance of her last sad glance full of feelings, and serves as his attempt to say farewell to the gentle and quiet angle he loved so much.²⁸²

Ты предо мною
Стояла тихо.
Твой взор унылый
Был полон чувства.
Он мне напомнил
О милом прошлом...
Он был последний
На здешнем свете.
Ты удалилась,
Как тихий ангел;
Твоя могила,
Как рай, спокойна!
Там все земные
Воспоминанья,
Там все святые
О небе мысли.
Звезды небес,
Тихая ночь!..²⁸³

[You stood in front of me/ Quietly./ Your gloomy glance/ Was full of feelings./ It reminded me/ Of the dear past.../ It was the last one/ In this world./ You departed,/ Like a quiet angel;/ Your grave,/ Is peaceful like heaven!/ There are all the earthly/ Memories,/ There are all the holy/ Thoughts about heaven./ Stars of the sky,/ Quiet night!...]

²⁸⁰ “Чего я желал? — писал Василий Андреевич своей недостижимой возлюбленной. — Быть счастливым с тобою. Из этого теперь должно выбросить только одно слово, чтобы все заменить. Пусть буду счастлив тобою. Право, для меня все равно — твое счастье или наше счастье... Моя привязанность к тебе теперь уж точно без примеси собственного, и от этого она живет и лучше.” (Elena Arsen’eva, *op. cit.*, 6)

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁸³ Vasily Zhukovsky, “Ты предо мною...” (“You in front of me...”) 1823.

Even though the romance between Masha and Zhukovsky did not have the happy ending both of them hoped for, it still had a great impact on Zhukovsky as a person and an author. Masha and the strong love she and the poet shared helped him to learn how to be a better, more moral, gentle and selfless person and a more talented, creative, and productive author. The romance with Masha helped the poet to shape his ideas about the dimension of love related to marriage and the spouses' roles in it, and the importance of this sacred union one's life—ideas that became central not only in his personal life, but also in his works. In this way, through his relationship with Masha, Zhukovsky advanced on his way to spiritual self perfection and to the Heavenly Father. His recognition of this can be seen in the way the poet describes Masha's grave in the poem. Her last resting place is the intersection point of the earthly and the heavenly—under the night sky and the light of the stars it is peaceful like heaven and it holds both all earthly memories and all the sacred thoughts about heaven.

The second main experience with love for Zhukovsky that I will discuss is the one with Alexandra Feodorovna, which Vinitsky refers to as the creation of the *Alexandra-Cult*. In 1817 Zhukovsky was invited to be the Russian language tutor of the young wife of Grand Duke Nicholas, the Prussian princess Charlotte, who after marrying Nicholas became the Grand Duchess Alexandra Feodorovna, the future Russian empress. In a letter to her husband Nicholas I from 1830 Zhukovsky says that 1817 marks the beginning of a new stage in his life, very different from the first one.²⁸⁴ Zhukovsky's feelings for the Grand

²⁸⁴ “С 1817-го года начинается другая половина жизни моей, совершенно отличная от первой.” [From 1817 the second half of my life begins, completely different from the first one.] (“Письма Николаю I и к А. Х. Бенкендорфу,” op. cit.)

Dutchess were different from the ones he had for his niece Masha. Zhukovsky never saw Alexandra as his potential wife. His adoration of Alexandra was strictly platonic. The poet understood that Alexandra was like the stars in the night sky—bright, glorious, and beautiful, but very distant and thus completely out of reach. The way he worshipped her was the same as the way one would worship a goddess—observing and admiring from a distance, knowing that a romantic partnership would never be possible. With Alexandra, Zhukovsky took the role of a devoted chivalrous knight kneeling in front of the pedestal of his Fair Lady—a model well known to both of them through the works of their favorite authors Fouqué and Tieck. As Alexandra’s biographer August-Theodor von Grimm remarked, Zhukovsky was “the first who frequented the court to discover the eminent feminine qualities of Alexandra and through all ensuing years she continued to be the *beau ideal* of this poet.”²⁸⁵ In his letters to Nicholas I the poet expressed that he saw the opportunity to serve her and her family as a sacred mission, a blessing, and a heavenly gift. Zhukovsky claimed that being close to the Empress and being able to obtain her trust was his most important recognition.²⁸⁶ He fully understood the “sanctity” and the importance of his assignment and dedicated all of his thoughts to it,²⁸⁷ stating that the same feelings that filled up his soul when he was working only for the fame of being an author still

²⁸⁵ Пля Vinitzky, op. cit., 21.

²⁸⁶ “Я был приближен к особе государыни императрицы. Смею сказать, что я приобрел доверенность ее величества: это мой лучший аттестат.” [I was close to the Empress. I dare to say that I obtained her trust: this is my highest recognition.] (“Письма Николаю I и к А. Х. Бенкендорфу,” op. cit.)

²⁸⁷ “...положив руку на сердце, могу сказать, что понимаю святость моего назначения. Все мои мысли свелись на один предмет: я не способен соединить с ним ничего недостойного!” [With my hand on my heart I can say that I understand the sanctity of my job. All my thoughts are directed to one subject: I can not unite anything not worthy with it.] (Ibid.)

existed, but now they served higher goals.²⁸⁸ While serving Alexandra and her family, Zhukovsky realized that he was no longer living for himself and had removed himself from the world.²⁸⁹

Zhukovsky's adoration of Alexandra Feodorovna shines through the lines of some of his works. One of them is the "Послание Государыне в. к. Александре Фёдоровне" ("A Message to the Empress Alexandra Fedorovna") which Zhukovsky wrote for the birth of her son—Alexander Nikolaevich, in April 1818. Zhukovsky praised Alexandra for her role as the Mother of the future Emperor of Russia.

Изображу ль души смятенной чувство?
Могу ль найти согласный с ним язык?
Что лирный глас, и что певца искусство?..
Ты слышала сей милый, первый крик,
Младенческий привет существованью.²⁹⁰

[Can I express the feeling of my troubled soul?/ Can I find a language that agrees with it?/
What is the voice of the lyre and the art of the singer?.../ You just heard the dear first cry,/ A child's greeting to existence.]

The work ends by Zhukovsky talking about the grand magnitude of Alexandra's love, which carries holy peace and joy.

Твоя любовь - всевидящее око;
В твоей любви - святая благодать.²⁹¹

[Your love is an almighty eye;/ In your love there is heavenly grace.]

²⁸⁸ "Те же чувства, которые наполняли душу мою, когда я просто работал для чистой славы писателя, наполняют ее и теперь, но только для высшей цели." [These same feelings that filled up my soul when I worked only for the fame of an author, fill it up now, but for loftier goals.] (Ibid.)

²⁸⁹ "Теперь живу не для себя. Я простился с светом..." [I live no longer for myself. I have said my farewell to the world...] (Ibid.)

²⁹⁰ Vasily Zhukovsky, "Послание Государыне в. к. Александре Фёдоровне" 1818.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

Another work in which the poet praised Alexandra's lofty mission is "К портрету великой княгини Александры Федоровны" ("To the Portrait of Great Princess Aleksandra Feodorovna"), which is contained in his pupil's album dated November 6, 1818. In this poem Zhukovsky claims that it was for the Russian people that Fate brought Alexandra in this world and it was for the Russian people that her soul bloomed and matured. She stood in front of them like a genius of happiness and gave them everything wonderful that she had. Zhukovsky pointed out that Alexandra's youthful happiness was sweet and the spirit of greatness was growing inside her. The poet shows his conviction that she will go through her challenging path with dignity and she won't betray Russia's expectation.

Для нас рука судьбы в сей мир ее ввела;
 Для нас ее душа цвела и созревала;
 Как гений радости, она пред нами стала,
 И всё прекрасное в себе нам отдала!
 С веселой младостью мила, как упование!
 В ней дух к великому растет и возрастет;
 Она свой трудный путь с достоинством пройдет:
 В ней не обманется России ожиданье!²⁹²

[For us fate's hand brought her to this world;/ For us her soul blossomed and matured;/
 Like a genius of happiness she stood in front of us,/ And gave us everything wonderful
 that was inside her!/ She is dear with joyful youth, like hope!/ Inside her her spirit grows
 and matures for great deeds;/ She will go through her challenging path with dignity:/
 Russia's faith in her will not be betrayed!]

If Masha was Zhukovsky's "quiet angel," Alexandra was his distant goddess who carried the charming sweetness of youth, the holiness of motherly suffering and love, and the strength of a great spirit. Inspired by his adoration and devotion Zhukovsky continued on the path to spiritual self-perfection by exploring a different dimension of love—a spiritual

²⁹² Vasily Zhukovsky, "К портрету великой княгини Александры Федоровны," 1817.

union based solely on platonic admiration of the Fair Lady, and by finding more selfless expressions of his ambition and talent as an author through serving not only Alexandra and her family, but also the Russian people.

The third main experience that Zhukovsky had with love comes in the last period of his life—his “sunset love” for the young Elizabeth Reutern. The first time Zhukovsky met Elizabeth, the daughter of his German friend Gerhardt von Reutern, a veteran of the Napoleonic Wars, was when she was thirteen years old. In a letter to the Bunins, Zhukovsky wrote that when he was getting ready to leave the child threw her arms around his neck and pressed herself against him with “such unusual tenderness” that he was shocked.²⁹³ They met for a second time in 1839. Zhukovsky wrote, “Reutern’s older daughter, then nineteen years old, appeared before me like a heavenly vision which I admired to my soul’s fulfillment simply as a heavenly vision, not even allowing myself the thought that this bright spirit could descend from the heavens and merge with my life.”²⁹⁴ In 1841, nine years before his death, Zhukovsky married Elizabeth. They had two children—a girl named Alexandra and a boy named Pavel.

In Elizabeth, Zhukovsky finally finds the “bright spirit” that descended from the heavens and thus the ideal balance between the forbidden “quiet angel” Masha and the distant goddess Alexandra. Elizabeth carries the heavenly light which is necessary to illuminate the path to spiritual self perfection and the Heavenly Father, but because she is seen as descending from the heavens to earth, she becomes human and accessible. In 1840 Zhukovsky wrote the poem “Елисавете Рейтерн” (“To Elizabeth Reutern”) dedicated to

²⁹³ Ilya Vinitsky, op. cit., 35.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 36.

Elizabeth. This poem was based on a poem by Nikolaus Lenau (“Stumme Liebe”). Zhukovsky’s poem takes the form of a prayer in which he asks the Creator to let him be close to the heavenly presence and the heavenly gaze of his wife and to allow him to slowly burn and die before her just as the lamps quietly and blissfully burn before the heavenly Madonna.

О, молю тебя, создатель,
 Дай в близости ее небесной,
 Пред ее небесным взором
 И гореть и умереть мне,
 Как горит в немом блаженстве,
 Тихо, ясно угасая,
 Огонь смиренных лампады
 Пред небесною Мадонной.²⁹⁵

[I beseech you, Creator,/ Let me burn and die close to her heavenly presence,/ In front of her heavenly gaze/ As the fire of the humble icon lamp/ Burns in silent bliss,/ Quietly, clearly fading,/ In front of the heavenly Madonna.]

In the way that Zhukovsky describes his relationship with Elizabeth in this poem one can see echoes of his experiences with Masha and Alexandra. The poet wants to quietly and submissively adore the altar of Elizabeth’s heavenly aura, but he is also able to get onto the same level with her not only through their physical proximity, but also by being for her something similar to what she is for him—something he could never achieve with either one of his previous loves. She is his “bright spirit”—his light, and he is her lamp without the light of which her heavenly features would remain hidden in the darkness. Just as she illuminates his path to self perfection and the Heavenly Father, he makes her heavenly characteristics visible and lets them shine even brighter. Just as before, when the poet said that he loves not Masha’s physical beauty, but her soul, from this poem it becomes clear

²⁹⁵ Vasily Zhukovsky, “Елисавете Рейтерн,” 1840.

that Zhukovsky's adoration of his wife is not based on the earthly and the physical; it is based on the spiritual—his recognition of the beauty of her heavenly soul.

For Zhukovsky, his wife did not have only a sacred place in his personal life; she was also of crucial importance for his career as an author. In the article "Писатель в обществе" ("The Author in Society") Zhukovsky points out that for the author society is divided into two circles. The first circle is the big circle in which he goes with the sole intention of being a spectator, cold-blooded, calm and humble, without any pride, needs, and hopes. The goal of the author by going into the big circle is to obtain some new knowledge needed for his talent and to possibly influence others through his talent.²⁹⁶ The second circle is the small circle where the author is happy, where he loves and is being loved, where he is successful

²⁹⁶ "Для него человеческое общество разделено будет на два круга: один обширный, в который он входит изредка с твердою решимостию быть просто зрителем спокойным, холодным, без всяких честолюбивых требований и надежд, без всякого соперничества с людьми, желающими в нем торжествовать, равнодушный к собственным своим неудачам, желающий единственно приобретения некоторых новых понятий, некоторой образованности, необходимой его таланту; он будет не замечен, это верно; зато не будет и странен: ибо в свете находят странными одни усилия самолюбивых, бесполезно желающих отличить себя пред другими каким-нибудь превосходством; тихая скромность будет его украшением. Вся деятельность его в сем круге ограничится единственно тем влиянием, которое он может иметь на него посредством своего таланта." [For him human society is divided into two circles: one big one which he does not frequent and which he enters with the firm conviction to be only a calm, cold spectator without any ambitious needs or hopes, without any rivalry with people who wish to be victorious in it, indifferent to his own failures, wanting only to obtain a few new concepts, some education needed for his talent; he would not be noticed, this is true; and for this reason would not be strange: for in society, they find strange only the strivings of the ambitious ones, wishing to stand out before the others with some kind of advantage; quiet humbleness will be his adornment. All of his activity in this circle will be limited only to the influence he can have on it through his talent.] (Vasily Zhukovsky, "Писатель в обществе" ["The Author in Society"] in *Collected Works VI*. 4 at http://rvb.ru/19vek/zhukovsky/01text/vol4/02prose_papers/317.htm)

without any effort, where he is able to enjoy life.²⁹⁷ This circle includes his friends and his family. According to Zhukovsky the author needs family ties and that family place where he can think and love—the place that is dearest to his heart and combines all of universe’s happiness.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷ “Другой круг -- тесный, есть тот, в котором он счастлив, любим и любит, где он имеет успех без всякого усилия, не прибегая к утонченному и коварному искусству; там его уединение, где он наслаждается жизнью, в труде безмятежном и полезном, где он беседует с самим собою, где он высокими чувствами и мыслями совершенствует душу свою, где он вверяет бумаге сокровище собственных мыслей и чувств для пользы современников, быть может и для пользы потомков; там его друзья, соединенные с ним одинакою деятельностью, сходством жребия, склонностей, дарований; их строгая разборчивость его образует, их благотворное соревнование животворит в нем творческий пламень, в их искренней похвале его воздаяние и слава; там, наконец, его семейство.” [The other circle—the small one—is the one where he is happy, where he loves and is loved, where he is successful without any effort, not using refined and cunning art; there is his seclusion where he enjoys life, in calm and useful labor, where he talks to himself, where he through lofty feelings and thoughts improves his soul, where he entrusts to paper the treasures of his own thoughts and feelings for the benefit of his contemporaries, maybe for the benefit of the coming generations; there are his friends united with him through similar activities, a similarity of fate, of inclinations, of gifts; their stern fastidiousness educates him, their noble rivalry ignites creation in him, their sincere praises are his reward and fame; there after all is his family.] (Ibid.)

²⁹⁸ “Для писателя, более нежели для кого-нибудь, необходимы семейственные связи; привязанный к одному месту своими упражнениями, он должен около себя находить те удовольствия, которые природа сделала необходимыми для души человеческой; в уединенном жилище своем, после продолжительного умственного труда, он должен слышать трогательный голос своих любезных; он должен в кругу их отдыхать, в кругу их находить новые силы для новой работы; не имея вдали ничего, достойного искания, он должен вблизи, около себя, соединить все драгоценнейшее для его сердца; вселенная, со всеми ее радостями, должна быть заключена в той мирной обители, где он мыслит и где он любит.” [The author more so than anyone else needs family connections; tied to one place through his activities he needs to be able to surround himself with pleasures, which nature made necessary to the human soul; in his secluded home, after prolonged mental labor, he needs to listen to the dear voice of his beloved ones; he needs to relax amongst them, and amongst them find new strength for new work; not having anything worth pursuing far away, he needs to bring closer around himself and unite everything and everyone that is the dearest to his heart; this universe with all its happiness needs to be locked in this peaceful abode where he thinks and loves.] (Ibid.)

The letter that Zhukovsky left his wife before he died on Easter Day, April 12, 1851 becomes the strongest testament of the poet's appreciation of the way his wife and their marriage made him a better, more moral, and talented person and author and illuminated his way along the challenging path to the Heavenly Father, "Thinking that my last hour could be close I'm writing to you and would like to say a few comforting words. More than anything, from the depths of my soul, I would like to thank you for agreeing to become my wife; the time that I spent in our union was the best and the happiest in my life. Despite the many sad minutes caused by external factors or by us—and from which no one's life is free, for they serve as good challenges for it—with you I enjoyed life to the fullest meaning of this word; I better understood its value and became firmer in the pursuit of its goal, which is nothing other than learning to obey God's will. This I owe to you; accept my gratitude and with that the promise that I loved you as the most valuable treasure of my soul."²⁹⁹

In this section I will discuss Zhukovsky's relationship with Fouqué and will provide a summary of Fouqué's work *Undine*, which Zhukovsky translated. Zhukovsky admired the talent not only of Russian authors, such as his student Pushkin, but also of foreign,

²⁹⁹“В мысли, что мой последний час, может быть, близок, я пишу тебе и хочу сказать несколько слов утешения. Прежде всего, из глубины моей души благодарю тебя за то, что ты пожелала стать моей женою; время, которое я провел в нашем союзе, было счастливейшим и лучшим в моей жизни. Несмотря на многие грустные минуты, происшедшие от внешних причин или от нас самих — и от которых не может быть свободна ничья жизнь, ибо они служат для нее благодетельными испытаниями, — я с тобою наслаждался жизнью в полном смысле этого слова; я лучше понял ее цену и становился все тверже в стремлении к ее цели, которая состоит не в чем ином, как в том, чтобы научиться повиноваться воле господней. Этим я обязан тебе; прими же мою благодарность и вместе с тем уверение, что я любил тебя, как лучшее сокровище души моей.” (Natalia Litvinova, *Любовь моя безгрешна* [*My flawless love*] at <http://www.rulit.me/books/lyubov-moya-bezgrishna-read-143204-9.html>. 9.)

especially German authors. As mentioned before Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué was one of the favorite authors of both Zhukovsky and of his beloved Alexandra Feodorovna and through his works they got introduced to what became the model of their relationship—the chivalrous knight’s cult for his Fair Lady. In her article ““Ундина” в переводе В. А. Жуковского и русская культура” (“Undina” translated by V. A. Zhukovsky and Russian culture”) E. V. Landa claims that Zhukovsky put Fouqué on the same level with Goethe, Schiller, and Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg (Novalis), and defined his works as a multitude of wonderfulness (“многое множество прекрасного”).³⁰⁰ The main thing that he valued in authors such as Goethe, Schiller, and Fouqué, was that they learned from the great authors before them, but did not imitate them and created their own original works.³⁰¹ The first time Zhukovsky and Fouqué met was in Berlin towards the end of 1820. They never became close friends. The first impression that Zhukovsky had of Fouqué as a person, found in his “Diary”, was very different from the impression he had of Fouqué as an author. Zhukovsky said that in Fouqué’s face there was nothing that attracted attention. He had lively eyes, but he also had talent and talent is capable of igniting the imagination to write something wonderful, but this is not a permanent state and depends on the situation and on the ability to find inspiration. Zhukovsky pointed out that the person and the author are not one and the same and the face rarely expresses what the author feels and thinks.

³⁰⁰ E. V. Landa, ““Ундина” в переводе В. А. Жуковского и русская культура” (“Undina translated by V. A. Zhukovsky and Russian culture”) at http://az.lib.ru/z/zhukowskij_w_a/text_0150.shtml

³⁰¹ “Но воспитанники прежних, а не подражатели чужим в своем веке. Таких оригинальных авторов в наше время немного: Гете, Шиллер, Фуке” [Students of the previous authors, and not imitators alienated from their time. Our time does not know many such original authors: Goethe, Shiller, Fouqué.] (Ibid.)

Their conversation was short and consisted of exchanging compliments.³⁰² That was the first and last time the two authors met.³⁰³

Before Zhukovsky and Fouqué met in Berlin Zhukovsky had read many of Fouqué's works, but the 1811 fairy-tale novella *Undine* left such a lasting impression on him that in 1836 Zhukovsky published his own translation of it called *Undina*. Fouqué's work was inspired by the French folk-tale *Melusine*, which was translated in German by Thüring von Ringoltingen in 1456. The young girl Melusine was punished by her mother Pressyne for disrespecting her father and was condemned to turn into a serpent from the waist down every Saturday. Acquiring the serpent tail is seen as the equivalent of becoming a mermaid. The human knight, Raymond of Poitou, proposed marriage to Melusine and she agreed under the condition that he would not see her on Saturdays. Raymond eventually broke his promise and saw his wife as a mermaid, but she forgave him. During an argument the angry Raymond allowed himself to call Melusine "a serpent" in front of the court, to which she responded by turning into a dragon and flying away.³⁰⁴

³⁰² "В лице Ла-Мотта Фуке, - записал Жуковский в "Дневнике" свое первое впечатление от облика немецкого писателя, - нет ничего, останавливающего внимание. Есть живость в глазах: он имеет талант, и талант необыкновенный, он способен, разгорячив воображение, написать прекрасное; но это не есть всегдашнее, зависит от расположения, находит вдохновением; автор и человек не одно, и лицо его мало изображает того, что чувствует и мыслит автор в некоторые минуты. Разговор наш состоял из комплиментов и продолжался недолго." [In Fouqué's face—wrote Zhukovsky in "Diary" about his first impression of the German author—there is nothing that attracts attention. There is liveliness in his eyes; he has talent, and unusual talent, he is capable, kindling his imagination, to write something wonderful; but this is not all the time it depends on the mood to find inspiration; the author and the person are not the same, and the face expresses very little of what the author feels and thinks at some points. Our conversation consisted of a few compliments and did not last long.] (Ibid.)

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Boria Sax, *The Serpent and the Swan: The Animal Bride in Folklore and Literature* (Blacksburg, VA: The McDonald and Woodward Publishing Company, 1998), 62-65.

Fouqué's work *Undine* consists of a dedication and nineteen chapters. It tells the story of the water spirit Undine and her beloved human knight Huldbrand. It is written in prose. The story begins with a good "pious old fisherman"³⁰⁵ who lived with his "aged wife" by a lake. One evening a young knight emerged from the deep shadows of the wood and "came riding toward the cottage." The fisherman invited the knight inside to spend the night at the cottage where he met "a beautiful, fair girl" who "glided laughing into the room"—Undine. From the first moment they saw each other, Huldbrand and Undine could not take their eyes off each other, "she perceived the knight, and stood fixed with astonishment before the handsome youth, Huldbrand was struck with her charming appearance, and dwelt the more earnestly on her lovely features..." The "beautiful little vision" sat next to Huldbrand, while he was trying to not notice how mischievous and naughty her ways could be. Not being pleased with the conversation, Undine "stamped her pretty little foot", got very mad and violent, jumped up from her little stool and ran away into the dark night.

The fisherman told Huldbrand the story of how Undine first came to the cottage fifteen years ago. God had given them a "wonderfully beautiful child"—a little girl. One evening when the fisherman came home his wife met him "with tearful eyes and clad in mourning." They were playing by the edge of the lake and suddenly the little girl, "as if attracted by something very beautiful in the water" bent over and disappeared in the lake. They could never find the body. That same evening they were sitting in the cottage and suddenly they "heard something rustling outside the door: it flew open, and a beautiful little girl three or four years old, richly dressed, stood on the threshold smiling at" them. The fisherman and

³⁰⁵ All quotes from *Undine* are taken from The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Undine* by Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3714/3714-h/3714-h.htm>

his wife decided to adopt the little girl in place of the one they just lost and she “was therefore baptized 'Undine'.” While the fisherman was telling the story, a storm began outside and the two men went out hoping to find the beautiful fugitive.

Huldbrand found Undine and brought her back to the cottage where he shared with everyone that about eight days ago he went into an imperial city where he met a beautiful noble lady— Bertalda, whom he fell in love with. She dared him to go into the wild forest where he followed a white path that eventually lead him to the fisherman’s cottage.

Huldbrand settled in the cottage and got used to living with the fisherman, his old wife, and the beautiful Undine. One evening an “aged priest” came to the cottage and Huldbrand, being aware of his feelings for the beautiful Undine, and seeing her feelings for him, asked the priest to marry them. The priest married Undine and Huldbrand. On the day after the wedding Undine was very changed, “She then rose, kissed her foster-parents, and thanking them for all the goodness they had shown her, she exclaimed: "Oh! I now feel in my innermost heart, how much, how infinitely much, you have done for me, dear, kind people!" Everyone wondered how that complete transformation happened. Undine shared with her husband Huldbrand that she belonged to the world of the water spirits—beautiful and joyful beings that lived in the underwater realm. They looked like humans, but lacked an essential element that every human has—a soul. Since these beings did not have human souls their journey ended with their physical death. Undine’s father sent her away when she was a little girl hoping that she would be able to live in the human world and “obtain a soul by the closest union of affection with one of [Huldbrand’s] human race.” Through her union with Huldbrand Undine obtained a human soul, for which she promised she would

be forever grateful to her husband. Undine and Huldbrand decided to leave the fisherman and his wife and to go back to Huldbrand's castle.

On the way to Huldbrand's castle they stopped at the imperial city where Huldbrand met the charming Bertalda. Undine did not see Bertalda as her rival, but rather as her dear friend and even proposed to Bertalda's foster parents to let her accompany them on their way to the castle Ringstetten. At the gathering for Bertalda's name day Undine revealed that the old fisherman and his wife were Bertalda's real parents and she was the beautiful little girl who they lost in the lake many years ago. The proud Bertalda "amazed and indignant, Bertalda tore herself from their embrace" blaming Undine that she was lying. Undine's newly obtained soul was bleeding from the unjust and malicious way Bertalda was acting towards her real parents and towards Undine, calling her "enchantress...a witch, who has intercourse with evil spirits" and said that she "knew nothing of [her] foolish habits and [her] heartless mode of thinking, and [she] shall never all [her] life long become accustomed to them." Huldbrand realized that if he had really given his wife a soul, he had given her one "a better one than [his] own."

The fisherman refused to take his daughter Bertalda to his cottage until she had changed her proud and unfair ways, and so the angelic Undine invited her to go to castle Ringstetten with them. Despite the fact that Undine treated her as a sister and showed her nothing but kindness, Bertalda could not suppress the "sense of dread that seemed to come between her and her friend, and at their evening repast she could not but wonder how the knight could behave so lovingly and kindly toward a being who appeared to her, since the discovery she had just made, more of a phantom than a human being."

After the arrival of the three young people at the castle the story takes a tragic turn. The author skips “a considerable space of time” in order to get to the point when “Huldbrand's heart began to turn from Undine to Bertalda;...Bertalda more and more responded with ardent affection to the young knight, and...they both looked upon the poor wife as a mysterious being rather to be feared than pitied;...Undine wept, and...her tears stung the knight's heart with remorse without awakening his former love, so that though he at times was kind and endearing to her, a cold shudder would soon draw him from her, and he would turn to his fellow-mortal, Bertalda.” Undine placed a stone over the castle's well so her uncle would not be able to come in and harm Bertalda and Huldbrand for the way they were making his niece suffer. Undine also warned her husband that he should never “let [his] fury rise, and [his] eyes flash and [his] voice get angry...toward [her] on the water, or even when [they] are near it” because if he did so her relatives would take her away from him forever.

Undine's uncle tried to harm Bertalda and Huldbrand at the Black Valley, but Undine rescued them. “After this last adventure, they lived quietly and happily at the castle. The knight more and more perceived the heavenly goodness of his wife” and “Bertalda...showed herself grateful, humble and timid, without regarding her conduct as anything meritorious.” The three of them planned a trip on the Danube. One day Bertalda was holding a necklace that was given to her as a gift by Huldbrand over the water and suddenly a hand came out and snatched the necklace away. Bertalda started weeping and Undine's sweet words and beautiful gifts could not console her. Huldbrand, forgetting Undine's warning, exclaimed to his wife “in passionate rage: "Have you then still a connection with them? In the name of all the witches, remain among them with your

presents, and leave us mortals in peace, you sorceress!" "Poor Undine gazed at him with fixed but tearful eyes... began to weep more and more...and vanished over the side of the vessel."

For a while Bertalda and Huldbrand lived quietly in the castle overwhelmed by sadness and wept over Undine's loss, but the knight's fear of solitude and the empty castle resurrected his old affection for the charming Bertalda and he asked the fisherman for Bertalda's hand. The fisherman agreed and they sent a letter to the priest who had married Huldbrand and Undine in the past. Upon getting the letter the priest hurried to the castle, hoping that he could still prevent the evil. When he got to the castle he shared with Huldbrand that "for a fortnight past she [Undine] has stood at [his] bedside at night in [his] dreams, wringing her tender hands in anguish and sighing out: 'Oh, prevent him, good father! I am still living! oh, save his life! save his soul!'" Everyone ignored the priest's warning and they found someone else to perform the ceremony in a few days. Before his wedding the knight had a dream in which he witnessed a conversation between Undine and her uncle and found out that if he "marries again and is unfaithful to [Undine], [she is] in duty bound to take away his life." Undine's second warning, just like the first one, did not change the knight's decision to marry Bertalda.

Bertalda and Huldbrand got married, and before she joined her husband for their first night together Bertalda ordered for the stone that Undine put over the castle's well to be lifted. A pale female figure in a white veil came out of the well and while "weeping bitterly, raising her hands wailingly above her head and wringing them" she walked to Huldbrand's bedroom. The white figure opened the door and told the knight that they had opened the well and he must die. "Her lovely face smiled forth divinely beautiful. Trembling with love

and with the approach of death, she kissed him with a holy kiss; but not relaxing her hold she pressed him fervently to her, and as if she would weep away her soul. Tears rushed into the knight's eyes, and seemed to surge through his heaving breast, till at length his breathing ceased, and he fell softly back from the beautiful arms of Undine, upon the pillows of his couch—a corpse.” While making her way out Undine told some servants that she had wept him to death.

On the day of the funeral “a snow-white figure was seen, closely veiled, and wringing her hands with fervent sorrow” showed amongst the funeral procession and slowly made her way to the front. When everyone knelt by Huldbrand’s grave the white stranger disappeared and “on the spot where she had knelt there gushed out of the turf a little silver spring, which rippled and murmured away till it had almost entirely encircled the knight's grave; then it ran further and emptied itself into a lake which lay by the side of the burial-place. Even to this day the inhabitants of the village show the spring, and cherish the belief that it is the poor rejected Undine, who in this manner still embraces her husband in her loving arms.”

In the third section I will focus on Zhukovsky’s work *Undina* and I will specifically discuss the way the poet builds and presents the character of Undina in a manner that is unique in Russian literature- as a hybrid between a human soul and an inhuman essence of a water spirit that takes the unusual role of a protagonist instead of the traditional role of an antagonist. I will show that the uniqueness of the character is due to the fact that in *Undina* Zhukovsky’s combined his ideas and dreams of the ideal female figure and his need and hope for one, rather than simply translating from Fouqué’s work the ideas which

were influenced by German Romanticism. I will show that Zhukovsky's work is an original work unique to Russian culture and literature by highlighting the differences between Fouqué's and Zhukovsky's works both in form and content and by discussing Zhukovsky's contemporaries' reactions to his work.

The way Zhukovsky develops the main female character in *Undina* is very different from what can be seen in the works of some of his Russian contemporaries such as Pushkin and Lermontov. Even though Zhukovsky's work focuses on an undina and Lermontov's and Pushkin's works focus on a rusalka, the general idea behind these supernatural characters is the same. *Undine* is a term that appears in the alchemical writings of Paracelsus and is derived from the Latin word *unda*, which means "wave."³⁰⁶ Undine, or Undina in Russian, is a supernatural female figure that is associated with water and seen as a water spirit. The undinas do not have souls. They are beautiful girls that live in bodies of water— rivers, lakes, seas, oceans. Some of them have fish tails. Often they come out, comb their long hair, and using their beauty and songs lure men in.³⁰⁷ The undina can acquire an immortal human soul if, according to some versions she marries a human male, and according to other versions she has a child with a human male.³⁰⁸ The undinas have power over water and can change the weather. They are seen as the Germano-Scandinavian equivalent of the Slavic rusalki.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁶ Carole G. Silver, *Strange and Secret Peoples: Fairies and Victorian Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 40.

³⁰⁷ Theresa Bane, *Encyclopedia of Fairies in World Folklore and Mythology* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2013), 352.

³⁰⁸ Barbara F. Fass, "The Little Mermaid and the Artist's Quest for a Soul" in *Comparative Literature Studies*: Vol. 9, No. 3 (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1972), 291-302 at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40246020>

³⁰⁹ Theresa Bane, op. cit.

According to the critics, when the Russian readers were introduced to Zhukovsky's *Undina* for a first time, they were astonished by her character and by the plot, both of which were very unique when compared to the traditional beliefs and ideas they had about the water spirit. The idea of a relationship between a rusalka and a human was not new to the Russian reader. There were plenty of stories and legends about ghostly naked beauties that called men, tempted them, made them follow them, and then played mean tricks on them, which eventually lead to the men's death. In *Undina* the reader saw a completely different story—the rusalka came to the man in order to get married following the sacred rituals and traditions of Christianity in order to get what is considered the most precious gift that humans have—an immortal soul.³¹⁰ *Undina* is an embodiment of mysterious and inexplicable otherworldly forces because of her inhuman essence as a water spirit, but also of the pure heavenly beauty and depth of the human soul that is not susceptible to the human flaws that come with having a human essence. Zhukovsky, unlike most of his contemporaries and fellow male authors in Russia, does not create *Undina* in order to place her into a marginalized category and to reject her as the antagonist. Zhukovsky treats *Undina*—the Other—as the Other was treated at that time in many European countries, especially Germany—as a celebration of the complexity of women, of their roles as arbiters of morality and guardians of the hearth, and also “a representation of the new awareness of, and on occasion reverence for, the creative powers of women.”³¹¹

³¹⁰ Ilya Vinitsky, op. cit., 45.

³¹¹ Catriona Kelly, “The ‘Feminine Pen’ and the Imagination of National Tradition: Russian Women's Writing, 1820-1880” in *A History of Russian Women's Writing 1820-1992* (Oxford: New York: Clarendon Press, 1994), 19-79.

One could argue that this was just a consequence of Zhukovsky merely translating the work of the German author Fouqué. However, this assumption would be wrong because Zhukovsky's work is an original work of Russian literature different in many aspects from the German work. In order to illustrate this I will first discuss the already existing evidence that Zhukovsky's *Undina* is recognized as an independent work and is in many ways different from Fouqué's original *Undine*. Then I will provide my own contribution to the already existing commentary as to why Zhukovsky's work is an original and unique Russian work. I argue that the uniqueness of the character of Undina is due to the fact that in her character Zhukovsky combined his personal experiences with love and his hopes and ideas of an ideal partner who would help him advance throughout the challenging path to spiritual self-growth and perfection

In 1835 and in 1837 the first translated fragments of Fouqué's *Undine* appeared in "Библиотека для Чтения" ("Library for Reading"). At the beginning, just a few excerpts from the first three chapters were published. Later, the whole text of the translation, including chapters four to ten were published. Zhukovsky read Fouqué's *Undine* long before the publication of the translation. In letters from August 1816 Zhukovsky asked Turgenev multiple times to send him a copy of *Undine* because he really needed it—and indeed, the book was "necessary for my Muse."³¹² In September, after asking again,

³¹² "Купи мне и поскорее пришли "Ундину". Весьма, весь-ма, одолжишь. Она мне очень нужна" [Buy *Undine* and send it to me soon. You will be doing me a big favor. I need it a lot.]

(E. V. Landa, op. cit.)

"Опять повторяю просьбу об Ундине. Она продается и отдельно, и с другими повестями, напечатанными в 4-х книжках под титулом "Die Jahreszeiten" (журнал, издававшийся Фуке). Купи для меня все, если найдешь. Очень, очень буду обязан. Чтобы раззадорить тебя, скажу, что эта книжка нужна моей Музе." [Again I repeat my request about Undine. It is sold separately and with other novels

Zhukovsky finally got a copy of *Undine*. In a letter from 1817 to D.V.Dashkov, a younger friend from Moscow, Zhukovsky mentions that he is planning on translating Fouqué's novella not as prose, but as poetry,³¹³ which can be explained by a statement he makes in his article "About the refined in art" ("Об изящном в искусстве") where he points out that one of the most beautiful things about poetry and translating poetry is harmony, which disappears in prose or cannot be replaced by the harmony specific to prose.³¹⁴ For his *Undina*, Zhukovsky chose dactylic hexameter, or as he called it "fairytale hexameter" ("сказочный гекзаметр"), and explained this choice in letters to Dmitriev and Kireevsky. In a letter to I. I. Dmitriev from March 12, 1837, accompanied by a special copy of *Undina*, Zhukovsky emphasized his fondness for the hexameter, its diversity, and the opportunity it gives the author to write about a wide variety of subjects.³¹⁵ In a letter to Kireevsky Zhukovsky pointed out that his "fairytale hexameter" embodies the perfect connection

printed in 4 books under the title "Die Jahreszeiten" (journal published by Fouqué). Buy them all for me if you find them, I will very very much appreciate it. This book is needed to my Muse.] (Ibid.)

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ "Одна из главных прелестей поэзии, о переводах вообще и в особенности о переводах стихов", - состоит в гармонии, в прозе она исчезает, или не может быть заменена тою гармониею, которая свойственна прозе." [One of the most wonderful things about poetry, about translation in general and in specific poetry translation of poetry—is in the harmony, in prose it disappears, or can not be replaced with the harmony specific to prose.] (Ibid.)

³¹⁵ "Я их люблю; я уверен, что никакой метр не имеет столько разнообразия, не может быть столько удобен как для высокого, так и для самого простого слога. И не должно думать, чтобы этим метром, избавленным от рифм, писать было легко. Я знаю по опыту, как трудно. Это вы знаете лучше меня, что именно то, что кажется простым, выпрыгнувшим прямо из головы на бумагу, стоит наибольшего труда." [I love them (hexameters); I'm convinced that no other meter has so much diversity, or can be so comfortable for both the high and the low registers. And don't think that with this meter, having no rhyme, it was easy to write. I know based on experience how difficult it was. You know better than I that what appears to be simple, jumping straight from the head to the paper, is the most challenging to accomplish.] (Vasily Zhukovsky, *Полное*, op. cit., 484)

between prose and poetry.³¹⁶ Zhukovsky said that the one who is translating in prose is a slave, and the one who is translating in poetry is a rival.³¹⁷ By transforming Fouqué's prose into beautiful harmonious poetry carrying the melodious magic of his "fairytale hexameter", Zhukovsky firmly stated that he is not merely a slave to the original work; he became Fouqué's rival who created a completely different original work that reflected not only his identity as an author, but also his life, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and convictions.

The two works differ not only in their form. Another main aspect in which they are different is content. Even though in his translation Zhukovsky kept Fouqué's main plot line, the poet changed the way he developed some of the characters, the main one of which is Undina. Zhukovsky skillfully used the harmony of poetry, the beauty, power, and richness of the Russian language, and his own personal experiences to build a different Undina—much deeper, more complex, more appealing, charming, and touching.

If the work is divided into two main parts—the beginning to the wedding and the wedding to the end—it can be said that Zhukovsky changes and adds to Fouqué's Undine in each part in order to achieve a specific goal. The critics have noticed that in the first part Fouqué's and Zhukovsky's conceptions of Undina differ and Zhukovsky softens Undine's sternness, capriciousness, and rudeness, turning her into a mischievous, spontaneous, and stubborn child. When we meet Fouqué's Undine for a first time before she obtains a soul she is presented as an evil and spoiled water spirit without much emotional depth or appeal. When the old fisherman says that Huldbrand should not tell them about the forest

³¹⁶ Iu. D. Levin, "В. А. Жуковский и проблема переводной поэзии" ("V. A. Zhukovsky and the problems of translated poetry") at http://az.lib.ru/z/zhukowskij_w_a/text_0570.shtml.

³¹⁷ "переводчик в прозе есть раб, переводчик в стихах—соперник." (Ibid.)

“Undine...sprang angrily from her little stool, and standing straight before the fisherman with her fair arms fixed in her sides, she exclaimed: "He shall not tell his story, father? He shall not? but it is my will. He shall! He shall in spite of you!" and thus saying she stamped her pretty little foot vehemently on the floor.” Fouqué describes the way Undine runs out into the night as “swift as an arrow she flew from the room, and fled into the dark night.” Later, when Undine bites Huldbrand’s finger while he is praising Bertalda’s beauty all Fouqué says about her emotional state is that she is “appearing at the same time very gloomy and angry”.³¹⁸

Zhukovsky’s Undina is not angry and she does not put her arms on her sides in a threatening and demanding manner. The poet also takes out the repetitive command “He shall” and the spoiled statement “This is my will.” He also takes out the adjective “vehemently” characterizing the way Undina stamps her foot on the floor. The way he presents the upset Undina is childishly charming. She jumps up, her eyes start shining, her little eyebrows wrinkle and she stabs her little foot on the floor.³¹⁹

Услышавши это, с места вскочила Ундина, и глазки ее засверкали,
 "Нынче, не завтра он должен рассказывать! нынче, теперь же!"—
 Вскрикнула с сердцем она и, бровки угрюмо нахмутив,
 Топнула маленькой ножкою об пол;

[Upon hearing this Undina jumped from her seat and her eyes sparkled,/ “No, he will not tell us tomorrow! Now! Right now!”—/ She cried from her heart and furrowing her eyebrows angrily/ She stomped her little foot on the floor;]

Zhukovsky also eliminates the expression “swift as an arrow” from the description of how Undina ran away from the hut, since it carries a cold, threatening, negative connotation.

³¹⁸ E. V. Landa, op. cit.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

He uses the word “прыгнула” which means “jumped” and is a verb that implies an impulsive, childish action.³²⁰

Тут Ундина сказала:

"Если браниться хотите со мной, а того не хотите
Сделать, о чем я прошу, так прощайте ж; одни оставайтесь
В вашей скучной, дымной лачужке". С сими словами
Прыгнула в двери она и в минуту во мраке пропала.

[Here Undina said:/ “If you want to fight with me, and you don’t want to/ do as I say then
goodbye, stay by yourselves/ In your boring smokey hut.” With these words/ She jumped
to the door and disappeared in the darkness.]

Zhukovsky also changes the description of the “gloomy and angry” Undine that bites Huldbrand’s finger. He takes out the phrase “gloomy and angry” out and provides a more poetic and beautiful description that gives Undina’s emotional state depth and complexity—she angrily wrinkles her eyebrows and there are tears that sparkle and float in her eyes.³²¹

В эту минуту почувствовал рыцарь
Сильную боль в опущенной левой руке; оглянувшись,
Видит он, что Ундина, жемчужными зубками стиснув
Палец ему, сердито нахмурила бровки, и в глазках,
Ярко светившихся, бегали слезки

[At this minute the knight felt/ Strong pain in his lowered left hand; looking around,/ He
saw that Undina with her pearly teeth had bitten/ his finger, angrily furrowing her
eyebrows, and in her eyes,/ brightly sparkling there were tears]

Up to the point when Undina marries Huldbrand when the poet describes her he constantly uses endearing diminutives such as "бровки" (“little eyebrows”), "глазки" (“little eyes”),

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid.

"маленькая ножка" ("little foot"), and the word "child" ("дитя"). Zhukovsky, unlike Fouqué, gives the internal motivation for her mischievous actions up to the wedding: her mischief and rebellious nature are an expression of her childishness ("все шалости, непокорность—проявление ее 'детской запальчивости'") and her being a child is the reason for Undina's upsetting behavior and her inability to understand that she is hurting others. According to E. V. Landa this metamorphosis of the Undina character, the embodiment of the power of the elements, is related to Zhukovsky's and Fouqué's contrasting views on nature and its power. The uncontrollable power of the elements is depicted by Zhukovsky as a mischievous child who does not have the ability to understand in a mature way love and compassion—feelings characteristic only of the human heart. For Fouqué, in contrast, nature is indifferent to the sufferings of the human beings and he depicts the power of the elements as merciless, evil, and sometimes destructive.³²²

Landa has noted that in the second part of the work—the wedding to the end, Zhukovsky presents Undina's transformation from a mischievous child into an embodiment of the idea of the ideal harmonic femininity in a much more detailed and poetic way than Fouqué. Zhukovsky paints a much fuller deeper picture of Undina's thoughts and feelings so the reader can take with her every little step on her way to maturity and personal growth. He provides many original, poetically astonishing descriptions of Undina's internal world and how it blossoms and turns into a beautiful rose, how it rejoices under the rays of love, kindness, and devotion, and how it bleeds in pain and misery when she is being rejected or hurt or she knows that she is hurting others. The critics point out that in order to represent the full scope of Undina's emotional wealth, and show all the colors in the palette that

³²² Ibid.

represents her feelings, Zhukovsky often uses oxymorons. Zhukovsky calls Undina “sweet to the point of torment” (“мучительно-милым”) and describes the effect she has on Huldbrand’s soul as “painfully pleasurable” (“болезненно сладкою”).³²³

One of the most poetically astonishing descriptions of Undina’s soul, original to Zhukovsky’s work, is given on the day after the wedding when Undina shined like a heavenly vision with the purity of an angel, the agility of a newborn, the shyness of a little girl, the freshness of a flower, the variability of a stream. The poet concludes that Undina was not comparable to anything; she was sweet and gentle to the point of torture—a wonderful being—and her beauty penetrated and melted Huldbrand’s soul just like the beauty of spring and the magic of sounds or the painfully sweet thoughts that sometimes fill us.³²⁴

...Но мирной сей жизни была душою Ундина.
В этом жилище, куда суеты не входили, каким-то
Райским виденьем сияла она: чистота херувима,
Резвость младенца, застенчивость девы,

...
Свежесть цветка...
Словом, Ундина была несравненным, мучительно-милым,
Чудным созданием; и прелесть ее проницала, томила
Душу Гульбранда, как прелесть весны, как волшебство
Звуков, когда мы так полны болезненно сладкою думой,...

[But Undina was the soul of this peaceful life./ In this home where vanities did not enter/
She shined like some heavenly vision: the purity of an angel,/ the playfulness of a child,
the shyness of a young girl,/.../the freshness of a flower.../In a word Undina was
uncomparable, sweet to the point of torture,/ A wonderful being; and her charm
penetrated, softened/ Huldbrand’s soul, like spring’s beauty, like the magic/ of sounds
when we’re full of such bitter sweet thoughts...]

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Ibid.

Zhukovsky also created the poetically wonderful comparison between the carefree way Undina loved and the way a bird flies in the clear sky.³²⁵

Но Ундина любила—любила беспечно, как любит
Птичка, летая средь чистого неба.

[But Undina loved—loved in a carefree way, the way a bird loves,/ flying in the clear sky.]

Zhukovsky also modified in a beautiful way Undina's speech when she expresses her gratitude to her husband Huldbrand for giving her a soul. In Fouqué's text Undina says, "Still, I would not retain you by deceit" while Zhukovsky's phrase reads, "Но обманом/ Сердце твое сохранить она не хотела" ["But with a lie/ Your heart she didn't want to keep"]. Zhukovsky inserts the word "heart" in his text which adds additional emotional depth and complexity.³²⁶

И, милый, отныне
Я с душою навеки; тебе одному благодарна
Я за нее и тебе ж благодарна останусь, когда ты
Жизнь не осудишь мою на вечное горе. Что будет
С бедной Ундиной, когда ты покинешь ее? Но обманом
Сердце твое сохранить она не хотела.

[And, dear one, I will have a soul forever from now on;/ For it I'll remain grateful to you even if you/ Surrender my life to eternal misery. What will happen/ To poor Undina, when you leave her? But with a lie/ she didn't want your heart to keep.]

Poetically unique and beautiful in Zhukovsky's text are also the descriptions of Undina's reaction to Bertalda's accusation that she is a witch without a soul. Zhukovsky

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Ibid.

paints the picture of a pure heavenly angel with heavenly innocence in her peaceful eyes who does not know anything about the hellish evil.³²⁷

О нет,—Ундина воскликнула с чистым
Небом невинности в мирных очах,—никогда чародейкой
Я не была; мне неведомо адское зло".

[Oh no—Undina exclaimed with pure/ heavenly innocence in her peaceful eyes—never a witch/ had I been; Hell's evil is unknown to me.]

Undina realizes that love, happiness, and joy are very similar and can not be separated, and understanding them and learning from them requires a human soul.³²⁸

...он (Струй. - Е. Л.) мне, упрямый, не верит; в бездушной
Бедной жизни своей никогда не будет способен
Он постигнуть того, что в любви и страданье и радость
Так пленительно сходны, так близко родня, что разрознить
Их никакая сила не может...

[...he (Strui), the stubborn one, refuses to believe me; in his soul-less/ Poor life he could never be able to/ understand that love, suffering, and joy/ Are so charmingly similar, so closely kindred, that/ No force can separate them...]

Zhukovsky's heartbreaking descriptions of Undina's suffering reveal even further the richness and the depth of her emotions. Fouqué describes Undine's disappearance in the lake after Huldbrand's cruel words in the following way, "Poor Undine gazed at him with fixed but tearful eyes, her hand still stretched out, as when she had offered her beautiful present so lovingly to Bertalda. She then began to weep more and more violently, like a dear innocent child bitterly afflicted. At last, wearied out she said: "Alas, sweet friend, alas! farewell! They shall do you no harm; only remain true, so that I may be able to keep them

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Ibid.

from you. I must, alas! go away; I must go hence at this early stage of life. Oh woe, woe! what have you done! Oh woe, woe!"... Soon, however, she was completely lost sight of in the Danube; only a few little waves kept whispering, as if sobbing, round the boat, and they almost seemed to be saying: "Oh woe, woe! oh remain true! oh woe!" Zhukovsky's description is much richer and deeper. He describes the poor Undina as "pale and killed by fear" with a "fixed glance full of tears" that she placed on Huldbrand. She started weeping like a dear, sweet child who was viciously punished without fault and spoke with a voice, exhausted with sadness. Zhukovsky then adds that she kept crying for so long as if she wanted to cry her soul out.³²⁹

Бледная, страхом убитая, взор неподвижный, но полный
Слез устремив на Гульбранда, Ундина его слова роковые
Слушала; вдруг начала, как милый ребенок, который
Был без вины жестоко наказан, с тяжким рыданием
Плакать и вот что сказала потом истощенным от горя
Голосом: "Ах, мой сладостный друг! ах, прости невозвратно!
Их не бойся; останься лишь верен, чтоб было мне можно
Зло от тебя отворотить. Но меня уводят; отсюда
Прочь мне должно на всю молодую жизнь... о мой милый,
Что ты сделал! ах, что ты сделал! о горе! о горе!..."
Плакала, плакала тихо, плакала долго, как будто выплакать душу хотела

[Pale, stricken by fear, with motionless glance, full of/ tears focused on Huldbrand, Undina listened to his hurtful words/ And then suddenly like a dear child who/ was sternly punished without being guilty, with heavy sobbing/ Began to cry and said with a voice weary with sorrow:/ "Oh, my sweet friend! Oh, farewell forever!/ Don't be afraid of them, stay assured that I can/ Save you from evil. But they're taking me away./ I have to be away for all of my young life...oh my dear,/ What did you do! Oh, what did you do! Oh grief! Oh grief!/ She cried, cried quietly cried at length, as if she wanted to cry her soul out.]

³²⁹ Ibid.

Fouqué describes Undine's departure from the castle after she kills Huldbrand in the following way, "‘I have wept him to death,’ said she to some servants who met her in the ante-chamber; and, passing through the affrighted group, she went slowly out toward the fountain." Zhukovsky once again adds more depth to the character of Undina by describing her as a "mute, sad shadow" that with "quiet, light steps" descended into the depths of the fountain and disappeared.³³⁰

"Я до смерти его ушлакала", - встреченным ею
 Людям за дверью сказала Ундина и тихим, воздушным
 Шагом по двору, мимо Бертальды, мимо стоявших
 В страхе работников, прямо прошла к колодцу, безгласной,
 Грустной тенью спустилась в его глубину и пропала.

[‘I cried him to death’—said she/ to the people she met behind the door and with quiet, airy/ steps along the yard, past Bertal’da, past all the workers/ standing around in fear, she walked to the well, and as a quiet/ sad shadow descended into its depths and disappeared.]

Another proof of the fact that Zhukovsky's *Undina* must be seen as an original Russian work, beyond the differences in the formats and the contents of the two works, is the reactions Zhukovsky's contemporaries had to *Undina* when the work came out. Zhukovsky's work was immediately recognized and praised by his contemporaries as an original Russian work. The first detailed review of *Undina*, written by P. A. Pletnev in Ruskii invalid, came out in April after Zhukovsky's work was published. Pletnev was the first one to separate Zhukovsky's *Undina* from Fouqué's *Undine* and to point out that they are two very different works. Pletnev pointed out that the Russians in this case would be much more fortunate than the Germans because Zhukovsky gave *Undina* a place in the world of literature that it did not have before, which separated it from the German work

³³⁰ Ibid.

and showed the difference between the two authors.³³¹ Turning prose into poetry, according to Pletnev, gave “objects” the opportunity to show their innate loveliness, to expose the power and the glow of the images, and the flexible, true sounds related to poetry.³³² According to Pletnev *Undina* owed her better existence to Zhukovsky.³³³ In the 1850s Dostoevsky said that once a translation becomes an integral and eternal part of the country’s literature, it is no longer a translation and that the Russians will never forget the name *Undina* as the name of one of their original works.³³⁴

Many Russian authors and critics, such as Gogol’, Polonsky, Gertzen, Odоеvsky, Belinsky, Benediktov, Kiuhel’beker, Iazykov, Pushkin, Turgenev, and Sologub, read

³³¹ "Мы, русские в этом случае были гораздо счастливее немцев. Наш переводчик постигнул назначение "Ундины" в художественном мире и с торжеством ввел ее туда, где самая идея указывала ей место: обстоятельство, навсегда разлучившее немецкую "Ундину" с русскою и убедительно показавшее разницу между двумя поэтами." [We, Russians, in this case are much more fortunate than the Germans. Our translator established the significance of *Undina* to the world of art and brought it there in triumph, to the place where the very idea pointed her position: a circumstance forever separating the German *Undine* from the Russian one and convincingly showing the difference between the two authors.] (Ibid.)

³³² “давала "предметам" возможность выявить их "надлежащую законную живость... силу и блеск образов, гибкие, верные, неразлучные с поэтической идеей звуки" (Ibid.)

³³³ "Если Фуке не чувствовал во всем этом нужды для своей "Ундины", он недосмотрел в ней лучших сторон... Жуковскому она обязана лучшим существованием." [If Fouqué didn't feel the need for this for his *Undine*, he overlooked her best sides... She owes her best existence to Zhukovsky.] (Ibid.)

³³⁴ “"Когда вы читаете "Ундину"... - вы читаете Жуковского, вы пленяетесь Жуковским, - писал он в статье "Жуковский и романтизм"... Когда перевод становится вечным достоянием литературы, он перестает уже быть переводом... Пусть в других литературах есть своя "Ундина," свой *Наль* и *Дамаянти*... русские никогда не забудут своих, русских произведений, и озаглавленных этими именами." [When you read *Undina*—you read Zhukovsky, you are captivated by Zhukovsky,— he wrote in the article “Zhukovsky and Romanticism”... When a translation becomes an eternal virtue of literature it stops being a translation... Let other literatures have their *Undina*, their *Nala* and *Damayanti*... the Russians will never forget their own Russian works by these names.] (Ibid.)

Zhukovsky's *Undina* and were influenced by the work in different ways. For example, the famous Romantic poet Nikolai Iazykov wrote a poem called "Undina" in which he proclaims that reading Zhukovsky's *Undina* is a way to cure the main character from his dark thoughts ("мысли черные"), to make him feel refreshed, full of strength and peace, and to make his sad day look like a short dream.³³⁵

...читай Жуковского "Унди́ну":
Она тебя займет и освежит; ты в ней
Отраду верную найдешь себе скорей.
Ты будешь полон сил и тишины высокой,
Каких не даст тебе ни твой разгул широкой,
Ни песня юности, ни чаш задравный звон,
И был твой грустный день как бысролетный сон!³³⁶

[...read Zhukovsky's *Undina*:/ She will captivate you and refresh you; in her you/ will soon find true joy for yourself/ You will be full of strength and lofty silence,/ Which won't be given to you either by broad carousal,/ or by the song of youth, or by the cheering cling of glasses,/ And your sad day would become a quickly-passing dream.]

In "Литературные и житейские воспоминания" ("Memoirs about literature and life") written a few decades after the publication of *Undina*, Turgenev tells about a gathering he attended one evening at Pletnev's house, shortly after the publication of *Undina*. Pletnev talked about it, along with "The Government Inspector," as new works of literature that just came out and were worth everyone's attention. It is unclear whether Turgenev had read *Undina* then, but it is clear that by 1840 Turgenev had read *Undina* and knew a few passages from it. When Turgenev was in Rome and he saw the marble statue of St. Cecily he recited a few lines from Zhukovsky's poem "Старинная повесть" ("Ancient Tale"), with which *Undina* starts.³³⁷

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Nikolai Iazykov, "Унди́на" ("Undina")

³³⁷ E. V. Landa, op. cit.

И Прелести явленьем по привычке
Любуется, как встарь, душа моя.

[And my soul relishes the appearance of Charm/ as it used to before.]

Later in his life Turgenev was still very fond of *Undina* and asked for the newest copies to be sent to him.³³⁸ In the ninth book of *Отечественные записки* Belinsky included the second article from his cycle of articles “Essays of Alexander Pushkin.” (“Сочинения Александра Пушкина”) in which Belinsky talked about the great impact European Romanticism had on Russian poetry and on Zhukovsky’s work. According to Belinsky Zhukovsky “brought Russian poetry to life using Romantic elements, made it accessible for the public, gave it the opportunity to grow and develop, and without Zhukovsky we [the Russians] would not have had Pushkin”.³³⁹ Belinsky defined *Undina* as one of the most Romantic works of Zhukovsky³⁴⁰ and emphasized the skillful way in which Zhukovsky combined the fantasy world and the real world and at the same time revealed some of the deepest and most complex secrets of the heart.³⁴¹

The destiny of Zhukovsky’s *Undina* is unique for the history of translated literature in Russia—for more than 150 years that have passed since Zhukovsky translated *Undine*, no one has tried to translate *Undine* again even though each foreign work that was well

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ “одухотворив русскую поэзию романтическими элементами, сделал ее доступной для общества, дал ей возможность развития, и без Жуковского мы не имели бы Пушкина.” (Ibid.)

³⁴⁰ “одно из самых романтических его произведений” (Ibid.)

³⁴¹ “как искусно наш поэт умел слить фантастический мир с действительным миром и сколько заповедных тайн сердца умел он разоблачить и высказать в таком сказочном произведении.” [how skillfully did our poet unite the world of fantasy with the real world and how many secrets of the heart was he able show and express in this work.] (Ibid.)

received by the Russian public was translated more than once and each translation carries a different interpretation according to the way the author reads the original and the new requirements of the art of translation. However, as Landa puts it, there is no need to translate “your own” original work.³⁴²

I have discussed what the critics have pointed out as the reasons why Zhukovsky’s *Undina* should be seen as an original and unique work of Russian literature. I believe that another reason why *Undina* may be regarded as a unique work of Russian literature (and which to the best of my knowledge has not been discussed in criticism up to now), can be found in the way Zhukovsky created and developed the character of Undina. What makes Undina unique is the fact that she reflects Zhukovsky’s own personal desires and wishes in regard to a female partner, combining many of the characteristics that Zhukovsky’s beloved women—Masha, Alexandra, and the thirteen-year-old Elizabeth—had. Zhukovsky chose Undina to be the eternal guardian of those characteristics that left an everlasting impression on him—the characteristics that fostered his love for these women and that served as a guiding light helping him advance on the path to spiritual self-perfection and to God.

Undina’s similarities with these women becomes one of the reasons why Undina is able to be the talented author of a tale for herself and her husband Huldbrand. This tale ends with a Zhukovskian “happily ever after”: despite all hardships and challenges Undina and Huldbrand are reconciled in the end. Through their mutual love and support, the partners serve as each others’ guiding light on the shared quest to moral life and spiritual self

³⁴² “не появлялось потребности в переводе ‘своего,’ ‘оригинального произведения’” [there’s no need to translate ‘your own’ ‘original work’] (Ibid.)

perfection and are able to reach God and Heaven together—something that Zhukovsky had not yet at that point had the opportunity to experience. When he wrote *Undina* in 1837 he still had not found his ideal partner who would be given the sacred title “wife”, his Undina who would save him from the gloomy thoughts about eternal loneliness and would make him dream about the future and not about the past.

At that point, the poet had had just one brief interaction with the thirteen-year-old Elizabeth and did not even think that six years later they would meet again and he would see in her his future wife who was in a way different than the women he had loved before. This brings us to the other reason why Undina was able to have her Zhukovskian “happily ever after” with Huldbrand—the fact that she is also different in a significant way from Masha and Alexandra. Her difference lies in the fact that she seems to Zhukovsky to be *both* earthly *and* heavenly. The earthly-heavenly dichotomy in which Zhukovsky saw and described the women in his life—Masha, Alexandra, and Elizabeth—is expressed through the human-inhuman dichotomy in *Undina*. Undina’s perfection comes from the fact that she represents a unique combination of both human and inhuman characteristics that complement each other and make her ideal. As discussed before, both Masha and Alexandra for Zhukovsky represent the distant, unreachable heavenly realm—one is an angel and the other one is a goddess, and this is why they could never be life-long partners for Zhukovsky. Unlike them, the nineteen-year-old Elizabeth, like Undina, seemed to Zhukovsky to combine the earthly and the heavenly, the human and the non-human—a “heavenly vision and bright spirit that descended on earth.” This is why she and Zhukovsky, just like Undina and Huldbrand, could complement each other and serve as each other’s lights and reach their Zhukovskian “happily ever after.”

In October 1835 when he was translating *Undine*, Zhukovsky was thinking about the past, about his youth, and about what was and would never be again. He was once again overwhelmed by a melancholic longing for the ideal female figure that he had been looking for for so long. “For the heart the past is eternal”³⁴³ was what Zhukovsky carved on a picture.³⁴⁴ The fact that Zhukovsky was thinking about the past can be seen in the poem “Старинная повесть” (“Ancient Tale”), which is original to Zhukovsky’s translation and with which *Undina* begins. In the poem the author remembers the golden times when he had wonderful visions, his soul was blossoming with poetry, and the genius of inspiration flew to him with good news. These golden times passed and the known world showed its earthly face. However, the poet still keeps a sweet remembrance of the Dream singing to him and his soul still adores what used to be wonderful in the past.

Бывали дни восторженных видений;
Моя душа поэзией цвела;
Ко мне летал с вестями чудный гений;
Природа вся мне песнию была.

Оно прошло, то время золотое;
С природы снят магический венец;
Свет узанный свое лицо земное
Разоблачил, и призракам конец.

Но о Мечте, как о весенней птичке,
Певавшей мне, с усладой помню я;
И Прелести явленьем по привычке
Любуется, как встарь, душа моя.

³⁴³ “Для сердца прошедшее вечно”

³⁴⁴ E. V. Landa, op. cit.

[There were days of lofty visions;/ My soul was blossoming with poetry;/ A wonderful genius was flying towards me with news;/ All nature was a song to me.// This time passed, this golden time;/ The magical crown was taken away from nature;/ The known world showed its earthly face/ And the phantoms came to an end.// But the Dream like a spring bird,/ Singing to me I joyfully remember;/ And my soul relishes the appearance of Charm/ As it used to before.]

It is not surprising, then, that Zhukovsky was thinking about the women from his past—his niece Maria, the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna, and the thirteen-year-old Elizabeth Reuntern who he had just met for the first time, and that some of their characteristics that left a lasting impression on Zhukovsky can be seen in Undina. As mentioned before, when Zhukovsky first met Elizabeth in 1833 she was a thirteen-year-old child who impressed Zhukovsky with how impulsive, pure, and emotional she was. This strong impression that Elizabeth left on the poet might be the reason for his decision to, as shown in the previous section, transform the character of Undina before the wedding from Fouqué's cold, cruel, and spoiled water spirit into a mischievous, spontaneous, and emotional child. As mentioned earlier, the episode that Zhukovsky particularly remembered from his first interaction with the young Elizabeth was the way she threw her arms around his neck and pressed herself against him with "such unusual tenderness" that he was shocked. Undina behaves in a very similar way when Huldbrand finally finds her after she runs away from the fisherman's hut into the night—she unexpectedly wraps her arms around the knight's neck and starts kissing him and caressing him.

она ж, приподнявшись,
 Руки вокруг шеи его обвила и его поневоле
 Рядом с собой посадила.

[She lifting herself up,/ wrapped her hands around his neck and made him/ sit next to her.]

A similarity can be seen between the way Zhukovsky felt when he removed himself from the world in order to be able to serve Alexandra and her family, and the way Huldbrand felt when he started living with the old fisherman, his wife, and Undina in the hut completely isolated from the rest of the world. As mentioned before while serving Alexandra and her family Zhukovsky realized that he was no longer living for himself and he had removed himself from the world. The Fair Lady's proximity and the ability to communicate with her and obtain her trust were her devoted knight's biggest reward and made him feel happy and appreciative of this blissful isolation. After the storm and the flood it becomes impossible for the knight Huldbrand to leave the island and he has to live with the fisherman and his family. With his feelings for Undina growing stronger every day, Huldbrand cannot separate himself from Undina, and she becomes a part of his every thought and feelings.

С нею он стал неразлучен; с каждою мыслью,
 С каждым чувством слилась Ундина.

[He became inseparable from her; with every thought/ With every feeling Undina was united.]

The knight started looking with joy at the stream that was getting wider and thus pushing the island further and further away from land and from the world he used to know. It seemed to the knight that the world had ended for him, and his heart was filled with light, calmness, and peace. Life in isolation was sweet and his heart felt at home.

Здесь живетъ сладко, здесь сердцу будетъ приютно.
Вспомнивъ такую минуту, когда очарованной думой
Ты обнималъ безыменное, тайное счастье земное,
Ты, читатель, поймешь, что долженъ былъ чувствовать рыцарь,
Вдругъ поселившись в этомъ пределе, далеко отъ света.
Часто онъ с радостью тайной смотрелъ, какъ потокъ, свирепея,
День ото дня расширялся, и островъ все далѣе и далѣе
В море входилъ, разлучался съ твердой землею; казалось,
Миръ кончался за нимъ. На сердце рыцаря стало тихо, светло и легко.

[Here life is sweet, here the heart will be comfortable./ Remembering this moment, when enchanted by thoughts/ you embraced the nameless, secret earthly happiness,/ You, reader, will understand what the knight must have felt/ Suddenly moving to this area, far away from the world./ Often with secret happiness he watched how the stream, angrily/ got bigger every day and the island went even further away/ into the sea, separating from land; it seemed/ that the world ended beyond it. But the knight's heart became quiet, bright, and light.]

Another way in which Undina is similar to Alexandra is the lofty mission given to them by God. As mentioned before, the poet praised Alexandra's lofty mission as the Empress of Russian in the poem "To the Portrait of Alexandra Feodorovna." In *Undina*, Huldbrand is convinced that Undina was not born for a "low fate" and he believes that it is not simply a coincidence, but God's will.

Мнилось ему, что Ундина была рождена не для низкой
Доли; и, словомъ, онъ верилъ, что все то не случай, а божий
Промыселъ было.

[It seemed to him that Undina was born not in a low-class family/ and; he believed that this is not a coincidence, but God's will.]

Undina's association with light and angelic, heavenly qualities is one more way for Zhukovsky to intertwine his beloved women with her character. The poet describes Undina as shining like a heavenly vision³⁴⁵, a heavenly Angel³⁴⁶, and the angel of goodness.³⁴⁷ As mentioned before in the poem "Песня" ["Song"] Zhukovsky calls Masha his "friend" and his "guardian angel" and later in the last poem dedicated to her he calls her a "quiet angel." Elizabeth is also seen as a heavenly vision and a bright spirit. Undina is also "gentle and sweet to the point of torment" and a wonderful being that he can't compare to anything else,³⁴⁸ which greatly reminds one of the gentle and smart Masha who would know the value of family happiness and would not be interested in society distractions, of the grand magnitude of Alexandra's love, which carries holy peace and joy, and of the peaceful and loving goodness of the Madonna Elizabeth.

In her sorrow and suffering Undina reminds one a lot of Masha. As discussed before, the last poem Zhukovsky dedicated to his niece, who had recently passed away, carries his

³⁴⁵ В этом жилище, куда суеты не входили, каким-то

Райским виденьем сияла она: чистота херувима,
[In this home where vanities did not enter, like some kind of/ paradisa vision she was shining: the purity of cherubim]

³⁴⁶ и ее называли небесным Ангелом, дочкой родною

[And they called their dear daughter heavenly Angel]

³⁴⁷ ангел доброты

[angel of goodness]

³⁴⁸ Словом, Ундина была несравненным, мучительно милым,

Чудным созданием

[In one word, Undina was unique, sweet to the point of torture,/ Wonderful being]

deep pain and sorrow, the eternal remembrance of her last sad glance full of feelings that reminded him of the dear past.

Ты предо мною
Стояла тихо.
Твой взор унылый
Был полон чувства.
Он мне напомнил
О милом прошлом...
Он был последний
На здешнем свете.

[In front of me/ you quietly stood./ Your sad glance/ Was full of feelings./ It reminded me/ About the dear past.../It was the last one/ In this world.]

When Huldbrand, blinded by anger and rage, offends the sweet Undina on the boat and she realizes that she will be forever taken away from him and brought back to the depths of the sea, her last glance is fixed on the knight, and full of tears.

взор неподвижный, но полный
Слез устремив на Гульбранда,

[A stare that was fixed, but full/ of tears she gave to Huldbrand]

As previously discussed in his poem Zhukovsky describes Masha's grave as heavenly peaceful place under the quiet night sky and stars where all earthly remembrances and holy thoughts about heaven are kept.

Твоя могила,
Как рай, спокойна!
Там все земные
Воспоминанья,
Там все святые
О небе мысли.
Звезды небес,
Тихая ночь!..

[Your grave/ Is peaceful like heaven!/ There are all the earthly/ Memories,/ There are all the holy/ Thoughts about heaven./ Stars of the sky/ Quiet night!...]

Undina's last resting place is very similar. At Huldbrand's funeral Undina turns into a stream that circles around Huldbrand's grave and empties into a bright lake. For many years people believed that the stream around the knight's grave is his wife Undina—good, faithful, and forever united with her beloved even in the grave.

...прозрачный
 Ключ; серебристо вьясь, он вперед пробирался, покуда
 Всей не обвил могилы; тогда ручейком побежал он
 Дале и бросился в светлое озеро ближней долины,

... ручей тот Ундина,
 Добрая, верная, слитая с милым и в гробе Ундина.

[a transparent/ spring; crawling like silver it started going forward,/ until/ it surrounded the grave; then as a stream it went further/ and emptied into a bright lake at the nearby meadow.../ the spring is Undina,/ The good, faithful, forever-united with her beloved in the grave Undina]

Just like Masha's grave, Undina's grave is quiet and peaceful. The spring circling the grave represents the union between the spouses' earthly memories and their holy thoughts about the heavenly joint existence of their souls beyond the earthly grave.

Thus far I have argued that Undina combined many of Masha's, Alexandra's, and Elizabeth's characteristics that Zhukovsky loved and cherished. Now I will show how she was different from Masha and Alexandra and similar to the nineteen-year-old Elizabeth. Undina's perfection comes from the fact that she represents a unique combination of human and non-human characteristics that complement each other. Undina's essence is not human—she is a water spirit. She explains to Huldbrand that there are beings that look like humans, but are not human. Some of those beings live in the silver water where the sun, the moon, and the stars shine through, where one can see the beauty and glow of corals, where one walks on a soft carpet of sand. Those beings are much more beautiful than

people, and often fishermen, upon seeing one, throw themselves in the water to follow it.

These beings are called undinas and she is one of them.

Слушай. Ты должен
Знать, уж на деле узнал ты, что есть на свете создання,
Вам подобные видом, но с вами различного свойства.
Редко их видите вы...

...
...лоно морей, озер и ручьев населяют
Духи веселые вод. Прекрасно и вольно живется
Там, под звонкокристалышми сводами; небо и солнце
Светят сквозь них; и небесные звезды туда проникают;

...
Жители стран водяных обольстительно милы, прекрасней
Самых людей. Случалось не раз, что рыбак, подглядевши
Деву морскую - когда, из воды подымался тайно,
Пела она и качалась на зыбкой волне, - повергался
В хладную влагу за нею. Ундинами чудные эти
Девы слынут у людей. И, друг, ты теперь пред собою
В самом деле видишь Ундину"

[Listen, you must know that there are beings in the world/ that look like you, but have different characteristics./ You rarely see them... the bottoms of the seas, lakes, and streams are inhabited/ by the joyful water spirits. Wonderfully and freely one lives/ there under the crystal arches; sky and sun/ Shine through them; and the heavenly stars penetrate there;/...The inhabitants of the water land are temptingly nice, more beautiful/ than people themselves. It happened more than once that a fisherman, when seeing/ a water maiden—when she secretly emerged from the water/ singing and riding the waves,—he threw himself/ in the cold moisture after her. These marvelous maidens are called Undinas/ by people. And, friend, you right now, in front of you/ In fact see Undina.]

Undina reveals that even though these beings are superior in their appearance, much happier and carefree than people, there is one very important thing that humans have and they do not—a soul. This is why after they die they are lost like ghosts. People's souls continue into a better world after their earthly death, while the undinas, since they do not have souls, cease to exist altogether.

Видом наружным мы то же, что люди, быть может и лучше,
Нежели люди; но с нами не то, что с людьми; покидая

Жизнь, мы вдруг пропадаем, как призрак, и телом и духом
 Гибнем вполне, и самый наш след исчезает; из праха
 В лучшую жизнь переходите вы; а мы остаемся
 Там, где жили, в воздухе, искре, волне и пылинке.
 Нам души не дано; пока продолжается наше
 Здесь бытие, нам стихии покорны; когда ж умираем,
 В их переходим мы власть, и они нас в миг истребляют,

[In our appearance we have everything that people have and perhaps even better/ than what people have; but we are not like people; leaving/ Life we suddenly disappear like a ghost, both physically and spiritually/ We completely die, and our trace disappears; from dust/ you go into a better life; while we remain/ where we lived, in air, in a spark, in a wave and in a speck./ We are not given a soul; while our life here lasts/ we control nature; when we die/ We surrender to nature's power, and it destroys us immediately.]

This is why Undina's father sent her away when she was child hoping that she could be able to get a soul, even though he realized that with having a soul comes grief and sorrow.

The only for them to get a soul would be through an intimate union with a beloved human.

Мне, любимой, единственной дочери, душу живую
 Дать пожелал, хотя он и ведал, что с нею и горе
 (Всех одаренных душою удел) меня не минует.
 Но душа не иначе дана быть нам может, как только
 Тесным союзом любви с человеком.

[To me, his only beloved daughter/ wanted to give a living soul/ even though he knew that with it sadness/ (The lot of everyone gifted with a soul) Will not pass me by./ However, a soul can not be given to us in any other way, but/ only through an intimate union of love with a human.]

Undina needed a partner to complement her, a light that would guide her and help her advance on her quest to spiritual self perfection and God—a light that would make it possible for her heavenly features and characteristics to come out of the darkness and shine through. The same idea can be seen in Zhukovsky's poem dedicated to his wife Elizabeth discussed earlier, in which he says that he wants to be a lamp in front of the altar of the Madonna—Elizabeth—and illuminate her heavenly features. Huldbrand becomes

Undina's light by entering the sacred union of marriage with her and thus giving her a human soul, for which Undina is eternally grateful to him and in return for what she gives him her unconditional love.

И, милый, отныне
Я с душою навеки; тебе одному благодарна

[And dear from now on,/ I have a soul forever; I am grateful to you alone.]

Having a human soul transforms Undina. From a mischievous, unpredictable, spontaneous child, she becomes a calm, submissive wife and a pure, heavenly gentle and sweet being.

Кроткой, покорной женою, хозяйкой заботливой, в то же
Время девственно чистым, божественно милым созданием.

[Calm, obedient wife, hard-working housewife, at the same time/ a pure, heavenly sweet being.]

Once she obtains her human soul, Undina becomes Huldbrand's light guiding him on his quest to moral living and the salvation of his soul, since Huldbrand, even though he has a soul, is human and thus is subject of the flaws that come with human nature. Undina's essence still retains something not human, which means that she is not susceptible to the flaws that come with being a human, such as cruelty, selfishness, temptation, injustice, anger, and jealousy. Undina's "sweetness to the point of torture" and her heavenly perfection come from the fact that her inhuman essence lets the beauty of the human soul, which is sometimes suppressed in humans by their flawed nature, shine through. Huldbrand, when lovingly looking at his wife, was convinced that, no matter whether she

got her soul from him or not, her soul was the most beautiful one, the world has never seen such a soul, and his wife is like a heavenly angel.

Рыцарь с глубоким чувством любви смотрел на Ундину.
 "Мною ль, - он думал, - дана ей душа или нет, но прекрасней
 Этой души не бывало на свете; она как небесный Ангел".

[The knight with deep love was looking at Undina./ "Whether her soul—he thought—
 was given to her by me or not a soul more wonderful than hers/ has never existed in this
 world; she is like a heavenly Angel."]

Undina, unlike Huldbrand and Bertal'da, cannot understand or possess any human flaws. Upon finding out who her real parents were, the proud and spoiled Bertal'da screams with anger and malice that such lowly and poor people, such beggars like the old fisherman and his wife could never be her parents, and accuses Undina of being a witch and a liar. Bertal'da also condemns Undina as a cold ghost and as something that is distant to humans and their human soul.

то было понять ей
 Трудно, как мог он ласкаться к такому созданию, в котором
 (После того, что Бертальде сама рассказала Ундина)
 Виделся ей не живой человек, а какой-то холодный
 Призрак, что-то нездешнее, что-то чужое душе человека.

[it was difficult for her to understand/ how could he love such a being, in which/ (after
 what Undina herself told Bertal'da)/ She didn't see a living person, but a cold/ Ghost,
 something not from this world, something that is alien to the human soul.]

Another flawed aspect of Bertal'da's human nature is the fact that she resurrects her old feelings for Huldbrand despite the fact that he is married to Undina, and she becomes Undina's rival despite the fact that Undina has been nothing but kind, loving, and forgiving towards her. Huldbrand, a flawed human like Bertal'da, lets his burning love and passion

for his wife Undina die and opens his heart to another woman, Bertal'da, despite the fact that his wife is still living and has given him her unquestionable love and devotion.

мало-помалу рыцарь наш сердцем
Стал от Ундины далек и близок к Бертальде

[Little by little, our knight's heart/ started moving away from Undina and closer to Bertal'da.]

Upon witnessing Bertal'da's cruelty, anger, pride, and injustice, Undina, "like an angel who had suddenly lost heaven," in a state of extreme internal turmoil and confusion, exclaims, "Do you have a soul?"

а Ундина, как ангел, вдруг утративший небо,
Бледная, в страхе внезапном, не ведая, что с ней
Делалось, вся трепетала. "Опомнись, Бертальда! Бертальда,
Есть ли душа у тебя?" - она повторяла,

[And Undina, like an angel, who had suddenly lost heaven,/ Pale, in fear, not understanding/ what was happening to her, was whispering. "Come to your senses, Bertal'da! Bertal'da,/ do you have a soul?"—she repeated.]

She also declares that people are strange and she did not know about people's customs, about their wild cruel way of thinking, and these things would never be known and understandable to her.

"Вы странные люди!

...

Ах, боже! доньше
Я о ваших обычаях, вашем безумном, жестоком
Образе мыслей не знала, и их никогда не узнать мне.

["You're strange people!/. . . Oh, God! Up to now about your traditions, your wild, cruel/ way of thinking I didn't know, and they will always be incomprehensible to me.]

Huldbrand's inability to see beyond the surface of Undina's inhuman essence pushes him further away from her and closer to Bertal'da who he thinks he is of the same kind as he.

Слезы ее заснувшую совесть Гульбранда, а прежней
В нем любви уже пробудить не могли, как порою
Жалость его к Ундине влекла, а ужас невольно
Прочь отталкивал, сердце ж стремил к Бертальде, созданию
С ним однородному...

[Her tears could no longer awaken Huldbrand's sleeping conscience nor his/ previous love, as at times/ his pity drew him to Undina, but horror unconsciously/ pushed him away, his heart strove toward Bertal'da, a being the same as him...]

Huldbrand fails to recognize that the non-human element in Undina does not make her monstrous, but heavenly and angelic. This is the beginning of his downward spiral of rejection, anger, confusion, and temptation. In Zhukovsky's world, such immoral existence would have caused Huldbrand to fail on his quest toward spiritual self-perfection and to ultimately reaching the Heavenly Father, and his soul would have been lost forever in darkness and sin. However, Undina, as a true partner worthy of the sacred title "wife," recognizes that Huldbrand needs her help and her light in order to continue on the right path.

Undina makes multiple attempts to save the knight. At first she wants to save both his body and his soul by trying to prevent his physical death. The first such attempt is when she begs him to not express anger towards her when they are close to a body of water because her relatives would pull her back to her underwater home and she would never be able to return to him. If she ever were to return to him, it would mean his death. Despite her warning, Huldbrand cannot control his anger and malice and offends his wife while

they are on the river calling her a witch and a devilish creature and wishing that she would die and leave him and Bertal'da in peace.

Но рыцарь в бешенстве кинулся к ней, ожерелье
Вырвал, швырнул в Дунай и воскликнул: "Ты с ними
Все еще водишь знакомство, лукавая тварь! Пропади ты
Вместе с своими подарками, вместе с своею роднею!
Сгинь, чародейка, от нас и оставь нас в покое!.."

[But the knight in his rage leaned towards her, the necklace/ tore away, threw it in the Danube and exclaimed: "You still/ have contact with them, you cunning being! Go away you/ with your gifts and with your relatives!/ Go away from us, you witch, and leave us in peace.]

This is when Undina is forever taken away by her relatives and despite the burning pain and the devastating sorrow that she feels, she again tries to save her husband by asking him to stay faithful so the evil can be prevented. After some time Huldbrand starts fearing loneliness and decides that he would marry Bertal'da. The knight makes that decision despite Undina's warning and despite the old fisherman's warning that his wife might be still living and even if she is not, it is a great sin to replace her with the woman who was partially guilty for her early death. Undina makes another attempt to prevent her husband from committing a sin through the old priest Lavrentii who married them at the old fisherman's hut. She comes to the priest in a dream crying and says that she is still living and the priest has to prevent the wedding from happening and save the knight's body and soul. Lavrentii says:

а вам я скажу, что с недавних
Пор она по ночам начала мне являться: приходит,
Плачет, ломает руки, вздыхает и все говорит мне:
"Честный отец, удержи ты его; я жива; о, спаси ты
Тело ему! о, спаси ты душу ему!.."

[I will tell you that not long ago/ she started coming to me at night: she comes,/ cries, wrings her hands, sighs, and keeps telling me:/ “Honest father, stop him; I’m alive; oh, save/ his body! Oh, save his soul!...]

The knight, blinded by stubbornness and anger, refuses to listen to Lavrentii and finds another priest to do the wedding. Undina’s last desperate attempt to save her husband’s body and soul is through the dream in which she takes him over the Mediterranean Sea and lets him listen to the conversation that she has with her uncle Strui and thus learn that if the stone is ever removed from the fountain, that would give her a way to enter the castle and she would have to go in and kill him since he did not stay faithful to her. Unfortunately, this attempt fails as well since even though Huldbrand thinks about his and the priest’s dreams, he still decides to marry Bertal’da.

Undina’s last attempt is to save at least Huldbrand’s soul. After the knight and Bertal’da get married, Bertal’da is getting ready for her first night with her husband and orders for the stone that is blocking the fountain to be lifted so she can use the water on her freckles. When the stone is lifted water starts coming out and then suddenly a female figure dressed in white comes out and, while crying, starts walking towards the castle. Undina enters the knight’s room and announces that soon he will be lying in a cold bed. She says that they took the stone off the fountain, she is here, and he has to die. The knight asks her to not show him her face if it is distorted and horrifying, but Undina promises that it is as beautiful as it used to be. This scene radically contrasts with the final scene from Lermontov’s poem “Morskaia Tsarevna” in which the beautiful rusalka, when dragged out of the water by the prince, turns into a horrifying monster and dies in agony. The knight asks Undina to kill him with one last kiss

"...В постеле будешь ты скоро, но только в холодной", - шепнул за дверями

Плачущий голос. И в зеркало рыцарь увидел, как двери
 Тихо, тихо за ним растворились, как белая гостя
 В них вошла, как чинно замок заперла за собою.
 "Камень с колодца сняли, - она промолвила тихо, -
 Здесь я; и должен теперь умереть ты". Холод, по сердцу
 Рыцаря вдруг пробежавший, почувствовать дал, что минута
 Смерти настала. Зажавши руками глаза, он воскликнул:
 "О, не дай мне в последний мой час обезуметь от страха!
 Если ужасен твой вид, не снимай покрывала и строгий
 Суд соверши надо мной, мне лица твоего не являя". -
 "Ах! - она отвечала, - разве еще раз увидеть,
 Друг, не хочешь меня? Я прекрасна, как прежде, как в оный
 День, когда твоею невестою стала". - "О, если б
 Это правда была, - Гульбранд воскликнул, - о, если б
 Мне хоть один поцелуй от тебя! и пускай бы в нем умереть!"

[“You will be in bed soon, but in a cold bed.”—whispered behind the door/ a crying voice. And in the mirror the knight saw how the door/ quietly, quietly opened behind him, as the white guest/ Came through it. How the lock shut properly behind her./ “They lifted the stone from the well—she said quietly—/ Here I am; and you have to die now.” Coldness engulfed the knight’s heart/ and he understood that it was time for him to die./ Closing his eyes with his hands he exclaimed: “Oh, do not let me in my last minute lose my mind from fear!/ If your appearance is horrifying, do not take off your veil and bring your stern/ judgement upon me, without showing me your face.”/ “Oh!—she said—so you do not want to see me one more time, my friend?/ I’m beautiful, as before, as on the day/ when I became your wife.”—“Oh, if/ this were true—exclaimed Huldbrand—oh, if/ I could get one kiss from you! And let me die in that kiss!”]

Undina takes her veil off and kisses the knight, who is shaking from love and the proximity of death. Undina keeps kissing him and crying as if she wants to cry her soul out until he stops breathing and falls out of Undina’s hands onto his bed. When she walks away she says that she cried him to death and then descends into the fountain as a sad shadow. Undina comes to the knight’s funeral and turns into a stream that surrounds his grave and empties into a bright lake.

This last part of the poem is significant in many ways and contains many of Zhukovsky’s ideas about marriage and the soul’s path to God. Even though it might look like Undina kills the knight, and at this point changing from a protagonist into an antagonist and

assuming the traditional role of the malicious water spirit, she actually fulfills her wifely duties and saves the soul of her husband before he commits a sin—crossing the most intimate and sacred realm of marriage with another woman—thereby ensuring that his soul will continue on the path of light and reach the heavenly realm. The fact that Undina’s kiss is not deadly but liberating is shown by the way Zhukovsky describes it. He calls it a heavenly (“nebesnyi”) kiss which implies that it serves a lofty, not a malicious, purpose.

С небесным она поцелуем

[With a heavenly kiss she...]

There is a reason why all of Undina’s attempts to save both his body and soul fail: the body is the flawed shell in which the beauty of the soul is trapped. Huldbrand’s body, just as Tamara’s body in Lermontov’s “Demon”, gives him his human essence which is susceptible to temptation leading to anger, confusion, and sin. Both Huldbrand and Tamara could not take their flawed bodies on the way to spiritual self-perfection and to God; only the soul, once it is liberated from the body that is weighing it down, can continue this ascent, which it does. Tamara’s forgiven soul flies away in the tight embrace of the angel while her empty body lies in her earthly grave covered in flowers. Similarly, Zhukovsky describes the knight’s dead body—as a “soulless corpse”³⁴⁹—a dead shell that was emptied of the precious treasure it was hiding. As shown earlier in this chapter, the body was not what Zhukovsky was interested in. He never talked about physical love, passion, or lust and never commented on the physical appearance of the women he loved. He adored their

³⁴⁹ бездушным трупом

souls and saw in them the glow of the heavenly light that he was looking for. Immediately preceding his physical death, when Huldbrand's soul is about to leave his sinful body, he does not see Undina the way he imagined her before—as a witch, a devilish creature, and a monster. In the section that Zhukovsky significantly expanded from Fouqué's original, the knight sees Undina through the heavenly beauty of her soul—as wonderful, gentle, sweet, and loving as she had been before.

прекрасной Ундиною, прежней
Милой, любящей, любимой Ундиною первых,
Блаженных дней предстала

[The wonderful Undina, the former/ sweet, loving, beloved Undina of the first blissful days appeared]

The fact that Undina keeps crying while kissing Huldbrand, as if she wants to cry out her soul, and that her tears go into his eyes and bring sweet pain to his chest until he stops breathing is worth discussing.

Плакала, плакала тихо, плакала долго, как будто
Выплакать душу хотела; и, быстро, быстро лияся,
Слезы ее проникали рыцарю в очи и с сладкой
Болью к нему заливались в грудь, пока напоследок
В нем не пропало дыхание

[She cried, cried quietly, cried for a long time, as if/ she wanted to cry her soul out; and quickly, quickly pouring,/ her tears penetrated the knight's eyes and with sweet/ pain poured into his chest until/ he stopped breathing]

As mentioned before, Undina's father warned her that with having a human soul come sorrow and grief, feelings that the water spirits do not know and can not understand. Once Undina obtains a human soul and devotes her life to Huldbrand she finds out that marriage comes with a sweet pain—it is a combination of sunny blue skies filled with joy and love,

and thunderstorms filled with anger, sadness, and tears, a fact confirmed by Zhukovsky in his last letter to his wife Elizabeth. Through her purifying tears, a symbol of her soul, Undina performs a cleansing ritual on the knight through which she liberates his soul from his body. The sweet pain that her tears pour into his chest symbolizes the way his soul and Undina's soul are forever connected through the sacred ties of marriage. The fact that Undina knows that this bond is unbreakable and she will forever carry the sacred "wife" title, in this world and in the next, is also shown through the way she makes her way to the front of the funeral procession and stands right next to the grave where the wife is supposed to stand.

заметили белый образ, в длинном, густом покрывале, тихо идущий,
Грустно потупивши голову
...силой

Два смельчака хотели незванного из ряду вывести;
Но, от них ускользнувши, как легкая тень, он на прежнем
Месте явился опять и последовал тихо за гробом.
Вот напоследок он мало-помалу, менялся местом
С теми, кто в страхе спешил от него удалиться, подле
Самой вдовы очутился;

...
Раз Бертальда незванного гостя увидела, в страхе
Стала она рукою махать, чтоб он удалился;
Но покровенный, кротко упорствуя, тряс головою,
Руки к ней простирал

[They noticed a white figure in a long, thick veil, quietly coming,/ sadly keeping its head down.../ Using force two brave men wanted to take the unbidden one out of the line;/ But sliding away from them like a light shadow, the figure as before/ appeared at the same spot and quietly followed the coffin/ Slowly step by step the figure changed its place/ With those who in fear hurried to get away from it/ And found its way next to the widow;.../Immediately when Bertal'da saw the uninvited guest, fearfully/ She started waving her hand so that the figure would go away;/ But the one in the veil calmly refused, shook its head,/ And stretched its arms towards her]

The final piece of the poem represents the eternal union of the spouses' souls beyond their earthly graves. Undina's soul, just like the soul of her beloved Huldbrand, is liberated from her earthly form that was still keeping her in this world and thus away from the knight whose soul had already departed it. Undina transforms herself into a silver stream that goes around Huldbrand's grave and empties into a bright lake.

уж белый образ пропал; а на месте,
Где он стоял на коленях, сквозь травку сочился прозрачный
Ключ; серебристо вясь, он вперед пробирался, покуда
Всей не обвил могилы; тогда ручейком побежал он
Дале и бросился в светлое озеро ближней долины,
...ручей тот Ундина,
Добрая, верная, слитая с милым и в гробе Ундина

[the white figure disappeared; in its place,/ where it stood on its knees through the grass appeared a transparent/ spring; crawling like silver it started going forward, until/ it surrounded the grave; then as a stream it went further/ and emptied into a bright lake at the nearby meadow.../ the spring is Undina,/ The good, faithful, forever-united with her beloved in the grave Undina]

Light and nature play a significant role in this final scene. This final union can be seen as a representation of Zhukovsky's ideal: Undina and Huldbrand, guided by each other's light and love, were able to connect their souls with both nature and God for eternity and thus finally reach heavenly bliss. Thus, unlike all of Lermontov's couples of human and supernatural characters who could never achieve a lasting union of love, Undina and Huldbrand reach their Zhukovskian happy ending, "Добрая, верная, слитая с милым и в гробе Ундина" [The good, faithful, forever-united with her beloved in the grave Undina].

The character of Undina was so unique and noteworthy that later in the twentieth century she became for Alexander Blok the embodiment of the Eternal Feminine.³⁵⁰ No one from

³⁵⁰ E. V. Landa, op. cit.

Zhukovsky's contemporaries and even pupils tried to create a character similar to Undina. Aleksandr Pushkin wrote of Zhukovsky, "I am not his successor, but rather his pupil... Nobody has had or will have as powerful and varied a poetic voice as his."³⁵¹ This varied poetic voice can be seen in one of his most notable characters—Undina, a unique combination of Zhukovsky's personal experiences and ideas about morals, marriage, love, spiritual growth, and the path to God. Zhukovsky was a firm believer that the real author should write the same way he lives, and that being a moral person should be inseparable from being a talented author. His unquestionable belief in these ideas and his uncompromising attitude to his own principles gave him a special place in Russian literature and influenced the way he approached his works and characters. Zhukovsky's profound appreciation of the power of the platonic and the spiritual in life and in relationships with women may be the reason why there is not another character like Undina.

³⁵¹ "Prominent Russians: Vasily Zhukovsky" at <http://russiapedia.rt.com/prominent-russians/literature/vasily-zhukovsky/>

Conclusion

I was struck by the recurrence of rusalka figures in Russian literature in the first half of the nineteenth century (from Pushkin to Turgenev) and decided to see whether three of the most important poets of the period—Aleksandr Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, and Vasily Zhukovsky—did something distinctive in their treatment of the rusalka figure, or they were merely following a folkloric formula. Keeping in mind that previous scholars have tended not to pay much attention to most of these works, this dissertation brings these works to the foreground, analyzes them from a new point of view, and offers fresh perspectives on the complex psychological framework that each writer brought to his work.

I discovered that there is a direct correlation between the three poets' personal lives and their experiences with women and the rusalka characters in their works. This led me to the conclusion that the three poets used the rusalka characters in their works as a means of expressing their innermost desires, hopes, and fears about females they may have encountered or thought about in their lives. The fact that the works in which they use the rusalka characters are not describing or addressing specific people gave the poets the opportunity to imagine and speculate on different scenarios about their own internal quest for understanding and finding an ideal partner and love. The fact that they used the rusalka figure— one of the oldest, most well-known and wide-spread characters in Russian folklore—as a specific device for the expression of their innermost fantasies can be explained by the powerful role and the strong presence of Russian folklore in Russians' lives and by the instinctive, natural, and unquestionable parallel between a rusalka and a woman in the Russian mind.

Aleksandr Pushkin's 1819 poem "Rusalka" reflects the ideas that Pushkin had early on in his life that were associated with the power struggle between men and women and his fears related to women assuming control over men through their beauty and sexuality and using that control to lead men to their downfall and death. The nineteen-year old Pushkin, influenced by the moods of his era and his generation and lacking sufficient personal experience with the subject, assumed that women were beautiful, but rather empty, shells. In the eyes of the young poet, women—sweet faces on tempting bodies—lacked internal worlds and could be inexplicably irrational and threatening at times. The poetic drama "Rusalka" that Pushkin started in 1829 and never finished is much deeper and more complex than the 1819 poem "Rusalka." There are multiple factors that influenced the fact that the second work is so different. Since 1820 Pushkin had faced many challenges, such as being spied on by the government, not being allowed to leave the country, exile, censorship, and declining health, and he started seeing women as his only escape and salvation. Also since 1820 his opinion of women had drastically changed. He had had multiple relationships with women who were attractive to him because of the beauty of their *internal* worlds. Pushkin met and interacted with women who were strong, independent, self-confident, talented, well educated, and intelligent such as the motherly, loving, and protecting Ekaterina Karamzina, Praskov'ia Osipova, and Elizaveta Khitrovo; the young, charming friends, who were full of life—Zizi Osipova and Elizaveta Ushakova; the mistreated women whom he rejected and caused pain to: the pregnant serf girl from Mikhailovskoe and the devoted Anna Vul'f; and the ones that he had difficult and challenging romances with—Elizaveta Vorontsova, Ekaterina Ushakova, Anna Olenina, and the love of his life, his wife Natal'ia Goncharova. In the 1829 poem "Rusalka" one

can see Pushkin's much richer and fuller understanding of the power and independence of women, of the suffering and pain that come with being rejected and abandoned, the grief and guilt over lost love, and the unknown direction in which love takes people.

Mikhail Lermontov, one of the most controversial figures in Russian literature, combined in his character a threatening and wild "demonic" side marked by skepticism, pessimism, and cynicism, and a beautiful and gentle soul that showed Lermontov's soft human side. In the three works by Lermontov discussed in this dissertation—"Rusalka" (1836), "Morskaia Tsarevna" (1841), and "Demon" (1830-1839)—the poet uses human and non-human figures to express his distinctive vision on the possibilities of lasting love between individuals. The portrayal of the union between human and non-human characters in these works is an expression of Lermontov's two-sided nature, which turned the poet's life into a never-ending struggle between the beauty of his human soul and the cynicism, skepticism, and pessimism of his "demonic" side. The poet imagined and speculated on different scenarios about his own internal quest for overcoming his "demonic" side through the power of true love. However, influenced by his unfortunate experiences with true love in life, Lermontov could never envision a happy ending in his works. The outcomes for the lovers in all three works parallel the poet's life, in which he always remained separated from his beloved ones—the little girl who played with his cousin, the girl that he stole the blue ribbon from, and the love of his life—the charming and dreamy Varvara Lopukhina. Lermontov never had the chance to fully feel and understand the purifying and life-giving effect of a lasting union with the women he truly loved and this is why the partners in his works, either human or inhuman, remained separated by a wide void and could not understand, recognize, and help each other.

The plot of Vasily Zhukovsky's work has the same model as the works of Pushkin and Lermontov—*Undina* tells the story of the relationship between the human knight Huldbrand and the mermaid Undina. However, Zhukovsky offers a different vision of the nature and role of a water spirit than Pushkin and Lermontov. Zhukovsky used the idea of a union between a human and a supernatural being in order to describe the ideal union of true love in which the partners help and lead each other on the challenging path to spiritual growth, to peace and harmony, and to God. Zhukovsky's three main experiences with love—the tragic romance with his “quiet angel” Maria Protasova, the chivalrous adoration of his Fair Lady, Alexandra Feodorovna, and the marriage with the Madonna that descended from the heavens, Elizabeth Reutern—contributed to the development of Zhukovsky's views on both life and writing. The poet builds and presents the character of Undina as a unique hybrid between a human soul and the non-human essence of a water spirit that takes the unusual role of a protagonist instead of the traditional role of an antagonist. This is unique in Russian literature and the uniqueness of the character is due to the fact that in *Undina*, Zhukovsky combined his ideas and dreams of the ideal female figure with his need and hope for one. This is not merely the result of Zhukovsky translating Friedrich Heinrich Karl de la Motte, Baron Fouqué's work. Zhukovsky's work is an original reworking of Fouqué's themes and is considered an original work of Russian literature. Zhukovsky was a firm believer that the real author should write the same way he lives, and that being a moral person should be inseparable from being a talented author. Zhukovsky's deep adherence to these principles undoubtedly influenced his poetic creations, and may indeed be one of the key reasons why he was drawn to and depicted a water spirit so different than the analogous spirits in the work of Pushkin and Lermontov.

After the passing of these great poets, the changing role of women in Russian society and the emergence of the famous “woman question” in the middle of the nineteenth century led to a retreat from the poetic depiction of the rusalka figure among major Russian writers. New female figures came to the fore to command readers’ and writers’ attentions, thus closing a fascinating chapter in Russian literary history.

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