

FROM METAFICTION AS A FORMAL DEVICE TO METAPOETRY AS A DISCOURSE STRATEGY: PUSHKIN AND PREŠEREN IN A “SHKLOVSKIAN” PERSPECTIVE AND BEYOND*

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Abstract:

In his writings on art as device and Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, Viktor Shklovsky drew attention to the historical fluctuations in the reception of canonical writers and himself provided a pioneering example of this principle. With the concept of defamiliarization, he updated the sentimentalist novelist Sterne and his Russian successor, the canonical national poet Pushkin, and turned them into contemporaries of the avant-garde. By pointing to narrative forms that focus on the actual work of writing, Shklovsky later inspired both the structuralist and post-structuralist turn in literary studies. Shklovsky laid the foundation for the concept that has been referred to as metafiction since the 1960s: This time Pushkin and Sterne appeared as contemporaries of postmodernism. This article follows Shklovsky's pioneering formalist analyzes of metafictional devices, firstly by extending them generically to Romantic lyric poetry and secondly socio-historically by interpreting the metafictional form from a materialist perspective within the

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framework of critical discourse analysis. The example is the metapoetry of Alexander S. Pushkin (1799–37) and France Prešeren (1800–49) and their hybridization of the language of poetry with esthetic thought and Romantic ideology.

Keywords:

defamiliarization, metafiction, metapoetry, romanticism, Pushkin Alexander S., Prešeren France, Sterne Laurence

1. Introduction: Shklovsky's formalist "estrangement" of Pushkin and metafiction

In his OPOYAZ essays "Resurrecting the Word," "Art as Device", and "Eugene Onegin: Pushkin and Sterne," Viktor Shklovsky not only drew attention to historical fluctuations in the reception of canonical writers, but also provided a pioneering example of this principle himself: His innovative concept of defamiliarization (*ostranenie*) enabled him to update the sentimentalist novelist Laurence Sterne and his Russian successor, the canonical national poet Alexander Pushkin, and to recast them as contemporaries of avant-garde modernism.

According to Shklovsky's seminal 1914 essay "Resurrecting the Word," whose title boldly draws parallels between literature and Christian religion, once tropes and other literary words become overused and familiar, they lose their original ability to evoke experience and are reduced to "algebraic symbols devoid of imagery" (64). Just like such textual microstructures, entire texts can also be robbed of their vitality over the course of time: "Old works of verbal art experience the same fate as the word itself. They journey from poetry to prose. They stop being seen and begin being recognized. Classic works have become covered with the glass armor of familiarity." (67) Shklovsky developed the idea of familiarity further in his later essays from the OPOYAZ period. Drawing on the psychology of perception, he placed this idea in an evolutionary perspective. Their repeated use makes words, tropes, and other literary microstructures too familiar and deprives them of their potential to make readers aware of their makeup and to awaken in them the experience of what these microstructures stand for as signs. Consequently, they flatten into algebraic symbols that push the text out of the realm of literariness and into the proximity of everyday "prose," the instrumental calculus of practical reason.

What constitutes a literary work of art depends "on our perception," Shklovsky claims in his 1917/19 "Art as Device," suggesting that a text can also be "created as poetic and experienced as prosaic" (75) when it succumbs to "the automatization process" (79). In 1921, a year before he was forced to emigrate to Berlin, Shklovsky took the opportunity of the most algebraic ritual, the jubilee celebration of the national classic Pushkin, to "estrangle" the classic and present him in a revolutionary way as a contemporary of the Russian avant-garde. Even more provocative and paradoxical appeared Shklovsky's comparative method, by which he argued that Pushkin's modernity lay

precisely in the fact that he “resurrected” the “devices” from the literary pluperfect, i.e., from Laurence Sterne’s eighteenth-century novel *Tristram Shandy*.

Anticipating Tynyanov’s theory of literary evolution, Shklovsky begins his essay on the changing perception of literary works with the observation that “[f]rom time to time our understanding of them [i.e. literary works] is overturned: something that was funny becomes tragic, something that was beautiful is perceived as banal. It is as if the artistic work is written anew.” (“Pushkin and Sterne” 175). He lists some examples of such shifts: “The Symbolists overturned the perception of Gogol,” whereas “Shakespeare was re-born more than once” (175). As a thinker whose concepts such as “estrangement” are close to phenomenology (see Chernavin & Yampolskaya), Shklovsky provides a theory that explains the aforementioned turns in the perception of literary works or devices in terms of a general scientific law:

This change in the perception of an author is subject to a historical literary law: we do not perceive a writer independently, but against the background of our tradition. We compare a writer with our aesthetic norms. In order for a work to please us it is certainly not necessary for it to coincide with our aesthetic norms, it is the way in which these norms are violated that is important. (“Pushkin and Sterne” 176–177)

While in his pre-revolutionary text Shklovsky sets out his theory of the “resurrection of the word” against the religious background implied in the title, in “Art as Device,” written in the revolutionary year of 1917, he relates his theoretical concepts to a different background shared by other Russian formalists and avant-gardists. His metaphorical transfer of the concept of revolution to the realm of the formalist literary theory, however, deviates from the Bolshevik understanding of the term from the outset, as he does not see revolution as a total break with the old regime: “Literary revolutions do not only create new artistic values, they also reinstate old ones. Things are not just so much re-evaluated, as re-sewn like old clothes.” (177) Based on this insight, which departs from the historicism of Diamat, Shklovsky justifies his own formal method of re-reading Pushkin to save the canonized classic from being flattened into an algebraic national symbol:

We are losing a living perception of Pushkin not because we have moved far away from his environment and language, but because we need to change the standard (yardstick) by which to measure Pushkin. Now Pushkin is departing

into a cold fog, the moment of the overturn of our perception draws near. The study of writers' tradition or the formal study of art would be deeply nonsensical if it did not give us the possibility for the new perception of a work. ("Art as Device" 178)

What makes the familiar, worn-out, automated, algebraic meaning new and gives it the power to awaken a new experience of the world from a different perspective is, according to Shklovsky's famous "Art as Device," the device of *ostranenie*, "defamiliarization." "Estrangement" is for Shklovsky the distinctive textual feature that decides whether a structure or the entire text is perceived as literary art or is absorbed in the dreariness of everyday prose and falls into oblivion. In order to present his "revolutionary" perception of Pushkin, Shklovsky introduces a new "yardstick" by which he measures his Eugene Onegin using the Formal Method, which aims at "the reconstruction of the 'formal arrangement' typical of an artistic work" ("Art as Device" 179). This new background, against which Pushkin's work, estranged by Formalist theory, appears as a contemporary of Shklovsky, is the (post)-Romantic ideology of the autonomy of art. In the context of "the imaginative proximity of social revolution" (Anderson, "Modernity" 104), this ideology developed into the modernist concept of turning art towards its language. Parallel to the exploration of the language of painting in Kandinsky's abstract art, the Russian formalists – Roman Jakobson was the most prominent among them in this regard – sought to define "literariness" through the autotelic orientation of the literary message, which was later defined as a poetic function (see Juvan, *Literary* 123–140). And what genre could be more oriented to the language of literature (our own and others') than parody?

Parody, emerging from the shadows of triviality, enters the stage of Russian formalism as the protagonist of literary evolution. Even before Tynyanov's systematic studies of the genre and Mikhail Bakhtin's post-formalist focus on its cultural-ideological role, Shklovsky's essay on Pushkin and Sterne emphasized parody as a means of literary self-reference and self-reflection, as a device that draws our attention to the linguistic constructedness of a work of art: "Just like *Tristram Shandy*, *Eugene Onegin* is a parody novel, it parodies not the morals and types of the era but the technique of the novel, its construction." ("Pushkin and Sterne" 179) In describing in detail what he recognized as "the unusual structure of *Eugene Onegin* and the *sternianstvo* of its devices," (181), Shklovsky pointed out his antithesis to the usual

thematic perception of Pushkin's masterpiece: "The true plot [*siuzhet*] of *Eugene Onegin* is not the tale of Onegin and Tatiana, but the game played with this plot [*fabula*]. The novel's main content consists of its constructive forms; the plot form [*siuzhet*] itself is used in the same way as real objects are used in Picasso's pictures." (182) Parody, digression and other devices adopted by Pushkin under the influence of Byron from Sterne, his forerunner in the pluperfect tense, are all strategies for changing the focus of historical perception on the form (structuredness) of the literary work. The fact that Shklovsky mentions Picasso in this context is evidence of his effort to highlight the aspect of Pushkin that makes him appear as a contemporary of the autotelic orientation of modernism and the avant-garde.

According to Shklovsky, Pushkin's most self-referential text, *The Little House at Kolomna*, "is almost entirely occupied with the description of the device with which it is written. It is a narrative poem about a narrative poem. It is almost a purely abstract, constructed thing." (184) It is unfortunate that he did not analyze this peculiar poem, which begins with a humorous and lengthy discussion of its stanzaic forms and even grammar and lexicon:

These foolish four-stress Lines have had their Day;
 They're puny Rubbish, fit for Boys and Girls;
 Ottava rima's best for a fresh Fray –
 I've always liked its fast, facetious Swirls;
 Chimes One and Two should come as fresh as May,
 Though Number Three more cautiously uncurls;
 Rhymes always were my favourite Relations –
 So, off to War! *En avant!* Battle Stations!

To make my new Verse true and empathetic,
 I'll take for Rhymes whate'er my Soul suggests –
 Despite the Cavils, arrogant, emetic,
 Which carping Critics, feathering their Nests,
 Give old John Hookham Frere, that proud Heretic
 And, doubtless, soon will level at my Jests;
 When Fate decrees, there's no Alternative –
 The Rhymes must bounce, so that the Verse may live.

No Word shall be thrown out here, All shall pass;
 No Draft-dodgers shall here have cold rejection,
 Nor any spavined Mule, nor jade, nor Ass;
 Conjunction, preposition, interjection,
 I'll take them all on, huddling in a Mass –
 Untouchability is no Infection –

The Dictionary don't disdain, so why should you?
This is War, not a military Tattoo. (Transl. Peter Cochran)

By pointing to digression and other narrative forms that focus on the labor of writing, Shklovsky later inspired both the structuralist and poststructuralist turns in literary studies. Shklovsky laid the foundation for the concept that has been referred to as metafiction since the 1960s: While Pushkin and Sterne emerged in the second decade of the twentieth century as contemporaries of modernism and the avant-garde, “the overturn of our perception” made both of them precursors of postmodernism and metafiction.

The first epigraph in Patricia Waugh's much-quoted book, for example, introduces the first chapter devoted to the question “What is metafiction?” with a quotation from Laurence Sterne (1), while in the genealogy of her definition of the phenomenon characteristic of postmodernism (“fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and real,” 2) she mentions not only William Gass, the presumed originator of the term, but also – in addition to Hjelmslev's concept of metalanguage and Bakhtin's dialogism – Russian formalists, especially Shklovsky:

Russian formalist theory begins with Viktor Shklovsky's notion of *ostranenie* or defamiliarization. ... Russian formalist theory can thus be seen to offer an optimistic view of metafictional strategies within the evolution of the novel. And this optimism can be strengthened by considering one of the other main strands of formalist theory: the notion of literature as a system that develops itself through the realignment of units within that system, and through its absorption of elements outside the literary system. (Waugh 65)

To summarize, against the background of Sterne, Shklovsky made Pushkin a revolutionary of form, a contemporary of the autotelic orientation of avant-garde art and formalist theory; Waugh and the postmodern theorists of metafiction, in turn, would perceive him as a contemporary of literary intertextuality and self-reference. Rather than further rehearsing the strategies of “estranging” the classics by making them appear as contemporaries of whatever is currently in vogue in literature, I will attempt to show Pushkin and his lesser-known Slovene contemporary France Prešeren as contemporaries of the discursive constellation of the era in which they lived. Following Fredric Jameson's famous maxim “Always historicize!” (*Political* 10),

I draw on Shklovsky's pioneering formalist analyzes of metafictional devices by extending them to Romantic poetry in terms of genre and interpreting the metafictional form socio-historically from a materialist perspective within the framework of critical discourse analysis.

2. Romantic ideology and metapoetry

Early nineteenth-century poems dealing with issues of writing, dissemination, reception, critical reflection, and the use of literature convey through their form the Romantic ideology that Jerome McGann depicts as a false consciousness of the real socio-economic conditions of writing. The ideologized forms of self-reflection were part of the self-regulatory mechanisms by which literature – as a relatively autonomous modern social subsystem (according to Siegfried J. Schmidt) – responded to and attempted to rhetorically influence its socio-economic context. In Romanticism, poetic self-reflection became an inseparable and insistent feature of esthetic literature, especially lyric poetry.

The metapoetry of Alexander S. Pushkin (1799–1837) and France Prešeren (1800–1849) blended the language of poetry with esthetic thought and Romantic ideology to convey to their readers the conviction that poetry was entitled to an esthetic autonomy distinct from bourgeois society and opposed to its commercialization in the book market. By confronting poetry with capitalist reality, emphasizing individualism and mythologizing poets as prophets and national seers, Romantic metapoetry also sought to introduce its form of public authority that could deal with the modern print media and the politics of cultural nationalism.

In European literature, the term Romanticism refers to the period between the French Revolution and the Springtime of Nations (see Day; Furst; Kos, *Romantika*). Influenced by the Enlightenment and the French bourgeois revolution, the Romantic movements were initially characterized by the emancipation of the individual and a radical critique of traditional secular and ecclesiastical authorities. However, the defeat of republicanism, Napoleonic imperialism, and the counter-revolutionary alliance of European monarchs in the pre-March period suppressed democratic tendencies or channeled them into nationalist movements. Regardless of the extremes of political dynamics, the first half of the 19th century was characterized by the industrial revolution and the rise of the bourgeoisie, which – even under the conditions of absolutism – promoted the development of

individuality and the modernization of societies. The structures of the ancien régime were also undermined by the capitalist economy with its market-based redistribution of wealth, increased vertical mobility and impoverishment. Better access to education and the advent of the mass press multiplied the readership, shaped the public sphere, and fostered the beginnings of popular culture.

As Siegfried J. Schmidt explains in his book on the self-organization of the social system of literature in the eighteenth century, under these conditions literature became a special sphere of socio-linguistic interaction, accessible in principle to all who had an adequate education.¹ Under the conditions of print capitalism, the creation and reception of literary works became detached from its earlier intertwining with other cultural practices used in distinct social ranks of the estate society. On the one hand, literature lost its predictable socio-ideological background and functions; on the other, it acquired a cultic role among the educated – it became a substitute for religion (as well as for national political institutions), but it existed as a relatively marginal form of intellectual labor, dependent on rents, patrons of art, the censorship, and the publishing market. Given the ambivalent position of word art, it is not surprising that it became a vital subject of literary works, especially during the Romantic period (see Schmidt 25; O’Neill). Romantic literature was intensely concerned with self-reflection and produced, among other things, a hybrid theoretical-literary genre of metapoetry. Not only in essays such as those by Schiller, Schlegel, Wordsworth, or Coleridge, but also in the poems themselves, poets wrote about how they perceived their status, their profession, and their creative process; what they saw as the specificity of poetic language; explained the composition and meaning of their works; commented on their reading, resonance, and social or national significance; defined themselves in relation to tradition and modern communication norms; built and cultivated their public image or responded to it; etc.

In contradistinction to common understandings of Romanticism which seek its totality in philosophical, esthetic, or poetological ideas (e.g., “intellectual fashions” and “climates of opinion” [Lovejoy 260]) or in the poetological features of literary texts and the worldview they represent (e.g., Wellek; Kos, *Romantika*), Jerome McGann proposes to define it through the reaction of writers to the contradictions of

¹ John Guillory shows that the ability to enjoy such word art became a status symbol of the educated and wealthier classes, that is, a sign of their excellence or “cultural capital” that distinguished them from the less sophisticated (and poorer) mass consumers of more popular cultural forms (332–333).

contemporary socio-historical events. A characteristic form of reaction, according to McGann, is “Romantic ideology,” which he understands, in accordance with the Marxist tradition, as a false consciousness that perceives and represents in a distorted way the contradictions in a tumultuous historical period characterized by the accelerated rhythm of changes in industrial capitalism and torn between the revolutionary overthrow of the old regime, the military-imperial export of French ideas across the old continent, and counterrevolutionary restoration. The poetic rhetoric of Romantic ideology is “marked by extreme forms of displacement and poetic conceptualization whereby the actual human issues with which the poetry is concerned are resituated in a variety of idealized localities” (2). According to McGann, “One of the basic illusions of Romantic Ideology is that only a poet and his works can transcend a corrupting appropriation by ‘the world’ of politics and money. Romantic poetry ‘argues’ this (and other) illusions repeatedly, and in the process it ‘suffers’ the contradictions of its own illusions and the arguments it makes for them” (13).

With the dissolution of the codified social bonds in which literary creation of past times had been bound, modern literature began to organize itself into a specialized social subsystem that introduced its particular institutions, media, and activities, for example, publishing houses, literary journals, reading societies, national theaters, or literary criticism. In the literary system, writing became a profession or the provision of services in the field of satisfying the entertaining-aesthetic needs of the public, and was thus left to the contingencies of the publishing-cultural market and public opinion.² From the point of view of Schmidt’s system theory, romantic metapoetry is a strategy by which the subsystem recognizable under the name of literature attempts to regulate the structure of this system, using elements that were already present in it or had just formed. Through self-governance, the system of literature distinguished itself in the social environment – it strengthened the boundaries of its authority, became aware of its cultural functions, and responded to other discourses and the social environment. In the book *Oracles and Hierophants*, David G. Riede shows that the Romantic poets – to paraphrase William Wordsworth – first had to create a taste in their readers that corresponded to the reception they imagined for themselves. Through their literary activity,

² David G. Riede notes that most of the potential readers of fiction trusted the newspaper more and preferred to reach for trivial literature rather than the supposedly elite poetry of the Romantics. Publishers adapted to this taste for economic reasons and were reluctant to print outstanding publications (244–246, 263–267).

writers created a new form of authority with which they competed for prestige with opinion leaders in newspapers and public discourse (Riede 23). Romantic metapoetry therefore sought to cultivate a sense of the uniqueness of esthetic literature through self-reflection and to strengthen the social function of writers. It thus sought to spread Romantic ideology in McGann's sense.

3. Prešeren and Pushkin: poetry and the book market

In what follows, I will discuss the Romantic metapoetry of France Prešeren and Alexander S. Pushkin. Although they did not know each other during their lifetimes and lived in two neighboring empires (NB, reactionary allies in the Holy Alliance), one in the periphery of Austria, the other in Russian urban centers and exile, their comparison is justified by their generational affiliation (Pushkin: 1799–1833, Prešeren: 1800–1849). Most of their work belongs to the late development of European Romanticism, conditioned by the *Vormaerz* Restoration and even more by the friction of their free thinking with censorship and absolutist power. Not least, they share an openness to Byronism as a revisionist version of Romantic ideology that oscillates ambivalently between early German idealism and Heine's later materialist critique.

In his work *Die Romantische Schule*, Heinrich Heine treated German Romanticism sympathetically, but from an ironic-critical distance. In light of radical liberal ideas, he attacked in particular the reactionary and escapist character of the Romantic renewal of Catholicism (McGann 34–35). The split in Romantic ideology in Prešeren and Pushkin is similar: on the one hand, a clear awareness of the limiting reality that marginalizes poetic creation with absolutist oppression and the prosaic realities of capitalism, and on the other, their rebellious yet escapist urge to mythologize poetry. This ambivalence can be compared to what McGann recognizes in Byron's second phase of Romanticism.

As a nobleman, Pushkin was one of the first Russian professional writers for several years (from 1824 until his humiliating placement at court), so he felt the short-circuit between the Romantic idea of the freedom of the creative self and the demands of the book market.³ In the satirical dialog "The Conversation of a Bookseller with a Poet" ("Razgovor knigoprodavca s poëtom"; printed as a preface to *Yevgeny*

³ I take the biographical information about Pushkin from the extensive study accompanying his poems (Klopčič, "Življenje A.S. Puškina").

Onegin, 1825; Pushkin, *Polnoe* II, 191–197) he intervened in the problem of the social-material existence of (his) poetry. The poem thrives on the contrasts between the idyllic past and the prosaic present, harmonious nature and the greedy crowd, rapturous poetic inspiration and the market (“I muzy sladostnyh darov / ne unižal postydnym torgom,” 192), leisurely idleness and a writer’s labor, solitary privacy and public availability, the subjective reality and obscenity of fame. In this metapoem Pushkin devotes himself to criticizing publishing, that is, one of the crucial roles in the system of literature. With romantic irony, also familiar from *Yevgeny Onegin*, the Poet’s views are confronted with the economic realism of the Bookseller and his capitalist rationality.⁴ The calculus that evaluates the fruits of artistic inspiration from the perspective of the market and the Romantic ideals of naturalness, freedom, love, esthetic excellence, and imagination (which the poet tries to preserve with his Quixotic idealism) is presented as cynical.

The contradictions between the Bookseller’s pragmatic market logic (i.e. Weber’s rationality of purpose) and the Poet’s belief in inspiration, subjectivity, and imagination lead to comic overlaps. In Pushkin’s ironic autothematic poem, the burlesque collisions between the sublime and the profane, between intellectual production and market transaction, and between symbolic and financial capital (between the classicism of “graces” and the modernity of bank “assignments”) are evident in the rhymes:

Poëma, govorjat, gotova,
 plod novyj *umstvennyh zatej*.
 Itak, rešite; ždu ja slova:
 naznač’te sami *cenu jej*.
 Stiški ljubimca muz i *gracij*
 my vmig *rubljami* zamenim
 i v puk naličnyh *assignacij*
 listočki vaši obratim.
 (Puškin, *Polnoe* II, 191; emphases added)

The Bookseller aphoristically hits the nerve of Romantic art-making – on the splitting of the artistic product into a spiritual-esthetic and a commodity side: “Ne prodaetsja vdohnovenie, / no možno rukopis’ prodat’” (197). By making the poet accept the fact of his market success and step out of his world of poetic fantasy, Pushkin

⁴ Max Weber characterized this kind of modern rationality with the term *Zweckrationalitaet*. In purpose-rational action, goal, means, and secondary results are rationally considered and weighed (*Economy* 24–26)

underscores his Romantic irony in undermining the barrier between the absolute world of artistic values (Romantic ideology) and the exchange value of the poetic text in the literary market (bourgeois ideology). Thus Pushkin revises his own idealism, the desire for the transcendence of the artistic word.

In the poem “The Gloss” (“Glosa,” *Krajnska čbelica* IV, 1834), France Prešeren wrote about almost the same theme as Pushkin in the above-mentioned dialog, namely the relationship between the art of words and the social environment in which capital decides (Prešeren, *Zbrano* 111–112). However, Pushkin’s version of Romantic irony, which does not spare even the poet himself, is alien to Prešeren, whose work does not know the motif of the poet earning from his market success. Unlike Pushkin, who experienced the splendor of the court, Prešeren’s poet figure is affected by poverty in the provinces, where there is neither a real publishing market nor rich patrons. In the first three stanzas, Prešeren satirizes the disdain for poetry among his Carniolan compatriots in a deliberately rude style, while the irony disappears in the last stanza, which elevates the poet’s profession. After his satirical portrayal of provincial bourgeois reality, gainful activities, and vertical mobility made possible by speculative capital (“The Gloss” gives an example of a swindler who buys a mansion in one year by selling worthless goods),⁵ Prešeren turns to radical otherness within the typical pattern of Romantic ideology. The alternative is marginal, excluded from the outset from the upward mobility so characteristic of 19th-century bourgeois narratives.

The poet backs up his decision to insist on the profession of a poet, which does not allow for advancement to a higher class (for which he otherwise yearns),⁶ with a series of *exempla* for the opening thesis of the poem (“He who sings is blind of eye”). “The Gloss” gathers historical evidence for the conclusion that poetic labor marginalizes. From the point of view of the instrumental rationality of the bourgeoisie, as represented by “The Gloss,” the pursuit of poetry is indeed blindness to reality. But the chain of allusions to poor, disabled, unfortunate, and persecuted poets (from Homer to Cervantes and Tasso), who were only posthumously canonized as classics, serves as a comforting

⁵ “Yesteryear one fraud still sold / curios, lugged round a box, / measured yards of ribbon, cloth: / now he’s buying a chateau.” (Unpublished translation by Nada Grošelj)

⁶ This aspiration of Prešeren’s, normal for the bourgeois world, into which he inserted himself only with difficulty, manifests itself otherwise through esthetic displacement, in his neopetrarchistic stylization of *courty* love for Julija Primic, the daughter of a rich *merchant* family.

prefiguration for Prešeren's experience of his standing. By enumerating world classics in his text, the author accumulates cultural capital metonymically marked by the timeless value of their names.

"The Gloss's" apologetic conclusion is the antithesis of the satirical diagnosis of the situation into which the literature of Prešeren's circle was plunged in the first third of the 19th century.⁷ With the metaphorical power of poetic speech realized in this metapoem, Prešeren undermines the symbols of material power accumulated through commodity exchange. Using a different exchange, that is, the symbolic exchange through tropes, he transforms wealth symbols into images of subjective freedom, beauty, and natural authenticity. Irreplaceable, authentic values, of which the poet as an individual is the subject and witness, can be expressed only through the means of symbolic exchange, and this, among all socio-cultural practices, is guaranteed only by the system of literature. The author thus shows how in a metaphor – a figure indispensable to poetry – the sky is equated with a castle, the pure dawn with gold, and the dewy grass with silver:

Yet his music will not cease;
 you may well pile up a hoard,
 buy yourselves a castle fort,
 live in it in unmarred peace!
 Where the vaulted heavens reach,
 porterless the bard's halls rise,
 and his gold is – clear dawn light
 and his silver – dew on grass:
 happy with this wealth amassed,
 penniless he'll live and die. (Transl. Nada Grošelj, unpublished)

The above verses are a document of Romantic ideology. In them, the creative subject asserts itself as an owner who transcends the attributes of property. In the space of the artistic text, the subject is established as a being connected to nature, as its inner values are expressed through landscape metaphors.

⁷ In the second stanza, the author uses antonomasia to caricature the indifference of his compatriots to the esthetic efforts of his circle, and he also laughs at their indolence. For Prešeren and Matija Čop, the path to higher culture lead only through poetry, the language dialect said to be the most comprehensive and developed (see Paternu 48–61). Prešeren characterizes the esthetic dimensions of literature, which contemporaries are said not to appreciate, with the adjective "pleasant," a translation of the hedonistic pole of Horace's poetic principle *dulce et utile*.

4. Prešeren and Pushkin: the poet and the nation

In the Romantic period, the relationship of writers to the people or the nation was ambivalent: on the one hand, contempt for the masses, the bourgeoisie, and the philistines; on the other hand, the idealization of the collective subject, which in the nineteenth century, based on Enlightenment-revolutionary ideas, was politically individualized in parallel with the individual – the nation was elevated to the collective creative genius, the subject of world history.

Pushkin and Prešeren also mocked the “rabble,” the “thick-headed people,” the “clumsy nuts,” “Carniolans,” or “goat-herders,” because they were convinced that their respective peoples were mostly unwilling or unable to accept poetry as poetry. And yet they placed the idea of the nation in an eschatological perspective (see Juvan, *Worlding* 81–140), which they did under the influence of transnational cultural nationalism. Thus, they formed an image of the nation as a collective individual located on a cultural level, similar to the Romantic self – such an idealized nation should be open to the esthetic forces of poets as ideal individuals.

Prešeren’s and Pushkin’s nationalist literary messianism is evident in their metapoetry from the mid-1830s. In the seventh sonnet of his “Sonnet Wreath” (“Sonetni venec,” *Illyrisches Blatt*, 1834), Prešeren presents himself as a romantically modernized Orpheus, the poetic savior of his nation, while Pushkin, in the poem “A monument I’ve raised not built with hands” (“Ja pamjatnik sebe vozdig nerukotvornyj,” written in 1836, but unpublished during his lifetime for political reasons) self-confidently expresses the vision of the canonical validity of his work with an intertextual variation on Horace’s ode “Exegi monumentum” (3:30).

Prešeren’s poetic voice takes on a different color in his “Wreath of Sonnets” than in “The Gloss,” where the social milieu is mocked. The sonnet cycle begins with a neo-Petrarchist parallel between a minstrel’s service to the addressed lady and the poet’s service to the “Slovenes,” between the poetic weaving of wreaths of glory for the chosen one and for his nation (“A Slovene wreath your poet has entwined / Of fifteen sonnets is the chaplet bound”, *Poems* 49).⁸ The poetic rhetoric of love weaves two longings of the bourgeois age into an esthetic wreath: for social advancement and belonging to the nation. Through

⁸ “Poet tvoj nov *Slovencam* venec vije, / ‘z petnajst sonetov ti takó ga spleta ...” (*Zbrano delo* 137; emphases added)

an ideal relationship with a wealthy bourgeois woman, the poet tacitly seeks the recognition of the bourgeoisie, and by writing poetry in his native language he hopes to gain respect in the imagined community of the nation and recognition that poetry is a symbol of the intellectual capacity of that community. In the “Wreath of Sonnets” Prešeren paints his milieu not in a synchronic, sociologically critical manner, but in a historical narrative with somber tones. The historical perspective, as developed among the protagonists of the national movements from among artists, philologists, linguists, and historians (see Anderson, *Imagined* 71), connected the events of the past into a meaningful whole through the narrative of the continuity of the ethno-linguistic community dominating a given territory.

Prešeren thus introduces the politics of the national gaze into the esthetics of poetry, retrospectively interpreting the reasons for the backward artistic and cultural conditions that paralyzed his poetic work and tinged it with sentimentality. He interprets them with an elegiac historical narrative that extends from the sixth to the eighth sonnet. He gives meaning to himself and his poetry through the idea of the Slovenian nation, which he views from the perspective of freethinking nationalism and Kollár’s glorification of Slavism. Prešeren’s stormy account of national political history highlights the loss of Carantania’s state independence in the Middle Ages.⁹ According to Prešeren, this marked the beginning of centuries of slavery, helplessness, hopeless rebellions, and internal conflicts (eighth sonnet), when the Slovenian collective subject disappeared from European history. Prešeren thus bases his poetic identity on national belonging, but interweaves it with an autobiographical melodrama of the love kind. The gloomy fresco of the Slovenian past and present is introduced into the sonnet cycle as a background for Prešeren’s poetic messianism.

Writers such as Pushkin and Prešeren (besides them, for example, Friedrich Schiller, Adam Mickiewicz, Karel Hynek Mácha, Sandor Petőfi or Hristo Botev) were canonized in Europe as “national poets” because they represented their nation in the international arena of letters (see Nemoianu; Neubauer; Juvan, *Worlding*; Dović and Helgason). They were credited with many merits – that they esthetically ennobled their mother tongue, helped shape the norm of literary language, celebrated

⁹ In “The Wreath of Sonnets,” the historical fate of Slovenia is probably inspired by Kollár’s sonnet cycle *Slávy dcera* (1824, 1832), in which erotic love and patriotism are also interwoven, and the narrative of the glorious Slavic past is shown with laments over its end (Kos, *Prešeren* 25, 214–222). Thus, Slovenian history is evoked in close connection with other Slavs of Austria.

the beauty of the homeland, sang about their nation's past and contemporary political aspirations, embraced local folk traditions, and looked prophetically into the nation's future. In the seventh and ninth sonnets, Prešeren assigns the savior role corresponding to the national poet to the singer Orpheus through intertextual metaphors. Borrowing the topos of Orpheus – who figured as a prefiguration of the Savior since at least the Middle Ages – Prešeren represents a belief in the power of poetry to cultivate savage peoples and temporarily overcome even death, which is indicated by the motif of Orpheus and Eurydice. Through Greek myth and Christian symbolism, Prešeren symbolizes the program of Slovenian national rebirth, colored by expressions that subsequently informed the program of “United Slovenia” in the revolutionary year of 1848:

Ah, would, to cure the dearth of these our days,
An Orpheus dowered with song of native strain
Were sent to us that all Slovenes might gain
Fresh fire to set their frozen hearts ablaze.

His words might kindle thoughts that would remind
Us of lost pride of race; discords would cease;
Our people in one nation then combined

Would see that feuds no longer did increase.
His strains would bring the rule of joy and peace,
Where tempests roar and nature is unkind. (Prešeren, *Poems* 55)

Prešeren's Orpheus thus appears as a heaven-sent savior in the midst of an oppressed and unsuspecting people, similar to the Messiah among the biblical Israelites. The Orphic myth, according to which a poetic word in Slovenian is supposed to reawaken a people from a thousand years of historical non-existence and unite it into a cultural-political entity on the eve of the Springtime of Nations, is transferred by Prešeren to himself in the ninth sonnet. With a gesture of self-mythification, he reveals his ambition to be publicly recognized thanks to his national mission (as overall in this cycle, he combines the poetic and national theme with the desire for love):

All the reward I wished for was that you
With me a poet's timeless fame might share
That native songs our poignant tale might bear;

That all Slovenes should waken and that true

Content and joy might come. ... (Prešeren, *Poems* 57)

In the wake of Prešeren's posthumous canonization as a national poet, the Romantic ideology that underpinned his self-mythification took over all those concerned with the critical, pedagogical, philological, and political treatment of his literary texts. In 1866, the critic Josip Stritar elevated Prešeren's not exactly modest Orphic self-image to the figure of a national poet and saint, comparable to the greatest names of the European literary canon.

Although Pushkin in several metapoems unscrupulously raised his poetic character above the despised masses – his aristocratic bearing distinguished him from the reserved, slightly rustic Prešeren – he did not hesitate to see his poetry as a national property and emblem, a force surpassing even the powerful ruler of the Russian Empire. Like Prešeren, he self-confidently laid the imaginary foundation for the monument that was later erected to him in reality (see Javornik). In the poem “A monument I've raised not built with hands” (“Ja pamjatnik sebe vozdig neruktovornyj (Pushkin, *Polnoe* III, 373), written in August 1836, a few months before his death, he chose the genre of the ode, the leading lyrical genre of Russian classicism, to glorify himself as the eternal classic of all nations of Great Russia and mouthpiece of free-thinking:

A monument I've raised not built with hands,
And common folk shall keep the path well trodden
To where it unsubdued and towering stands
Higher than Alexander's Column.

I shall not wholly die – for in my sacred lyre
My spirit shall outlive my dust's corruption –
And honour shall I have, so long the glorious fire
Of poesy flames on one single scutcheon.

Rumour of me shall then my whole vast country fill,
In every tongue she owns my name she'll speak.
Proud Slave's posterity, Finn, and-unlettered still —
The Tungus, and the steppe-loving Kalmyk.

And long the people yet will honour me
Because my lyre was tuned to loving-kindness
And, in a cruel Age, I sang of Liberty
And mercy begged of Justice in her blindness.

Indifferent alike to praise or blame
Give heed, O Muse, but to the voice Divine
Fearing not injury, nor seeking fame,
Nor casting pearls to swine. (Pushkin, *Alexander Pushkin Poems*)

Since the genre of classicist ode became obsolete in Romanticism, Pushkin treated it ironically-parodically as he regarded other classical forms. Whereas in many places Pushkin's later poetic language flirted with realistic prose (for example, in the almost diary-like poem of November 2, 1829, which depicts the writing of poems), in this case he not only returned to the direct ode, but even reinvigorated the poetics of classicism by resorting to the principle of *imitatio veterum* and imitation.

Its model is Horace's ode 3, 30, "Exegi monumentum" ("I have built a monument, more lasting than bronze"), which in Russian classical literature has already inspired Gavril Derzhavin's imitation and Mikhail Lomonosov's paraphrase. According to Renate Lachmann ("Imitation and Intertextuality"), Pushkin's version differs from its two predecessors by a more pronounced dialog with the Latin textual matrix, which makes it more of a replica than an imitation. Pushkin follows relatively faithfully Horace's structuring of the theme and the external form, and even translates individual phrases. In the first two stanzas, he agrees with him on the contrast between the material monuments erected by powerful rulers and the immaterial monument that is the author's poetry, as well as on the conviction that a more important part of his being will be posthumous, when it will be cherished by future generations. But Pushkin anchors the seemingly timeless *topos* of the poetry-monument, which goes back to Horace, in its specific historical moment. Allusions to contemporaneity dominate the last three stanzas of Pushkin's eulogy to himself.

Pushkin explicitly contrasts the esthetic and social values of his poetry with the authority of tsarist rule, claiming that his eternal spiritual-poetic monument will be higher than the Alexander Tower in St. Petersburg. In his short life, in which he was prone to all sorts of liberties and transgressions, Pushkin was fatally dependent on tsarist authority. Seen in this light, his self-mythification as the ideal of poets, herald of freedom, and idol of the peoples of the Russian Empire is actually a comforting response to his suppressed anger at the blockades imposed on him by absolutist rule (censorship, police control, exile, humiliating material dependence on the court, the seduction of his

wife by the tsar, etc.). Pushkin thus bases his imaginary monument on arguments different from those of Horace. While his Roman model believed that he deserved posthumous fame because of his successful social rise (from the poor classes and the provinces) and his leading role in the introduction of Latin poetry, the Russian Romantic sees his importance – not only for Russians, but worldwide – on an esthetic level, thanks to the inspirational power of his poetry (“I slaven budu ja, dokol’ v podlinnom mire / živ budet hot’ odin piit”), and on a political level – because of his propagation of freedom during the tsarist regime.

5. Conclusion

Further research should examine the other self-reflexive poems by Pushkin and Prešeren and, above all, shed more light on their biographical and historical-cultural context. But already from the comparative interpretations of the selected examples of their metapoetry, we can rightly conclude that both poets were united in their conception of poetry by a related complex of conceptual differences and semantic contrasts and that, despite considerable personal, esthetic, linguistic, stylistic, class and other differences, they drew from practically the same stock of ideas, concepts, vocabulary, images, and poetic procedures shaped by the Romantic ideology with its contradictions. Both drew the attention of their target audience to the paradox of the writer’s social marginality and national prophecy, both used the devices of criticism (satire, irony) and mythologization. All this indicates that Romanticism is a historically specific discursive formation from which writers drew material to justify their textual subjectivity and which they themselves influenced textually. Through the emphatic self-reflection with which literature entered the constellation of social discourses of its epoch, literature sought to demonstrate the meaning of its existence in the minds of writers and other participants in the literary system. Writers used metapoetry to give their work a broader social validity. With the help of the builders of the literary canon, they succeeded quite well, as Romantic ideology, with its veneration of poetry and national poets, did not experience a more serious crisis until the end of the 20th century.

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