

Iconicity of Personal Pronouns in Pushkin's Lyric Poems

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Abstract: Poetic iconicity, the phenomenon of close correspondence between verbal meaning and form, is related to what Roman Osipovich Jakobson (1970) termed the “subliminal verbal patterning” of poetry, and the “poetic function” of language. Poetic iconicity helps to construct the poet's vision (Hiraga, 2005). This paper examines a thematic cluster of lyric poems by Alexander Sergeevich Pushkin. In these poems, the personal pronouns “I” (я) and “thou” (ты) serve to foreground love relationships. This dynamic of love in various guises underlies the dramatic tension of the poems. Poetic iconicity, the “subliminal verbal patterning” of poetry, gives musical voice to this spiritual dynamic.

Keywords: Lyric poetry, pragmatics of personal pronouns, poetic function, poetic iconicity, Alexander Sergeevich Pushkin

1. Introduction

Poetic iconicity, the phenomenon of close correspondence between verbal meaning and form, is related to what Roman Osipovich Jakobson (1970) termed the “subliminal verbal patterning” of poetry, and the “poetic function” of language. Poetic iconicity helps to construct the poet's vision (Hiraga, 2005). The poetic function and poetic iconicity are relevant to intercultural communication because they provide a possible window into the nature of language. Just as the eye is said to be a window into the human soul, poetry is a window into the soul of language, and thereby, indirectly, also into the soul of human beings.

This paper examines a thematic cluster of lyric poems by Alexander Sergeevich Pushkin. The dramatic tension of these poems is created by the dynamic of love in various guises. The paper examines how the personal pronouns “I” (я) and “thou” (ты) serve to highlight these love relationships.

2. The poem ‘Thou’ and ‘You’

The theme poem which encapsulates the tension of love relationships is Pushkin's short lyric, ‘Ты’ и ‘Был’ – ‘Thou’ and ‘You’ (Pushkin, 1977, p. 58; “Thou and You”¹).

¹ The text of Pushkin's poem was retrieved 23rd August, 2013, from <http://feb-web.ru/feben/pushkin/texts/push10/v03/d03-058.htm?cmd=p>. The translation by Yevgeny Bonver was retrieved 13th March 2014, from http://www.poetryloverspage.com/poets/pushkin/thou_and_you.html and <http://www.poetryloverspage.com/yevgeny/index.html>, copyrighted by poetryloverspage.com. The translator could not be contacted. The author of this paper asserts fair use of the text and translation for research, commentary and criticism.

Ты и Вы

Пустое *вы* сердечным *Ты*
 Она обмолвясь заменила
 И все счастливые мечты
 В душе влюблённой возбудила.

Пред ней задумчиво стою;
 Свести очей с неё нет силы;
 И говорю ей: как *вы* милы!
 И мыслю: как *Тебя* люблю!

Thou and You

She substituted, by a chance
 For empty “you” – the gentle “thou”;
 And all my happy dreams, at once,
 In loving heart again resound.

In bliss and silence do I stay,
 Unable to maintain my role:
 “Oh, how sweet *you* are!” I say –
 “How I love *thee*!” says my soul.

This is a linguist’s poem *par excellence* – it is a poems about pronouns. In English today, the pronoun *thou* is archaic. Its pragmatic force – the personal intimacy of the 2nd person singular – is no longer fully felt by native speakers of English. It survives in current English usage only in religious contexts such as the traditional wording of the *Lord’s Prayer* – “Our Father, Who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” However, in Russian, as in Romance and in most European languages, there is a distinction between the more intimate and the more formal forms of address.

When I was nine years old, I experienced a bilingual confusion of tongues. Newly arrived in England from my native Poland, I went to primary school in London. I experienced culture shock at the usage of the English pronoun *you*. The contrast between Polish and English is even stronger than between Russian and English, because Polish uses the 3rd person singular rather than the 2nd person plural for formal address. When I figured out that my teacher expected me to address her as *you*, the word just couldn’t pass my lips. I was dumbstruck. The pronoun *you* felt just too intimate. I couldn’t bring myself to be so disrespectful to my teacher! The English 2nd person pronoun didn’t fit my Polish sense of pragmatics.

The tone of Pushkin’s poem evokes the flirtatious but polite atmosphere of nineteenth-century upper-class salons. Let us look at the pronouns.

Line 1	<i>вы</i>	<i>ты</i>
Line 2	Она	[3 rd singular: заменила]
Line 3		
Line 4		[3 rd singular: возбудила]
Line 5	Пред ней	[Ø 1 st singular: стою]
Line 6		с неё
Line 7	[Ø 1 st singular: говорю]	ей <i>вы</i>
Line 8	[Ø 1 st singular: мыслю]	<i>тебя</i>

Iconicity is the correspondence between the form and meaning of a text. The pronouns *вы* and *ты*, *you* and *thou*, are italicized by Pushkin, as if given in question marks – the text is about the words, the pronouns themselves, the problem of how to address the woman who is the object of the poet’s love. The italicization is a kind of pictorial, or direct, iconicity, graphically drawing our attention to the meaning of the poem. The meaning is the simultaneous desire for

intimacy and lack of intimacy – and this tension is conveyed by the distancing effect of the italics. The woman said *ты* but didn't mean it; while the poet in his heart wants to say *ты* but in actuality out loud says *вы*, in keeping with the social expectation.

However, besides this direct, overt iconicity, clearly marked by the italics, there is a subtle, covert iconicity, conveyed by the other pronouns in the text, which carry the main story line. The other pronouns are all 3rd person singular, referring to the woman. She is not named; the poem captures a fleeting moment of conversation; yet she is the focus of attention, and of attraction.

The first stanza is one complete sentence, which consists of two coordinated clauses. The pronoun, *она* “she”, in the nominative case, is the subject of the entire sentence, of both clauses. “She” is the subject of both verbs in the sentence – *заменила* (“exchanged”) and *возбудила* (“aroused”). On the other hand, linguistically speaking, in the sentence of the first stanza, the poet is not overtly present at all, neither in pronominal nor in verbal form. The presence of the poet is signaled by the words *в душе* – “in the soul” – without the presence even of the possessive pronoun, *in my soul*. Thus, the presence of the woman is entirely foregrounded, while the poet, as a living talking person, is backgrounded. What is present are his disembodied “happy dreams” (*счастливые мечты*) and his “soul in love” (*в душе влюблённой*). The phonetic ending –*ты* of *мечты* (“dreams”) echoes the pronoun *ты* (“thou”) that accidentally passed the woman’s lips – iconically indicating that the dreams, *мечты*, are about the possibility of intimacy connoted by the use of *ты*, “thou”.

In the second stanza of this poem, the grammatical subject of the first sentence becomes the grammatical object. The object appears three times, conveyed by the English translation “her”.

Пред ней – “before her” (instrumental case)

с неё – “from her” (genitive case)

ей – “to her” (dative case)

Iconically speaking, “she”, or rather, “her”, as expressed by the grammatical object, is the recurring object of attraction and fascination for the enamored poet. Here in the second stanza, unlike in the first stanza, the poet is grammatically present, but with a light touch – again, there is no overt 1st person pronoun. Grammatically, the 1st person is encoded only in the verbal endings:

Line 5 [Ø 1st singular] **стою** (“I stand”)

Line 7 [Ø 1st singular] **говорю** (“I say”)

Line 8 [Ø 1st singular] **мыслю** (“I love”)

The succession of many verbs conveys the poet’s presence and fascination, but the absence of the pronoun *я* (“I”) serves to background or efface his person. Moreover, in line 6, there is no overt finite verb and no overt grammatical presence of the poet:

Line 6 Свести очей с неё нет силы

to-take-off eyes from her no strength

There is no strength to take eyes off of her

The verb *свести* (“to take off”) is in the infinitive, and there is a grammatically covert copula: *нет силы* – “[there is] no strength”; in Russian, the word *нет* “no/not”, with zero copula (the verb “to be” is not grammatically overt), is the opposite of *есть* “there is”. In this line,

the “eyes” and the “strength” refer to the poet, but grammatically speaking, the person of the poet has been removed, since there is no 1st person pronoun and no 1st person verbal ending. This reinforces the backgrounding effect of the first stanza, serving to background the person of the poet and foreground the person of the unnamed woman, the object of his love, his intense fascination, and his desire for intimacy.

This is the iconicity of the poem. Through a careful manipulation of language, the form of Pushkin’s text echoes and reinforces the meaning. By backgrounding the persona of the poet, Pushkin draws us into the interiority of his soul. Within this interiority, the intimacy takes life, even though to the outside world, the moment captured in the poem was just a snippet of social conversation.

3. Tatyana’s letter to Onegin

In another famous lyric poem, Tatyana’s letter to Onegin from the verse novel *Евгений Онегин* (“Pushkin’s Poems”, *Eugene Onegin*, Book III), Pushkin echoes the atmosphere of self-disclosure of the poem *Ты и Бы*. However, here the self-disclosure is reversed – the poem is addressed by a woman to a man. The self-disclosure is also heightened exponentially, because the communication of innermost feelings is actually communicated to the recipient, rather than remaining in the interiority of the soul.

There is a linguistic distancing that happens as a framing of the letter within the novel, rather than within the space of the text of the letter itself. First of all, Tatyana, as a character in the novel, is clearly fictional, whereas the poem *Ты и Бы* conveys the immediacy of what was perhaps a real social encounter. Secondly, when introducing the letter in the context of the novel, Pushkin carries on a dialogue with his reader, commenting that the letter was originally written in French, but that this putative original is not given to the reader. The Russian text of the letter is a supposed translation of the putative French. The reader is asked to excuse the intimate tone of the text, which may be due to the poet’s efforts to convey Tatyana’s true feelings, and which is also imputed to her youth and lack of experience of the world. Thus, the reader’s expectation is set up that the text will indeed be something unusual in its degree of intimacy and self-disclosure. Finally, the text is framed by being different in form from the rest of the novel – it does not follow the strict form of the stanza employed in the rest of the novel. The text of the letter, although rhymed and also metered in iambic tetrameter, appears to flow more spontaneously and organically than the strict and elegant stanza form of *Евгений Онегин*. The form of the letter iconically fits the meaning, which is the spontaneous outpouring of emotion of a soul tormented by love.

The letter contains several parts of different length. In the first and second part (lines 1-30), the pronouns used include *я* (“I”), *вы* (“you,” formal), and also *мы* (“we”), the latter referring to Tatyana’s family in the countryside, inclusive of Tatyana herself. The very last part of the letter (lines 75-78), is a short four-line stanza, which contains *я* and *вы* but in their different grammatical forms – *мне* (“to me”, dative case) and *ваша* (“your”, possessive pronoun, nominative case). In this final stanza, Tatyana apologizes for the forthrightness of her emotional outpouring. I shall concentrate on the use of pronouns in the middle of the letter (lines 31-74), which conveys the outpouring of Tatyana’s soul.

On the basis of the poem *Ты и Вы*, and also native speaker intuitions of languages which distinguish formal vs. informal or intimate forms of address, we can surmise that it would have been socially unacceptable for Tatyana to suddenly address Onegin as *ты* in the context of a social conversation. Hence the distancing by the choice of a letter as the form of communication, and also, the elaborate distancing achieved by the poet's framing of the letter, as discussed above. When we get to the most emotional, third part of the letter, we as readers are secret voyeurs into a young woman's soul – a social indiscretion made possible by the fact that, albeit as a fictional character, she herself is committing the indiscretion of self-disclosure. Here, half-way through the letter, the socially acceptable *вы* lapses into an impassioned *ты*:

(Line 34) То воля неба: я твоя
that will of-heaven I your(s) [thine]
It's the will of heaven: I am yours [thine]

Unlike in the poem *Ты и Вы*, however, this is not an accidental lapse, a slip of the tongue (*оговорка*); the use of *ты* is deliberate and sustained for 45 lines of the poem. In the text below², this use is highlighted both in the Russian original and English translation.

Line	<i>Письмо Татьяны к Онегину</i>	<i>Tatyana's letter to Onegin</i>
1	Я к вам пишу – чего же боле?	I write this to you – what more can be said?
2	Что я могу ещё сказать?	What more can I add to that one fact?
3	Теперь, я знаю, в вашей воле	For now I know it is in your power
4	Меня презреньем наказать.	To punish me contemptuously for this act.
5	Но вы, к моей несчастной доле	But you, keeping for my unhappy lot
6	Хоть каплю жалости храня,	Even one drop of sympathy
7	Вы не оставите меня.	Will not entirely abandon me.
8	Сначала я молчать хотела;	At first I wished to remain silent;
9	Поверьте: моего стыда	Believe me, my shame, my agony,
10	Вы не узнали б никогда,	You never ever would have heard.
11	Когда б надежду я имела	As long as hope remained preserved
12	Хоть редко, хоть в неделю раз	That rarely, even once a week,
13	В деревне нашей видеть вас,	I'd see you in our country house,
14	Чтоб только слышать ваши речи,	To hear your voice, to hear you speak,
15	Вам слово молвить, и потом	To say a few words, and then, and then
16	Всё думать, думать об одном	To think, and think, and think again
17	И день и ночь до новой встречи.	All day, all night, until the next meeting.

² The text and translation are taken from <http://www.pushkins-poems.com/Yev311.htm>, copyright Oxquarry Books Ltd., translated by Gerard Ledger. The translation is reprinted here with permission from the translator. The translation is also reproduced in <http://www.abt.org/onegin2013/letter.html> and <http://mjsskelly.blogspot.com/2012/09/eugene-onegin-book-vs-movie.html> (retrieved 13th March 2014). The author of this paper asserts fair use of Pushkin's text for research, commentary and criticism. The 1st and 2nd person singular pronouns are highlighted in the Russian text and in the corresponding places in the translation.

18	Но, говорят, вы нелюдим;	But it is said you are unsociable,
19	В глуши, в деревне всё вам скучно,	And in this backwater all is tedious to you,
20	А мы... ничем мы не блестим,	While we... well here we shine at nothing,
21	Хоть вам и рады простодушно.	Although we're glad to welcome you.
22	Зачем вы посетили нас?	Why did you come to visit us?
23	В глуши забытого селенья	In this forgotten rural home
24	Я никогда не знала б вас,	Your face I never would have known
25	Не знала б горького мученья.	Nor known this bitter suffering.
26	Души неопытной волненья	The fever of inexperience
27	Смирив со временем (как знать?),	In time (who can tell?) would have died down,
28	По сердцу я нашла бы друга,	And I'd have found another lover,
29	Была бы верная супруга	Dear to my heart, to whom I'd be true,
30	И добродетельная мать.	And a loving wife, and virtuous mother.
31	Другой!.. Нет, никому на свете	Another!... No, no one on this earth
32	Не отдала бы сердца я !	Is there to whom I 'd give my heart!
33	То в вышнем суждено совете...	That is ordained by highest fate...
34	То воля неба: я твоя ;	That is heaven's will – that I am yours ;
35	Вся жизнь моя была залогом	My life till now was but a pledge,
36	Свиданья верного с тобой ;	Of meeting with you , a forward image;
37	Я знаю, ты мне послан богом,	You were sent by heaven of that I 'm sure,
38	До гроба ты хранитель мой ...	To the grave itself you are my saviour...
39	Ты в сновиденьях мне являлся,	In dreams you have appeared to me ,
40	Незримый, ты мне был уж мил,	Though yet unseen, I held you dear,
41	Твой чудный взгляд меня томил,	Your glance and strangeness tortured me ,
42	В душе твой голос раздавался	To my soul your voice was loud and clear
43	Давно... нет, это был не сон!	From long ago... It was not a dream!
44	Ты чуть вошёл, я вмиг узнала,	You came, and I knew that very instant,
45	Вся обомлела, запылала	I was struck dumb, my heart flared up,
46	И в мыслях молвила: вот он!	And in my thoughts said "He is the one!"
47	Не правда ль? я тебя слыхала:	Is it not true? I heard you often:
48	Ты говорил со мною в тиши,	In the silence did you not speak to me ,
49	Когда я бедным помогала	Both when I helped the poor, and when
50	Или молитвой улаждала	With prayer I sought to ease and soften
51	Тоску волнуемой души?	The pain inside my anguished head?
52	И в это самое мгновенье	And at this very moment, is it not you ,
53	Не ты ли, милое виденье,	Oh sweetest, lovely vision who
54	В прозрачной темноте мелькнул,	In the night's transparency flits by
55	Проникнул тихо к изголовью,	And quietly nestles by the bed's head?
56	Слова надежды мне шепнул?	And you , who with love and rapturously
		Whispered a word of hope to me ?
57	Кто ты, мой ангел ли хранитель,	Who are you, my guardian angel?
58	Или коварный искушитель:	Or a wily devil, a tempter fatal?
59	Мои сомненья разреши.	Disperse these doubts, this agony.

60	Быть может, это всё пустое,	Perhaps all this is nothingness,
61	Обман неопытной души!	A foolish mind's self-aberration,
62	И суждено совсем иное...	And something other is fate's decree...
63	Но так и быть! Судьбу мою	So be it! Whatever my destiny,
64	Отныне я тебе вручаю,	To you I give it from this day,
65	Перед тобою слёзы лью,	Before you the tears roll down my cheek,
66	Твоей защиты умоляю...	And your protection I beseech...
67	Вообрази: я здесь одна,	For consider: here I am alone,
68	Никто меня не понимает,	No one understands what I say,
69	Рассудок мой изнемогает,	My reason tortures me every day,
70	И молча гибнуть я должна.	And silently I am doomed to perish.
71	Я жду тебя : единым взором	You I await: With a single glance
72	Надежды сердца оживи,	Revive the hope that's in my heart, [or]
73	Иль сон тяжёлый перерви,	Cut short this heavy dream I cherish,
74	Увы, заслуженным укором!	Deserving, I know, reproach and scorn.
75	Кончаю! Страшно перечесть...	I finish – I tremble to read it through,
76	Стыдом и страхом замираю...	With shame and terror my heart sinks low,
77	Но мне порукой ваша честь,	But your honour is my guarantee
78	И смело ей себя вверяю...	And to that I entrust my destiny.

In the impassioned monologue in the middle part of Tatyana's letter, in the original Russian version, the 1st person pronoun *я* ("I") in its various grammatical forms appears a total of 23 times, while the 2nd person pronoun *ты* ("thou") in its various grammatical forms appears 17 times.

Occurrence of 1st person pronoun in lines 31-74

Subject form – 10 times:	(10) я "I" (nominative)
Object form – 7 times:	(4) мне "to me" (dative)
	(2) меня "me" (accusative or genitive)
	(1) со мной "with me" (instrumental)
Possessive form – 6 times:	(1) моя "my" (nominative singular, feminine)
	(3) мой "my" (nominative singular, masculine)
	(1) мои "my" (nominative plural)
	(1) мою "my" (accusative singular, feminine)

Occurrence of 2nd person pronoun in lines 31-74

Subject form – 8 times:	(8) ты "you (thou)" (nominative)
Object form – 5 times:	(1) тебе "to you (to thee)" (dative)
	(2) тебя "you (thee)" (accusative or genitive)
	(1) с тобой "with you (with thee)" (instrumental)
	(1) перед тобою "before you (thee)" (instrumental)
Possessive form – 4 times:	(1) твоя "your (thine)" (nominative singular, feminine)
	(2) твой "your (thy)" (nominative singular, masculine)
	(1) твоей "your (thy)" (genitive singular, feminine)

This shows a fairly equal balance between the presence of the 1st person of the speaker of the monologue, i.e., writer of the letter – Tatyana, and the presence of the 2nd person, Onegin, the man with whom she would like to initiate a close relationship.

In terms of verbal morphology, there is also an equal balance. The verbs are predominantly in the past tense, which is not overtly marked for grammatical person, but is marked for gender. Of these, out of a total of 19 verbs in past tense forms, nine refer to Tatyana as subject, while nine refer to Onegin as subject. In non-past verb forms, there are five verbs in the present tense, referring to Tatyana and morphologically marked as 1st person singular:

Line 37	знаю	“I know” (“I’m sure”)
Line 64	вручаю	“I entrust / hand over” (“I give”)
Line 65	лью	“I pour (out) [my tears]” (“my tears roll down”)
Line 66	умоляю	“I beseech”
Line 71	жду	“I wait” (“I await”)

There are also four verbs in the 2nd person singular imperative, directly addressed by Tatyana to Onegin:

Line 59	разреш	“decide” (“disperse [these doubts]”)
Line 67	вообрази	“imagine” (“consider”)
Line 72	оживи	“revive”
Line 73	перерви	“cut short”

Thus the distribution of verbal morphology, just like that of the 1st and 2nd person pronouns, creates an equal balance between the presence of Tatyana and Onegin in the text. This is iconic of the emotional intensity of the confession of love (*признание в любви*), which draws the “I” and the “thou” into an equal intimate relationship with each other.

It should be noted that there are a few other pronouns in the text which help to form a second thematic line, that of questioning of Onegin’s identity.

Line 31	никому	“to nobody” (negative pronoun, dative singular)
Line 46	он	“he” (3 rd singular, nominative)
Line 57	кто	“who” (interrogative pronoun, nominative singular)
Line 68	никто	“nobody” (negative pronoun, nominative singular)

These pronouns are “nobody” (*никому*, *никто*), “who” (*кто*) and “he” (*он*). The young woman’s mind questions: Is he the one who is meant for me? The letter is at once an affirmation of her own feelings – he is the one, you are the one, thou art the one – and a questioning of fate and of the feelings of the addressee, Onegin. Devoted readers of Pushkin’s novel know that this sets up the twisted fate and unexpected *dénouement* of our two protagonists. Tatyana’s letter contains *in nuce* the seed of that fate and *dénouement*. Later on in the novel, Tatyana will exclaim: *А счастье было так возможно, / Так близко!* (“And happiness had been so possible, so close!”)³, but it was not fated to be.

³ *Eugene Onegin*, Chapter 8, verse 47. See <http://www.bibliotekar.ru/encSlov/a/36.htm> (accessed 13th March 2014).

4. The poem *Я помню чудное мгновение...*

The dynamic of intimacy contained in the pronoun *ты* takes full flight in the untitled lyric *Я помню чудное мгновение...* (Pushkin, 2006; Gurarie, 1995⁴).

Line	<i>К</i> ***	<i>То</i> ***
1	<i>Я</i> помню чудное мгновенье:	The wondrous moment of our meeting...
2	Передо <i>мной</i> явилась <i>ты</i> ,	Still I remember you appear
3	Как мимолётное виденье,	Before me like a vision fleeting,
4	Как гений чистой красоты.	A beauty's angel pure and clear.
5	В томленьях грусти безнадежной,	In hopeless ennui surrounding
6	В тревогах шумной суеты,	The worldly bustle, to my ear
7	Звучал <i>мне</i> долго голос нежный	For long your tender voice kept sounding,
8	И снились милые черты.	For long in dreams came features dear.
9	Шли годы. Бурь порыв мятежный	Time passed. Unruly storms confounded
10	Разсеял прежние мечты,	Old dreams, and I from year to year
11	И <i>я</i> забыл <i>твой</i> голос нежный,	Forgot how tender you had sounded,
12	<i>Твои</i> небесные черты.	Your heavenly features once so dear.
13	В глуши, во мраке заточенья	My backwoods days dragged slow and quiet -
14	Тянулись тихо дни мои	Dull fence around, dark vault above -
15	Без божества, без вдохновенья,	Devoid of God and uninspired,
16	Без слёз, без жизни, без любви.	Devoid of tears, of fire, of love.
17	Душе настало пробужденье -	Sleep from my soul began retreating,
18	И вот опять явилась <i>ты</i> ,	And here you once again appear
19	Как мимолётное виденье,	Before me like a vision fleeting,
20	Как гений чистой красоты.	A beauty's angel pure and clear.
21	И сердце бьётся в упоенье,	In ecstasy my heart is beating,
22	И для него воскресли вновь	Old joys for it anew revive;
23	И божество, и вдохновенье,	Inspired and God-filled, it is greeting
24	И жизнь, и слёзы, и любовь.	The fire, and tears, and love alive.

⁴ The text of Pushkin's poem was retrieved 26th September, 2013, from <http://stihiolubvi.ru/pushkin/ya-pomnyu-chudnoe-mgnovene.html>. The translation, copyrighted by Genia Gurarie, egurarie@princeton.edu, was retrieved 24th September, 2013, from <http://www.inspirationalstories.com/poems/the-wondrous-moment-of-our-meeting-alexander-pushkin-poems/>. The translator could not be contacted at the given email address. The author of this paper asserts fair use of the text and translation for research, commentary and criticism.

In this poem, the intimate pronoun *ты* is confidently and hypnotically echoed in the phonetic repetition of the rhymes of the first, second, third and fifth stanzas:

Line 2	ты	“you (thou)”	(nominative singular)
Line 4	красоты	“beauty”	(genitive singular)
Line 6	суеты	“vanity”	(genitive singular)
Line 8	черты	“features”	(accusative plural)
Line 10	мечты	“dreams”	(accusative plural)
Line 12	черты	“features”	(accusative plural)
Line 18	ты	“you (thou)”	(nominative singular)
Line 20	красоты	“beauty”	(genitive singular)

We can also examine the distribution of pronouns in this poem, as highlighted in the text. The nominative case of the pronoun *я* (“I”) appears twice, and the nominative case of *ты* also appears twice in the poem. Other forms of “I” (*мной, мне, μου*) appear three times, while other forms of “thou” (the possessives *твой, твою*) appear twice. This would seem to be an equal balance, just as in Tatyana’s letter, signaling an intimate relationship. However, the appearance of these pronouns is not phonetically equal. The pronoun *ты* appears in stressed form in rhyming position at the end of line 2 and line 18 – a position of prominence. On the other hand, even though *я* appears at the very beginning of the poem in line 1, and almost at the beginning of the line in line 11, in both positions it is unstressed. Thus *я* is important, but underemphasized – iconically echoing the depressed mood of the poet in the middle of the poem.

One other pronoun appears in the poem – *для него*, in line 22. In context, the English translation is “for it” – *для [сердца]*, “for [the heart]”. However, grammatically speaking, *для него* could also be “for him” – for the poet. Here, the poet’s heart in the final stanza, and also his soul in the fifth stanza, are metonymous for the poet’s persona. Just as in the poem *Ты и Вы*, in the last two stanzas the poet’s persona has been grammatically backgrounded through the removal of the 1st person pronoun. Instead, what is foregrounded is the poet’s emotional and spiritual reaction.

5. Conclusion

In all of the poems examined in this paper, the dynamic of love and intimacy in various guises underlies the dramatic tension of the poem. Poetic iconicity, the “subliminal verbal patterning” of poetry, gives musical voice to this spiritual dynamic. A close analysis of the poems shows that each has its own individual internal poetic. The poet has masterfully manipulated language to achieve effects of foregrounding and backgrounding the different personas in a love relationship, as in the poems *Ты и Вы* and *Я помню чудное мгновение...*, or of establishing an equal relationship, as in Tatyana’s letter to Onegin. Moreover, in the poem *Я помню чудное мгновение...*, the iconic effects of phonetic repetition reinforce the foregrounding of the beloved woman, and the removal of the 1st person pronoun in the last stanza, substituted by the metonymy of the heart, serves to reinforce the emotional reaction. The last stanza is punctuated by repetitions of the conjunction *и* (“and”):

И сердце бьётся в упоение,
И для него воскресли вновь
И божество, **и** вдохновение,
И жизнь, **и** слёзы, **и** любовь.

These repetitions of *и* (“and”) iconically echo the poet’s quickened heartbeat.

The internal patterning of poetic iconicity is created through structural correspondence between the choice of formal elements in a poem’s language – its phonemes, morphemes, lexical units, inflectional endings and syntactic structure – and the world of meaning constructed by the poem. This paper has examined the choice of pronominal forms and verbal endings carrying the grammatical category of “person”, with particular reference to the patterns of choice related to the juxtaposition between the informal/intimate 2nd person pronoun *ты* “thou” and the formal 2nd person *вы* “you” in Pushkin’s lyric poems.

In each of the poems I have examined, the iconic pattern of the choice of pronominal and personal forms is different and unique to the poem, but congruent with the poem’s meaning in construing and constructing the semiotic world of a love relationship.

In the poem *Ты и Вы* “*Thou and You*”, amazingly, the lexical choice itself is the theme of the poem – it is a metalinguistic poem. The reader acutely feels the poet’s social predicament, in the course of casual and polite conversation, between the choice of the pragmatic force of the intimate *ты* “thou” vs. the formal and socially expected *вы* “you”.

In *Tatyana’s Letter to Onegin*, Pushkin has distanced the heroine of the novel from the immediacy of a direct social confrontation by having her write a letter. Only in the second half of the letter does the formal usage of *вы* “you” give way to the impassioned torrent of *ты* “thou”, coupled with 2nd person imperative invocations.

In *К*** (Я помню чудное мгновенье...)* [*To*** (“The wondrous moment of our meeting...”)*], only the form *ты* “thou” appears, and this is one of the most intimate of Pushkin’s lyrics, reflecting the real-life closeness of the relationship between the poet and the addressee, Anna Kern⁵. Throughout the poem, the iconicity of *ты* (*ty*) is reinforced by the additional phonetic - *ты* (*-ty*) endings in the rhyme scheme. This phonetic prominence serves to foreground *ты*, as it were placing the beloved on a pedestal. In the last two stanzas, direct pronominal reference to the 1st person (the poet) disappears, replaced by the metonymic *душе* (“to the soul”, line 17) and *сердце* (“the heart”, line 21), zooming in not on the poet as agent but rather on his emotional reactions, his interiority.

Although achieved through grammatical and lexical choices, this effect of foregrounding has an almost visual quality, like shifts in perspective or in the lens of a camera. At the same time, the overall iconic pattern of each poem masterfully conveys the dynamics of Pushkin’s real and fictional love relationships.

⁵ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Petrovna_Kern, and http://happypushkin.ru/hotel/pushkin_ladies/anna/, retrieved on 8th April 2014.

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