

A QUEER FISH IN DISTRESS: SOME OBSERVATIONS
ON THE SUJET IN LERMONTOV'S *VALERIK*

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In this paper an endeavour will be made to demonstrate how a temporally determined sujet, which is primarily distinctive of a prose-narrative, is realized in a poetic text which is spatially determined as in such a text mostly a situation, or at most, a mere limited action rather than a series of actions, is represented. Lermontov's works are highly interesting in this regard as these show a mixture of stylistic qualities typical of poetry and prose respectively.

Starting-point is H. Brémond's distinction between prose and poetry. In his view prose-words are based on just one function: to evoke in the perceiver's mind imaginable ideas corresponding to a word. The poetic word, on the other hand has a dual function, or force. Thus the poet using it, selects them, as he requires from them, on the one hand, that they evoke the above-mentioned imaginable images. On the other hand, by using them he inspires in them a quality which they do not have of their own. In so far the poet is a magician as he both uses the natural, imaginable force of words, and inspires them with an originally unidentifiable force (Brémond 1926; see also Walzel 1932: 63).

In several contemporary as well as more modern studies the difference between poetry and prose has been expressed in terms of this dual character of words, which is reserved for poetry. The observations of the Russian Formalists are particularly illustrative in this regard. See, for instance, Jakobson's definition of the basic procedure of poetic speech. Starting-point for this scholar is that poetry is nothing else than an utterance of which the expression (rather than its content) stands central. Actually Jakobson's statement that poetry is nothing else than an utterance in which the expression rather than the content-plane of an utterance plays a key role just means the negation of that utterance in normal, everyday speech. Consequently poetical speech is defined by the Formalists rather for what it is not than for what it is. See, in this regard a

sceptical contemporary scholar, like Medved'ev (1928 [1984]). In Waszink (*to appear*) I went somewhat deeper into the negative character of elements with a deictic function in literature versus elements with what I have called there elements with a figurative character. In poetry, Jakobson says, two units are presented in a juxtaposition. Distinctive of poetic speech is the style-figure of parallelism in the broadest sense, such as comparisons, metaphors, i.e. a reduced parallelism, elliptically reduced to a point, and metamorphosis, i.e. parallelism in time (Jakobson 1919 [1979]): 336). As far as the sound character of poetic speech is concerned, the use of parallelism manifests itself in rhyme, rhythm, alliteration and assonance. At the basis of Jakobson's view that in poetic speech two elements are placed in a juxtaposition lies the assumption that each expressed language-sign consists of a semantic part and a sound-part, which are equivalent. Jakobson's observation implies that in poetry the relationships on the paradigmatic rather than the syntagmatic axis of language are of primary importance.

In more recent studies the idea is elaborated that relationships on the temporally (rather than spatially) determined syntagmatic axis of language are distinctive of prose and relationships on the spatially (rather than temporally) determined paradigmatic axis, of poetry. The fact that in poetic texts the sound-part of the words dominates the semantic part gives a clear indication of this spatial rather than temporal determination. Thus a prose-text is marked by the presence of a consistent grammatical structure whereas a poetic text lacks such a structure.

Returning to Brémond, the spatial determination of poetry versus prose is emphasized by the latter in his distinction of "pure poetry" (*poésie pure*) versus "impure poetry" (*poésie impure*) as he calls it. Although he does not use the terms "temporal" and "spatial" in his definition, in the list of "impure" elements the temporal determination of these elements is evident; these are:

1. the contents (*sujet*; i.e. not the *sujet* as it is used in the various definitions of the Formalists!) or summary of the poem;
2. the sense of each phrase;
3. the logical succession of the expressed ideas;
4. the progress of the plot (*récit*);
5. the details;
6. everything immediately captivating our imagination or reason;
7. everything belonging to that which the poet emphatically has wanted to express and which as such gets through to the perceiver;

8. everything which the poem yields when it is analyzed by a grammarian or a philosopher, or when it is translated (Brémond 1926: 21, 26 f.).

In other words, the perception of the items 1-8 presupposes the use of language as far as it is determined by semantics and grammar, i.e. those aspects of language by which relations are established on the syntagmatic axis of language. In poetry, however, semantics and grammar play a secondary role only, given the fact that the emphasis in such speech lies on the expression rather than the content of a verbal message. In order to read a poem correctly one needs to fully understand its content; a *time-consuming* process (Brémond 1925: 18). The spatial element distinctive of poetry manifests itself in the fact that the reader tends to *stay* thinking about what he just read, rather than to *continue* his (temporally determined) reading-process (Brémond 1926: 17).

Rather than the *correct* meaning of a poetic text the associations, evoked by a possibly incorrect interpretation, are essential for the perception of the above-mentioned pure element of poetry. In this process feelings rather than cerebral activities play a primary role. (Brémond 1926: 19ff.) The temporal determination of a prose-text versus the spatial one of a poetic one is, accordingly, also evident in Brémond's definition of prose-words versus poetic ones: whereas the first excite, stimulate, and fill our normal activities, the last appease and tend to suspend these (Brémond 1926: 27). The spatial element of poetry finds its clearest expression in its mysterious character, as poetry always expresses something which is ineffable in Brémond's terminology, i.e. which is not expressible by *human* words (Brémond 1926: 16). In this phenomenon the dual character of poetic speech finds its clearest expression. Thus a word indicating some mysterious phenomenon not only refers to a denotation, but it also connotes particular ideas which are not directly imaginable. The process of evoking these ideas *cannot* be steered by consistent laws or precepts.

The above-mentioned expressions of parallelism which are, in Jakobson's view, distinctive of poetry, can, in their simplest form, be reduced to Brémond's observation that poetry always expresses something *plus* something ineffable which is indissolubly linked to it. In this regard V. Šklovskij's observation that one of the procedures to transform ordinary speech into poetic speech should be mentioned; it implies that the language-code of a text is shattered. For instance, Latin was the poetic language in the West during the Middle Ages, Sumerian, of the Assyrians; in Persian poetic speech many Arabic words occur, and so on (Šklovskij 1916 [1971]: 31). The dual character of this kind of

speech, by which its ineffable character is expressed, is evident as a poetical word in a given language is consistently linked to its corresponding counterpart in the code of the daily language.

As far as the domination of the sound-part of language over its semantic part in poetry is concerned: in another, more modern study, the verse has been defined as an anti-phrase. Starting-point there is that a phrase is a unit consisting of two independent parts, a semantic element and a sound-element. The first is, in its turn, split into a psychological and a grammatical part (Cohen 1966: 73). The verse is not just agrammatical, but even anti-grammatical, as it makes use of enjambment, i.e. a style-figure by which a semantically coherent text-part is torn apart (Cohen 1966: 72). In other words, a phrase, grammatically determined as it is, may be considered to be distinctive of a prose-text only. It should be kept in mind that this domination of one of the two levels of language (either of the sounds or of the semantics of the words) can never be complete. Thus Jakobson observes that the euphony, distinctive of poetry, is brought about not by mere sounds, but by phonemes, i.e. acoustic units which are operative within the framework of language as an abstract sign-system. If this were not the case, poetry would be a kind of defective singing (Jakobson 1919 [1979]: 336). On the other hand, a prose-text which is cut into pieces in such a way that all possible indications of grammatical relationships are obscured, does not automatically result in a poem, although it would have lost its character of a prose-text (Cohen 1966: 76).

The dualistic character of poetic speech is emphasized by Genette as far as he rejects Cohen's observation that the use of figurative speech presupposes the complete suppression of the literal meaning, or denotation, of a word. The latter states that denotations and connotations mutually exclude each other. In Cohen's view the word in a prose-text bears a merely denotative character; the connotations of words, however, are reserved for a poetic text (Cohen 1966: 214). Thus the denotation of a word is distinctive of intellectual language, whereas its connotations are distinctive of emotional language. Again: in his view denotations and connotations of a word cannot be used at the same time. Genette, however, emphasizes that in figurative speech the original denotation of a word acquires a new shade of meaning as it procures a connotation, its denotation remaining identifiable (Genette 1969: 142). In the latter's observation that in figurative speech not only the connotation of a word stands central, but that its denotation remains visible, does justice to Brémont's definition of poetry as something mysterious which cannot be expressed in human words, but which is nevertheless identifiable because the denotations of poetic words remain understandable to the brain.

The transition of a poetic into a prose-text is realized in the origin of the sujet, in the definition of the Formalists. Particularly the observations by Šklovskij (1971 [1916]) and Tomaševskij (1925) are essential here. The introduction of a sujet in a text means that the earlier-mentioned parallelism, distinctive of poetry, is gradually annihilated as the factor time becomes more and more visible. Actually this means that the relationships on the paradigmatic axis (distinctive of poetry) are overruled by those on the syntagmatic axis (distinctive of prose).

In its initial form the sujet still bridges the difference between the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes in language. Actually a sujet is the result of parallelism (distinctive of poetry) in which one of two images, motifs or themes, is temporarily forgotten and realized only later, in the course of the narrative. Thus a syntagmatic relationship between these images, themes or motifs is established (Hansen-Löve 1978: 164, and the literature given there). Actually, the more visible two constituent parts of a sujet are at the same time, the more spatially determined it still is. Reference should be made here to the plastic arts in which a movement or development can only be represented in a pictorial manner. Reversely, in a literary text events in a development can only be reported successively, as if taking place in a certain order. This would imply that, in its ultimate form, in a temporally determined sujet each constituent event becomes invisible as soon as the following one enters the stage. In a still primitive literary genre like the Homeric epos, the consequence of this suggestion manifests itself in the representation of simultaneous events as taking place in successive order (as was observed by F. Zieliński already in 1901). The latter demonstrates that the consistent representation of such events in this manner unavoidably leads to the semantic distortion of the literary representation. In this distortion the poetic character of the primitive genre of the Homeric epos manifests itself. For instance, when, in Homer's "Iliad", two figures get from Zeus two separate instructions at one and the same moment, one of them is presented as waiting until the other one has completed his instruction before he can begin to carry out his. Reference should again be made to Jakobson's and Cohen's observation that in poetry semantics plays a secondary role only. The ineffable character, which is, according to Brémond, distinctive of a poetic text, is expressed exactly by this distortion.

That the sujet in its simplest form is still applicable to a poetic rather than a prose-text manifests itself in one of the most primitive literary genres, that of the riddle. There the above-mentioned distinctive feature of a temporally-determined sujet, i.e., that a constituent part simply seems to disappear as soon as the following element in succession enters the

stage, presents itself. In the riddle we see that its correct solution is temporarily forgotten, mostly in favour of another, incorrect one, which is suggested by the context of the question, i.e. an earlier-made message. Exactly the solution brings about the completion of the sujet. At that moment a relationship on the syntagmatic axis is established between the two constituent elements of that sujet, i.e. the original message (the given data and the resulting question) and the second one (the answer). The appearance of the second message marks the end of the riddle as a literary text. The riddle demonstrates its character as a *literary* text as its solution coincides with the end of the riddle as such, or, what could be called its modeled time (*Erzählte Zeit*), exactly coincides with the time required for its production (*Erzählzeit* as G. Müller calls it). Summarizing, the procedure, applied in the riddle, in which use is made of two elements, one of which is temporarily made invisible, is a step forward in the process of the creation of a temporally-determined sujet.

The phenomenon that a text which does not bear a sujet is spatially marked, whereas it becomes temporally determined as soon as a sujet begins to play a role in it, stands central in Lotman's studies of the field. In the latter's work from 1972 [1981], he defines a text not bearing a sujet as one in which a mere inventory of a modeled world is given; in such a text the boundaries of that world are merely confirmed. At the basis of the internal organisation of the text-elements usually lies a binary semantic opposition; in the world in such texts the rich and the poor, the familiar and the foreign, the orthodox and unorthodox, the civilized and the uncivilized, enemies and friends, are sharply divided (Lotman 1972 [1981]: 337). Distinctive of a sujet-bearing text, on the other hand, is, that a hero is operative in it who shatters the boundaries of that same world by his movement across them (Lotman 1972 [1981]: 342). The difference between a poetic text and a prose-text manifests itself in the fact that the sujet of the first is a chain of events, whereas in the latter a generalized sujet is presented in which the presented events are reduced to an inventory of elementary, pre-existent models. In so far a poetic text stands nearer to myth than the novel.¹ It is distinctive of the first that it generally

¹ In this respect the example Ejchenbaum gives in order to define the narrative poem as an intermediary between poetry and prose is essential. In this genre the transition from poetry to prose manifests itself in the fact that the description of the action, i.e. the chain of events, is regularly interrupted by the (more spatially determined) lyrical parts, and vice versa. Referring to Puškin's exclamation that there is "a devil of a difference between a novel and a novel in verse", he states that to render "Evgenij Onegin" in prose would "require a much more complicated motivation [in the Formalists' sense], a much larger

contains a general truth rather than unknown events, which would have to be told strictly in a successive order, from the beginning to the end (Lotman 1975: 152). In other words, in this limited character of the sujet in a poetical work versus a prose-text its spatial determination manifests itself.

Generally speaking the spatial character of the Russian prose of the thirties of the nineteenth century manifests itself as the works of that time are mostly cycli of scenes, stories, and sketches of a heterogeneous character. In other words, the texts are marked by short, surveyable elements, loosely tied by a rather impersonal narrator, rather than by a rigid, coherent plot with a hero going through a succession of events (see Èjchenbaum 1961: 250, 255).

It has correctly been observed that in Lermontov's works a continuous exchange takes place of elements distinctive of poetry and prose respectively (LÈ 79). For the equivalency of poetry and prose in Lermontov's works, see Èjchenbaum 1924 [1962]: 163. Whereas Lermontov's early works overflow with parallelisms, metaphors etc., his (later) *prose*-style becomes more and more simple and clear, although generally his prose-works are not yet marked by a temporally-determined sujet in the strict sense of the word. This can be illustrated by the fact that many of his narrative texts have remained uncompleted. This incomplete character can hardly be considered accidental.² *Vadim* (written in 1833-34) is exemplary. In it a lyrical monologue and a narrative style are combined (Èjchenbaum 1924 [1967]: 133). In other words, a victory of a temporally determined narrative over a more spatially determined poetic text would manifest itself in a sujet in the modern sense, and such a sujet is, for the moment at least, still lacking as the book remained uncompleted. A similar combination of a poetic and a prose-text is "Princess Ligovskaja". This work is also a prose-work; the sujet seems to be well-defined both in space and time: the scene takes place in St. Petersburg in 1833. However, the poetic quality of the novel manifests itself in that same plot; it cannot be set to work, and when in motion, it can hardly be kept going (Èjchenbaum 1924 [1967]: 146). This jerky

amount of events and persons, and that it would not enable the writer to insert a whole album of lyric passages in the narrative" (Èjchenbaum 1924: 127).

² In Waszink 1991 I have paid somewhat more detailed attention to the use of "the fragmentary" as a romantic device.

movement is to be ascribed to the earlier-mentioned procedure of duplication. Thus, for instance, the text is marked by the presence of doubles and contrarious characters (see also Waszink 1988: 116 ff.). In "Princess Ligojskaja" these are Pečorin and Krasinskij; in "A hero of our times" – Pečorin and Grušnickij, and the respective women they court (Mary and Vera). The two women are doubles in so far as they both love Pečorin, and that the hero loses both of them. The procedure of duplication is applied in *Vadim* too, in the stylistic-figure of *monologue intérieur* (Vinogradov 1941 [1964]: 533). There are quite a lot of statements of the kind: "The moon rose. 'Poor child!'"³ As if the two statements were causally related; this, however, is *not* the case, as the first is addressed to the reader and the second to an internal figure.

The earlier-mentioned combination of a lyrical and an epic text, marked by a temporally determined sujet, is also found in the narrative poem *Valerik*.⁴ Actually the combination of a temporally- determined description of a battle and a spatially determined lyrical one (a love-poem) were unusual among Lermontov's romantic contemporaries (LÊ 78). The specific character of the poem "Valerik" as bridging the opposition between poetry and prose manifests itself in the form of the sujet. This, on the one hand, misses the properties of the sujet in a poetic work in Lotman's sense, i.e. it does not bear a generalized character only. Thus it is enriched with the description of a battle, or, a temporally determined, historical event, consisting of a chain of events, which is rather illustrative of a prose-work.

The essential character of the sujet of *Valerik* resides in the fact that it consists of two clearly distinguishable constituent elements (a spatially and a temporally determined one) which are equivalent in so far as they condition each other. Reference should be made again here to the genre of the riddle in which a sujet in its original form, as still being to a maximal degree spatially determined, is operative. There of the two constituent parts the second one is hidden until the end; exactly its solution demonstrates that it derives its sense from the co-ordination of two equivalent constituent elements, rather than that the two parts are given at

³ Actually this style-figure was introduced by Puškin in his narrative poems and was further developed by him in his prose-works (Vinogradov 1941 [1964]: 523).

⁴ The work was written in the summer of 1840; in it the battle of July 1, 1840, in which the author took part, is described. It was published for the first time in *Utrennjaja Zarja* na 1843 g. (Spb. 1843), with the heading *Valerik*. The original autograph was lost (Lermontov 1983: 571). In the rough draft there is no heading (Lermontov 1957: 355).

the outset serving as the starting-point of a temporally determined sujet, in which a development is presented.

The first part of the poem derives its spatial determination from its lyrical character. In this part the narrator confirms toward his addressee that his love for her is still there. In other words, by the use of a lyrical form the quality of the first part as a text, which does not bear a sujet in Lotman's definition, is stressed. The question whether the narrative element is more important than the lyrical one and whether, consequently, the syntagmatic axis overrules the paradigmatic one remains unanswered. Actually a completed sujet is thus prevented from realizing itself, in the same way as in *Vadim* as well as "Princess Ligovskaja". The lack of a clear solution is presented as a literary procedure. Firstly, reference should be made to the framing function of the lyrical part.

The explicitly poetical character, distinctive of the lyrical part, is expressed at the outset; thus the opening-lines run as follows:

I'm writing to you by accident;
I don't know why and how.
I've already lost this right,
and what shall I tell you? - nothing!
Why do I remember you? - but, by God,
you've known that for a long time now;
and it makes, of course, no difference to you (54).⁵

This introductory section to the lyrical part shows the dual character of the lyrical text in its simplest and clearest form. Reference should again be made to Jakobson's observation that parallelism is distinctive of poetry. Actually the basic way to realize this device is to make use of negations and questions (see in this regard Wazink *to appear*, n. 2 and 3). Thus the addresser makes use of the artistic procedure of duplication here, by stressing that a further development of the action which he anticipates may not follow at all. By doing so he questions the existence of the poetic text and, consequently, of its producer and addressee. The above-mentioned lines are evident in this regard; they say that it may be useless to create a text as it is doubtful whether there will be anybody who will be interested in it at all. The duplication of the content is continued as follows:

⁵ Reference is made to the text in Lermontov 1957, which has been added in the appendix. The translations are mine. I consulted the translation in Lermontov 1983, which is, in my eyes, far too free.

Reading the pages of the past,
 analyzing them successively now, with a cooled brain,
 I've lost belief in everything (*ibidem*).

The framing character of the love-poem as a literary text is reinforced by the circumstance that its completion marks the end of the poem as a whole. Thus in the concluding section the beloved addressee re-appears:

Farewell now! If you'll
 only be slightly amused and captivated by my tale
 I'll be glad. But if not?
 Forgive it me, like a frolic
 just say for yourself: 'queer fish! [that's what you are]' (60).

The equivalency of the two constituent elements of the poem (its lyrical and its epic element) manifests itself in fact that the narrator stresses the independence of both himself and the addressee. The latter may either be moved or remain unmoved by his words. Schematically this could be presented as follows:

	theme of "love"	
	addresser	addressee
beginning of poem	+	-
end of poem	-	+
		(-)

Thus the co-ordinate character of the constituent elements of the sujet in the poem exactly manifests itself in this presentation of the theme of "love" as something which does not develop itself. It is clear that in the beginning of the poem a clear-cut inventory of the two elements (love and non-love), as being distinct, is made, but at the end one might expect a solution as to the confrontation of these two themes, which is, however, not given. In other words, in this merely *potential* presence of the quality of love (expressed by "(+)") at the end of the end of the poem the ineffable character of these two themes is indicated as they do not occur at the same time.

That the opposition "love"/"absence of love" is not solved in a victory of one of the two can also be illustrated by the fact that the parallel opposition of the motifs "happiness"/"lack of happiness" is not solved in such a way that one of the two clearly overrules the other one in the course of the narrative, but rather that at the end it can be expressed as follows: "happiness"/"0 (zero)". This zero-form appears from the fact that a positive reaction on the side of the addressee to his work will leave the

addresser cold. (as he says) Shortly, in this even latent presence of either the feelings of love or non-love at the end of the poem the duplication of these feelings as far as they serve as literary themes, is evident. However, in the course of the poem the narrator demonstrates that at exactly under the impression of the narrated events he underwent a *change* himself. In so far the epic part of the work, i.e. the temporally determined description of the battle at the Valerik, has in its turn a framing function for the lyrical part as it motivates the change of the narrator's attitude to the addressee. The temporal element tends to grow in such a way that it gradually completely overrules the spatial one. In order to demonstrate this development the motif of "hatred toward military action" is used. This hatred has filled the hero with the consciousness of the uselessness of man's existence to such a degree that he consequently also becomes aware of the uselessness of his love toward the addressee. Actually the addresser's hate of man who is apparently able to kill on such a scale as has been done in the battle near the Valerik, results from the fact that he comes to consider his love as merely socially conditioned, based as it is on the incorrect assumption that the whole world is identical with the small circle in which he once moved at the time he regularly met his beloved. In this process of mental growth the addresser clearly outgrows his addressee in so far as he has moved to a geographical area in which completely different things happen whereas the latter has remained in her old place. He consequently stops regarding her as the only light spot in his life (Pul'chritudova 1960: 77). In other words, at the end of the poem the addresser seems to have stopped trying to oust the addressee as one of the two equivalent, autonomous partners in the first, lyrical, part of the sujet. However, at the end of the epical part, the description of the battle, the hero seems to have ousted his former self as he was operative in the period preceding the battle.

It was observed above that the phenomenon that it consists of two still clearly visible parts is distinctive of a sujet in its simplest form. This dual character of the sujet is visualized in the theme of "a military action, such as a battle" before and after the end of the battle near the Valerik. Before that time the hero considers a military action a carefree pastime. Consequently, at that time he presents himself as behaving himself in that same light-hearted manner which is illustrative of the world in which his addressee also moves. The motif of "military action", realized as it is in the single-fight in the first part on the one hand and in the battle in the second part, are viewed from different viewpoints, and the section separating the descriptions of the single-fight and the battle marks the transition of the viewpoint. The mental growth of the hero is presented as

starting at the end of the of the description of the first. See the conclusion of the description of the single-fight:

But in these reckless skirmishes
 there is much fun, little sense;
 in the cool evening we'd,
 take delight in them,
 untouched by bloodthirst,
 as if in a tragic ballet.
On the other hand I've seen scenes,
which one doesn't find on YOUR stage (57)
 [NB. Italics and caps mine, PMW].

The last line anticipates the addresser's above-mentioned spiritual growth as far as his conception of military actions is concerned.

Summarizing, these lines mark the transition from an originally primitive *sujet*, consisting of two equivalent, well distinguishable, constituent elements, toward a more modern type of *sujet* in which *one* hero is represented going through a particular *development*. Thus not only does the moment the narrator starts to realize the moment at which he understands the cruelty of man towards his fellow-men serve as the moment the syntagmatic axis starts to overrule the paradigmatic axis in the text. The reverse also holds: as long as the narrator still lives in the blissful consciousness that military actions are mere play, the paradigmatic axis overrules the syntagmatic one as the relations on the paradigmatic axis which are distinctive of the text preceding that moment are distinctive of a lyrical poem. In other words, the distinctive feature of *Valerik* that neither the lyrical part explicitly frames the epic, narrative part, nor vice versa, is motivated by the absence of a clear, temporally determined *sujet*. Such a *sujet* conditions the text as such in so far as it can be said that for the reader the end of the *sujet* implies the end of the text as such. In this regard the lyrical and the epic parts of *Valerik* seem to be in an endless movement, adopting from each other the role of the frame in an interaction.

Also thematically the text seems to originate from a vacuum, starting from what could be called a non-text, which is expressed by negations and questions of the kind "Why do I write you?" "I don't know why" etc. Then, as more and more of the text is realized, this growth thematically runs parallel with the development of the hero who, in his turn, grows from non-consciousness to consciousness of his own identity. The text seems to adapt itself to this qualitative growth as well, as it develops from

static to dynamical, from a text not bearing a sujet, to a text bearing one. In other words, it grows from a poetical to a prose text, if we follow Jakobson's and Tynjanov's assumption that a poetic text lies at the basis of a prose-text, and not vice-versa. The endless character of the above-mentioned interaction is caused by the fact that the narrator withholds from us the information whether his original motive to write the text as it stands, still holds at the end of the text. Although he assures his readers there that his original love does *not* exist any more, his assurance that he will be glad when she enjoys his verses contradicts this statement. Reference should be made again to Jakobson's specific definition of poetry as bearing a negative value. The text as a whole derives its poetic solution from this value, which is expressed in the absence of a development of the theme of "love". This lack of a solution manifests itself in the neutralization of the opposition "love" / "hatred" in a 0 (zero)-form. ("when you will be pleased by my verses, I'll be glad, if not, it will be equal to me")

The ineffable character of the poetic expression of another theme, that of "death" is expressed in a manner similar to that of "love." Actually it is visualized in the opposition of the motifs "life"/"death", but in the first part of the poem "death" remains unrealized. Reference should again be made to the motif of "military action", realized as it is in the description of the individual fight of the Cossack with the Čečen, in the first part. In this part the narrator is still presented as a light-hearted being; only after the period of the individual fights, i.e. after the horrible battle, the narrator becomes more earnest. See in this regard the lines:

A Cossack, in a black cap
with a crest, came running on.
He quickly grabbed a rifle,
he was close to him .. a shot .. some smoke..
Hey, Cossacks, stand by!, help him!
He's wounded! It's nothing!
And then a shooting-affair began (56; italics mine, PMW).

The penultimate line is essential as death is presented here as being of secondary importance only, overruled as it is by its opposite "life", in the form of the motif of (a mere) "wound". In the concluding lines of the narrative part of the poem, the description of the battle near the Valerik-river, however, the situation is different.

It was observed that the theme of the protagonist's spiritual growth is initiated by the motif of "the battle". Firstly, its meaning is hardly

identified by the hero; from the description of the single-fights it is evident the hero hardly understands the full impact of death. Actually the protagonist's first reactions to the battle are worded in the form of questions. Reference should again be made to the earlier-mentioned specific function of negative statements as well as questions in poetic texts as elements with what could be called a zero-function; see:

I thought [says the protagonist]: 'How miserable man is!
What does he want? ... Heaven is clear,
 under heaven there is place enough for all,
 but only he is continuously and vainly
 ill-disposed to his fellow-beings - *why?*' (59; italics mine, PMW).

The answer to his question concerning the name of the river is presented as following naturally from his meditations. This answer is given to him by his *kunak*, his native Turkic assistant:

In your language
 it is the river of death; really,
 that name was given to it in olden times (*ibidem*).

In other words, the introduction of the theme of "death" which had thus far been unknown to the hero, is motivated by the suggestion that originally the latter did not understand the name of the Valerik, which is operative as the carrier of death; only after the battle, when he has got familiar with death, he consequently also learns the name of that same carrier. *Before* that time, i.e. before the temporally determined description of battle has been completed, it merely connotes a concrete object - a river.

So the ineffable character, which is, in Brémond's view, distinctive of a poetic word, is visualized in the name of the river as its denotation "river of *death*" rather than its connotation "name of a river" becomes evident. The feature of "ignorance", distinctive of poetic texts, manifests itself. Reference should again be made here to Šklovskij's observation that the use of foreign languages rather than the vernacular is distinctive of poetic texts. Actually the full understanding of such texts is reserved for those who have been initiated to the code of the specific language. In other words, for such initiates these esoteric texts have changed into prose-texts. The moment at which the initiation takes place can be considered the moment at which the poetic word has lost its poetic character and is transformed into a prose-word. This moment can be said to coincide with the moment at which its user becomes *conscious* that he

uses a foreign word, and asks for its exact meaning, of which he is, consequently, informed. Thus it is evident how a text-element with a semantic zero-function (as mere indicator of a river), grows into one with a clear semantic function ("death") by means of a question and the subsequent answer to it.

The use of the procedure "question with subsequent answer" implies that the above-mentioned consciousness (i.e. of death) is introduced in the poetic text, by means of the opposition "death"/ "life." See the lines following the above-mentioned ones:

"And how many people approximately fought
today? [the hero asks the *kunak*] 'Let's say 7000'.
'And did the mountaineers suffer many losses?'
'How should I know? Why didn't you count them!'" (*ibidem*).

In other words, firstly the *kunak*'s indifferent attitude concerning the losses of his fellow-men is expressed in his ignorance of their number. However, this indifference toward the own people, who are defeated by the Russians, does not automatically imply that his attitude toward the latter is friendly. Actually one of the narrator's fellow-countrymen continues the above-mentioned lines as follows:

'Yes!' someone said at that moment,
'they'll remember this blood-stained day!'

This man, in other words, expresses a view of the battle which is far from indifferent. The Čečen, in his turn, then stresses again his attitude which is indifferent both to the mountaineers and the Russians as follows:

The Čečen cast a cunning glance
and shook his head" (60).⁶

Thus, whereas the Russian explicitly presents the motifs of "death" and "total ruin" (of the mountaineers) overruling that of their *life*, the Čečen questions, by his words as well as his behaviour, this motif. He suggests, in other words, that they may not be definitely be slain, re-introducing in this manner the possibility of their life. In other words, he refers again to the earlier-mentioned lines, describing the single-fight between the Cossack and the mountaineer; see again:

⁶ Liberman emphasizes this sceptic attitude in his free translation of these lines: "I caught the Chechen's glance derisive: / He grimmed but did not say a word" (305).

Hey, Cossacks, help him!...
 What? He's only *wounded* ... It's nothing! [*bezdelka*]
 and a shooting-affair began (56; italics mine, PMW).

It was observed above that the motif of "life", realized as it is here in the image of a man who is merely wounded, is distinctive of the first part of the poem.

The opposition "one"/"many" also plays a role in the poem too as the first quality is applicable to the first part and the second quality to the second part. The Čečen, by his indifferent answer to the narrator's question demonstrates that for him numbers, i.e. of dead men, hardly count. The theme of death, realized in the second part, is described in the form of a battle which takes an enormous amount of lives. See the information that during the fights with bayonets and dagger "the river is *jammed with dead bodies*. / I wanted to tap water... / but the troubled stream / was warm and red" (58; italics mine, PMW). Reference should be made again to the earlier-mentioned observation that the name of the river, in which the dead bodies are found, means "river of *death*". The theme of "life", realized in the first part, however, is described in the form of the activities of individuals, which is, actually, typical of a *lyrical* poem. Thus, we find a juxtaposition of the addresser and an addressee, and a military activity there exists of separate single-fights of individual enemies. This theme of "individuality" re-appears in the second part in the fact that the literary realization of the theme is "death" takes place by means of a detailed description of *one* representative of the large group of dead men, i.e. that of the dying captain. "... [The captain] groaned for a long time / but always lower his voice sank and little by little / he became silent and passed his soul to God" (*ibidem*). The distinction between the first and second part, dominated by the themes "light-heartedness" and "seriousness" respectively, personified in the hero, can be well illustrated by this passage. Thus the latter's heart is filled with grief as he sees the people carry the captain to his grave (59). However, when, in the succeeding lines, he mentions that many of his friends and comrades lost their lives in the battle, he expresses himself in the following way: "But I found in my soul/ neither pity, nor sadness" (*ibidem*). In other words, whereas the hero's soul is presented as being still full of life when it is confronted with individuals, it appears to be dead when it is confronted with a large number.

Summarizing, the ineffable character of the poem, in Brémond's words, of the text manifests itself in the many reminiscences, in the second part, of the preceding, thematically opposed, part. Actually these

reminiscences hold up the continuation of a possible, temporally determined, character of a sujet, and it was observed by Ejchenbaum that holding up the sujet is distinctive of most of Lermontov's texts with a narrative character. Schematically the different interpretation of each of the sets "life"/"death", "one"/"many" (individuality vs. large numbers) and "serious"/"non-serious" can schematically be presented as follows:

	life	death
first part	+	-
second part	-	+
		(+)

Accordingly the reminiscence of the theme of "life" (distinctive of the first part) in the second part, is expressed by "(+)"; this evokes the element of the ineffable, distinctive of a poetic text. A similar scheme can be drawn up, for the different interpretations of the opposition "one"/"many"; see:

	one	many
first part	+	-
second part	-	+
		(+)

And, to conclude, exactly in the same way, the opposition "serious" / "unserious", manifesting itself as it does in the single-fights in the first part and the big fight in the second part respectively:

	unserious	serious
first part	+	-
second part	-	+
		(+)

Thus it is evident that, whereas in the lyrical part of the poem, i.e. the text which does not bear a sujet, a mere inventory is presented of a modeled world, which is based on binary oppositions. In the second part, however, these oppositions are mixed up as there the narrator is operative as a mobile hero, in Lotman's sense, who shatters the originally sharp boundaries between the semantic fields presented in the preceding text-part. The representation of the events in this part, however, preserve its

poetic character. This is evident from the phenomenon that the opposite motifs, demonstrated in the preceding part, remain identifiable. These serve, in other words, as what Brémond called the ineffable elements of the poetic expression.

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