



## THE PUSHKIN MYTH IN RUSSIAN CULTURE

## ПУШКИНСКИЙ МИФ В РУССКОЙ КУЛЬТУРЕ

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### “Alexander Sergeyich, I Miss You”: Pushkin – A Personage of Georgy Ivanov’s Lyrics

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**Abstract.** The purpose of the study is to identify the stylistic means of creating the image of Pushkin, as well as its aesthetic function in Georgy Ivanov’s works. It is argued that the intertext of G. Ivanov, references to the works of A. Pushkin occupy a significant place. However, Pushkin is present in the poetic world of G. Ivanov not only at the level of words and images, he is a living character in lyric poems, appearing in five texts from different periods of creativity. G. Ivanov focuses on important episodes of Pushkin’s fate: The Lyceum, the Decembrist uprising, marriage, duel, death. The major focus is G. Ivanov’s various techniques to introduce Pushkin as a character into the text: metrical allusion to Pushkin’s hexameter poems; conceptual integration of mental spaces; symbolization (Pushkin is one of the symbols of abandoned Russia); stylistic transformation of conversational genres. The following conclusions were made as the major result of the research: The figure of Pushkin embodies various facets of artistic meaning, relevant for the lyrical hero of G. Ivanov – the dream of poetic glory; personal involvement in tragic historical events; touching the world harmony, the music of the spheres; courage in the face of death; Guided by Pushkin’s antinomy of the “humble” and the “divine,” G. Ivanov constructs the image of Pushkin at the intersection of high pathos and low conversational elements.

**Keywords:** A. Pushkin, G. Ivanov, intertext, stylistic means, aesthetic function, lyrical hero

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## «Александр Сергеич, я о вас скучаю»: Пушкин – персонаж лирики Георгия Иванова

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**Аннотация.** Цель исследования – выявить стилистические средства создания образа Пушкина, его эстетическую функцию в произведениях Георгия Иванова. Отмечается, что отсылки к творчеству А.С. Пушкина занимают существенное место в интертексте Г. Иванова. Пушкин присутствует в поэтическом мире Г. Иванова не только на уровне слова и образа, он живой персонаж лирических стихотворений, возникающий в пяти текстах разных периодов творчества. В фокус внимания поэта попадают важные эпизоды пушкинской судьбы: лицей, восстание декабристов, женитьба, дуэль, смерть. Особое внимание уделено способам введения Г. Ивановым Пушкина-персонажа в поэтический текст: метрической аллюзии на пушкинский гекзаметр; концептуальной интеграции ментальных пространств; символизации (Пушкин – один из символов оставленной России); стилиевой трансформации разговорных жанров. В результате сделаны следующие выводы: фигура Пушкина воплощает различные грани художественного смысла, актуального для лирического героя Г. Иванова, – мечту о поэтической славе, личную вовлеченность в трагические исторические события, прикосновение к мировой гармонии, музыке сфер, мужество перед лицом смерти; ориентируясь на пушкинскую антиномию «ничтожного» и «божественного», Г. Иванов строит образ Пушкина на пересечении высокой патетики и сниженной разговорной стихии.

**Ключевые слова:** А.С. Пушкин, Г. Иванов, интертекст, стилистические средства, эстетическая функция, лирический герой

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### Introduction

Georgy Ivanov (1894–1958), a prominent figure of Russian émigré literature of the first wave, mentions Alexander Pushkin in allusions and poetic images across his entire poetry. However, five Ivanov’s poems not only refer to Pushkin’s works

on the levels of words and aesthetic images, but features him as a proper poetic character. Ivanov focuses on the key episodes of Pushkin's biography, which may be referred to as Pushkin's lyrical biography (Leontyeva, 2019, p. 298): the school-time at the Imperial Lyceum in the village of Tsarskoye Selo, the Decembrist upheaval, the marriage, the fatal duel, and the death. In this article, we do not pay much attention to the elements of Pushkin's biography used in Georgy Ivanov's poetry, but focus on the stylistic means aimed to create an image of the poet, as well as on the ways of incorporating Pushkin-the hero into Ivanov's poems.

## Results and Discussion

Pushkin is first mentioned in G. Ivanov's poetry in 1912 ("August 26, 1912"). Having barely started his poetic career, Ivanov, being only 17 years old, can clearly see the role model that should be aspired to. The poem that starts as a dedication to the anniversary of the Battle of Borodino, also known as the Battle of Moscow (*To-day, we celebrate this glorious anniversary. / Once again, the banners of Borodino flutter in our heart*<sup>1</sup>), turns into a full-pledged homage to Alexander Pushkin. Ivanov makes it clear that the Battle of Borodino and the earliest manifestations of Pushkin's poetic genius are of equal glory and value for Russian history: *Yet, the year of 1812 was more than the year of victory: / It was the year when the young Pushkin / Was first caressed by the Muses in Tsarskoye Selo*<sup>2</sup>.

According to A.Yu. Leontieva (2019, p. 298), Pushkin's *Memories in Tsarskoye Selo* are clearly made an evident pretext of Ivanov's poem by thematic unity. However, we argue that Ivanov creates the image of Pushkin here through a metrical allusion to the classical hexameter or pentameter, which Pushkin often used in his own verses. Thus, the classical meter is both conventional as a marker of certain poetic themes and allusive<sup>3</sup> (Rogotnev, 2019, p. 114): the meter becomes a representation of Pushkin himself.

In terms of poetic meter, Georgy Ivanov's poem is a semantic echo to two Pushkin's poems. *The Statue in Tsarskoye Selo* was an iconic description of the Tsarskoye Selo chronotope. The other one was a two-line poetic eulogy to Nikolai Gnedich's translation of *The Iliad*. In the latter case, Pushkin used poetic meter as a semantic mirror: giving his approval a hexameter shape, Pushkin reflected the poetic genius of Gnedich the Translator, who, in turn, reflected the genius of Homer the Great Poet. Ivanov imitated Pushkin's hexameter to join the semantic aura of his poetic fame and chime in the great ones' conversation. The young Ivanov used the entirely canonical image of Pushkin: not yet a living character, but an element of the Poet-and-Muses topos and motif. When Pushkin's name reappears in the last line,

<sup>1</sup> Ivanov, G.V. (2005). *Poems* (p. 366). Saint Petersburg: Academic Project Publ. (In Russ.). Poems translated by the author – I.T.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> See: Bondi, S.M. (1978). Pushkin and Russian Hexameter. In *About Pushkin: Articles and Research* (pp. 310–371). Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya Literatura Publ. (In Russ.)

it is clearly rhetorical: *Being afraid of the answer, I dare not ask the fate / If we will ever have a poet equal to Pushkin again*<sup>4</sup>.

In 1919, Ivanov wrote another poem about Pushkin that began as follows: *This morning reminds me of Pushkin, the 1820s...* The poem was a blend of several mental spaces, if we apply the term of conceptual integration. Turner & Fauconnier (Fauconnier, Turner, 2002) define the poetic blend as a conceptual structure that unites several initial mental spaces. This dynamic form makes it possible to guide the reader's attention to two subjects at the same time because these two components of the poetic world emit overlapping semantic echoes. The author makes the reader to project one space onto the other to blend them in their mind.

The world *reminds* in the opening stanza allowed Ivanov to blend two juxtaposed mental realities, i.e., Pushkin's reality of the 1820s and his own reality of the post-revolutionary Saint Petersburg: *Of Pushkin, in the 1820s, / and Emperor Nicholas / This morning reminds me, / With its magic of winter frost, / The silhouette of the Summer Garden, / And the dancing snowflakes*<sup>5</sup>.

Ivanov used Pushkin's name to label the world of the 1820s and polished it with an allusion to Pushkin's *Winter Morning* and, possibly, some episodes from *Eugene Onegin*. However, the frosty morning, the Summer Garden, and the dancing snowflakes belong to both realities, i.e., that of Pushkin and that of Ivanov. As the poetic protagonist of his own poem, Ivanov described his reality through literature and allusions to Pushkin's frosty morning, sleigh rides, and the Summer Garden in Saint Petersburg. In the opening stanza, Pushkin himself was mentioned merely as the author of the pretext that triggered the allusion.

The next three stanzas were a search for commonplaces between the two realities: the horse riders, the exquisite interiors of mahogany wood, and the mist-clad beauties painted by a popular artist could belong both to Pushkin's 1820s and Ivanov's 1919. Ivanov paralleled these two realities grammatically and syntactically by triplicating the conjunction + adverb of time (*but just like back then*). The analogy of two realities finally gave way to an analogy of attitudes as the people of now and the people of then shared similar mindsets and political ideals: *And just like back then, we would believe / That the Decembrists could save Russia*<sup>6</sup>.

In the final stanza, Pushkin turns from an allusion to a full-scale character:

Going home from a lyceum party  
And remembering a line by a poet executed – shot,  
Everybody would think, just like Pushkin did:  
“So good I’m not involved in that...”<sup>7</sup>

In these closing lines, Pushkin's name marks two subspaces: the one of Pushkin the Lyceum Student and the one of Pushkin the Contemporary of the Decembrist

<sup>4</sup> Ivanov, G.V. (2005). *Poems* (p. 366). Saint Petersburg: Academic Project Publ. (In Russ.)

<sup>5</sup> Ivanov, G.V. (1994). *Collected Works* (Vol. 1, p. 489). Moscow: Soglasie Publ. (In Russ.)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

upheaval. In Pushkin's spiritual world, in his musings, the image of a poet executed by shooting, and not by hanging seems strange. However, it is not a historic inaccuracy: it is a signal that marks the return from Pushkin's to Ivanov's reality. Ivanov had a friend, the poet Leonid Kannegiser, who was indeed shot by the Bolsheviks, and Ivanov commemorated him in his verse (Moseshvili, 1994, p. 600).

The Russian grammar and syntax of the stanza may seem illogical: the two adverbial participial phrases refer to different subjects and are further complicated by the confusing generalized *everybody*. However, the faulty grammar is entirely logical if we look at it from the perspective of the blend method, which combines Pushkin's reality with that of Ivanov and that of the reader, who is expected to be familiar with Pushkin's poetry. In this blend, Pushkin is both an acting and speculating character. The phrase *I'm so glad I'm not involved in that*, obviously attributed to Pushkin, could actually belong to any ordinary citizen. This phrase might have its roots in something Pushkin wrote to his friend Anton Delvig about his not participating in the Decembrist Revolt: *Of course, I am not involved in anything* (Leontyeva, 2019, p. 299). When Ivanov substituted the introductory *of course* with *I'm so glad*, he added an evaluative aspect to the original phrase, probably disguising his thoughts as Pushkin's in an attempt to justify his own political position as an observer.

Pushkin's informal, dairy-like speech turns him from a great poet into everyone else. Ivanov used colloquial vocabulary with pronoun emphasis to make the inner speech of the poet sound spoken and natural. Ivanov would later return to colloquialism as a stylistic resource in his *Posthumous Diary*.

The emphasis on the mundane routine reappears in Ivanov's *Slowly and Uncertainly* (1931). Yet, Ivanov seemed to follow the model introduced by Pushkin himself in his *Poet*: the personality of a poet unites the divine and the mundane.

In this poem, Pushkin the Character initially appears entangled in what he himself identified as *the cares of the vain world*<sup>8</sup>. This routine is a constant, recurring property of the universe, which, in all its ordinariness, is embodied in the never-breaking patterns of celestial orbits:

Everything in this world is as before.  
The moon rises as it used to rise before,  
When Pushkin mortgaged his estate  
Or was jealous of his wife<sup>9</sup>.

The divine in Ivanov's Pushkin is what Pushkin called *the divine word*<sup>10</sup>: it is his ability to hear *the vague and wondrous music* of the celestial spheres in their universal harmony.

<sup>8</sup> Pushkin, A.S. (1948). *Complete Works* (Vol. 3, book 1, p. 65). Moscow; Leningrad: Academy of Sciences of the USSR Publ. (In Russ.)

<sup>9</sup> Ivanov, G.V. (1994). *Collected Works* (Vol. 1, p. 291). Moscow: Soglasie Publ. (In Russ.)

<sup>10</sup> Pushkin, A.S. (1948). *Complete Works* (Vol. 3, book 1, p. 65). Moscow; Leningrad: Academy of Sciences of the USSR Publ. (In Russ.)

Music is the key motif in Ivanov's poetry (Tarasova, 2008, p. 105). It is a poly-semantic symbol that stands for:

- the universal harmony as the source of inspiration: *I don't need music anymore, I can't hear music anymore (...) It can't change anything, and it can't help anything*<sup>11</sup>;
- eternity: *Now, a shorter distance separates me from the eternal music*<sup>12</sup>;
- death: *music that drives you mad*<sup>13</sup>.

In poetic context, these meanings either occur together, or one shows through another. In the Pushkin context, music is the universal harmony that explains the mystery of Pushkin's divine spark. It elevates Pushkin above the mundane, making him a one-of-his-kind poet: *The vague and wondrous music only he could hear*<sup>14</sup>. Still, the word *music* also realizes here its potential meaning as a symbol of death.

In the final stanza, Pushkin appears on his deathbed, not in a moment of creative inspiration:

Yet it fixed nothing,  
It helped nothing,  
The vague and wondrous music  
Only he could hear<sup>15</sup>.

Strictly speaking, Pushkin's death itself is absent from the poem, and so is the word *death*. Yet, it is there, right in the opening stanza, in the symbolic images and motifs that Ivanov always endowed with death semantics, i.e., the swaying black tree branches and the fragrance of spring and grass. It was very obvious in his earlier verse: *The black branches, the roar of the ocean, the stars are so bright it hurts to look at, but all this means we too must die, sooner or later*<sup>16</sup>. In this context, the rising crescent of the moon turns into the archaic symbol of the death realm.

The scene of Pushkin's death is familiar to any Russian reader, who immediately understands Ivanov's hint about the *nothing* that the celestial music failed to *fix*. By mentioning music in the final stanza, Ivanov made it clear that Pushkin's death was not that of an ordinary man who had a mortgaged estate and a beautiful wife he was jealous of, but the death of a Poet.

In the 1930s, Georgy Ivanov's poetics turned to symbolism. The books of verse he called *Roses* and *Sailing Off to the Island of Cythera* relied on a complex but coherent system of poetic signs and symbols with existential semantics. Pushkin's name in Ivanov's symbolism became a sign of the bygone Russia. In fact, Ivanov was quite straightforward about it in his *Atomic Decay: Pushkin's Russia, why did you deceive us? Pushkin's Russia, why did you betray us?*<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Ivanov, G.V. (1994). *Collected Works* (Vol. 1, p. 302). Moscow: Soglasie Publ. (In Russ.)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 456.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 299.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 291.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 516.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 32.



Ivanov's Russia had a complex structure in that it consisted of three segments, or three different Russias: The Russian Empire, the Soviet Russia, and the abandoned motherland limited to the author's imagination and memory (Tarasova, 2008, p. 142). On the one hand, Pushkin the Character belonged to the world of the Russian Empire (remember one of the abovementioned verses where Pushkin and Emperor Nicholas were syntactically parallel). On the other hand, Pushkin was a major symbol of Russia's tragic fate.

Pushkin continued to fossilize as a symbol in another Ivanov's poem that opened up with the line *Russia is happiness. Russia is light*. It expressed the demise of Pushkin's Russia and questioned the very right of the imaginary Russia to exist as an idealized world born in the White émigré's poetry (*Or, perhaps, Russia doesn't exist at all*<sup>18</sup>). The imaginary nostalgic reality of *happiness* and *light* contrasted with the Bolshevik Russia and the Russian version of *universal void*.

The poem unfolds at the intersection of two symbolic predicates. The first Russia is an unconditional value of *happiness* and *light*; the second Russia, whose description is introduced by *maybe*, is an endless void, a territory of death and fear: *Russia is silence. Russia is dust. Or maybe Russia is nothing but fear. It is a rope and a bullet; it is the icy darkness and the music that drives you mad*<sup>19</sup>. The Bolshevik Russia is described by words that directly refer to the semantic field of death (*dust, bullet, rope, icy darkness, convicts' sunset*), as well as by such conventional poetic symbols of death as *night* and *snow*. The latter appears nine times in this relatively short poem. Probably, the natural realities of darkness and snow symbolize the death of Russian culture as such (Uspensky, 2016, p. 183).

Pushkin emerges in the poem as part of the ideal Russia, where *Pushkin never died in the snow*. This image stands in one line with the Kremlin, as well as with Saint Petersburg and the Neva River, which were probably more significant for Ivanov as a St. Petersburg native. Although the image tries to annihilate the death of the poet, it still manifests his death. It is linked with the sunset as a symbol of death: *And the sunset over the Neva never burned out, and Pushkin never died in the snow*<sup>20</sup>. Ivanov returned to this parallel in *Atomic Decay: Pushkin lies wounded in the snow, trying to rise on one elbow while the red sunset lashes his face*<sup>21</sup>. This paired image forms a steady conceptual structure of Ivanov's poetic worldview. In the 1930s, the image of Pushkin steadily merged with the motif of death in Ivanov's poetry. In fact, Pushkin's name opens Ivanov's last book of poems, *Posthumous Diary*.

*Alexander Sergeyich, I Miss You...* is constructed as a dialogue between the Ivanov's poetic protagonist and his imaginary interlocutor, Alexander Pushkin. Pushkin enters the text as a full-scale character due to the stylistic shift of such discourse genres as confession and heart-to-heart talk.

<sup>18</sup> For polemic contexts, see (Uspenskij, 2016).

<sup>19</sup> Ivanov, G.V. (1994). *Collected Works* (Vol. 1, p. 299). Moscow: Soglasie Publ. (In Russ.)

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

The switch between styles relies on the inclusion of utterances modeled on primary (everyday) speech genres (Bakhtin, 1996, p. 164). The very possibility of this genre shift is conditioned by the dialogic nature of the poem. In *The Posthumous Diary*, dialogism is a defining feature of the colloquial speech and poetics. Conversation serves as the cycle-forming bond because almost half of the poems in the book are based on the communicative model of I – You (Koptelova, 2022, p. 251). This dialogic nature makes it possible to model everyday communication, which always takes place in a genre form (Bakhtin, 1996, p. 181).

The speech genres of confession and heart-to-heart talk semantically correlate with communicative situations associated with emotional sincerity when interlocutors open their souls to each other (Panchenko, 2022, p. 190).

Here, the main semantic load belongs to the heart-to-heart talk genre while the confession serves as an emotional and stylistic lead-in. To minimize the social distance between the interlocutors, Ivanov set up the imaginary dialogue in a relaxed atmosphere over a cup of tea, as well as added colloquialisms and vernacular idioms. The contracted patronym in *Alexander Sergeyich* instead of Alexander Sergeyevich gives the poem a distinctly colloquial flavor, not to mention the repeating intensifier *after all* and syntactic inversions<sup>22</sup>.

Confession presupposes an open and frank statement of one's actions, deeds, and feelings. It can be a "love confession" or a "sincere confession" of some bad deeds (Panchenko, 2022, p. 186). Ivanov's *I miss you* sounds more like *I love you*, as if the dying poetic protagonist wanted to talk to the living Pushkin but was too shy to express the true extent of his feelings and tried to hide them behind the formula *I miss you* (Nikolaeva 2023, p. 57). In other words, it is an indirect declaration of love. The poetic protagonist further expressed his feelings by telling Pushkin *You are my closest and my dearest*<sup>23</sup>. The looming death is the most likely reason for this ever-increasing affection. Ivanov used the communicative goal of confession to make a sincere statement of his feelings and explain his choice of Pushkin as a confidant in a threshold situation where a loved one, a relative, or a close friend would seem more appropriate.

Confession is a monologue, but a heart-to-heart conversation presupposes a constant shift in communicative roles. This genre embodies such core values of Russian culture as open-heartedness, friendship, and sincerity, which makes it a Russian communicative ideal (Dementyev, 2019, p. 257). A heart-to-heart conversation usually goes about the most important things, life attitudes, and values. Ivanov's *Posthumous Diary* revolved around the poetic protagonist's looming death. In a situation when the protagonist needed support from someone he admired and can associated with, Pushkin was there for him.

Ivanov seemed to project his own life experience onto that of Pushkin in his last year of life: *Alexander Sergeyich, you too had to grieve, rage, and despise; you too*

<sup>22</sup> Ivanov, G.V. (1994). *Collected Works* (Vol. 1, p. 553). Moscow: Soglasie Publ. (In Russ.)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



*had to die a hard death*<sup>24</sup>. Ivanov's protagonist addressed his deeply personal feelings to Pushkin because he was confident in the great Russian poet's sincerity and understanding. He was certain that his feelings were similar to Pushkin's. Should Pushkin be able to take over the communicative initiative, this analogy would allow the reader to predict his lines: *You would be talking, and I would be listening to you with my ears perked up*<sup>25</sup>.

Just as oral speech melts together styles of different discourses to create a target aesthetic function, so poetry uses the resources of colloquial genres to create a target aesthetic effect.

## Conclusions

Georgy Ivanov used various techniques to introduce Pushkin as a character into his verse. In *August 26, 1912*, he applied a metrical allusion to Pushkin's hexameter. *This morning reminds me of Pushkin, the 1820s...* was built on a conceptual integration where the imaginary reality of the 1820s overlapped with Ivanov's own reality. *Russia is happiness. Russia is light...* featured Pushkin as a symbol of Russia as Paradise Lost. Finally, Ivanov invited Pushkin to his *Alexander Sergeyich, I miss you* by merging and transforming the genres of confession and heart-to-heart talk. Pushkin came to embody various facets of artistic meaning, depending on which one was more relevant to Ivanov's poetic protagonist, from the dream of poetic glory and personal involvement in turbulent historical events to an initiation into universal harmony and psychological support in the face of death.

Using Pushkin's own antinomy of the mundane and the divine (*The Poet*), Georgy Ivanov compiled his own image of Pushkin from the epic pathos and the vernacular.

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<sup>24</sup> Ivanov, G.V. (1994). *Collected Works* (Vol. 1, p. 553). Moscow: Soglasie Publ. (In Russ.)

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

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