

Romantic Love and Love Magic in Russia

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In the study of emotions, the debates between the universalists and the constructionists seem to be over. Most scholars agree that what in English is called 'emotion' is a phenomenological state experienced uniquely by a human being, but accounted for in terms of the local culture. Emotion is both feeling and meaning, both physically felt and cognized, both socially and linguistically constructed and expressed in neurophysiological processes and bodily sensations. Fred Myers (1996) has suggested going beyond 'the referential view of emotions', when the emotion terms are seen as Saussurian linguistic signs whose fixed referents are psycho-biological states. Instead he proposed to see the emotion terms, linguistic signs infused by cultural meaning, in terms of Peircian semiotics, as Representamina, whose Objects are life situations in which they arise. In Shweder's (1991) terms, semiotic Objects of emotion terms account for the 'ecological' aspect of emotions, or the 'logics of engagement' with life situations mentioned above. Interpretants, 'further signs born in consciousness', are in this view complex chains of thoughts and actions that ensue, the semantic and the management aspects of emotions.

Ethnography, Semiotics and Epistemology of 'Love'

If we assume that some basic ways of 'emoing', either conceived 'logically', as Myers (1996) proposes, seen as configurations of the engagement between the self and the world, or 'biologically', as has been usual in the universalist approach to emotions, are encountered in most known societies, romantic love would be a prime candidate for universality (Jankowiak 1995). Scholars who study the neurochemical basis of emotions have demonstrated that the emotional state connected with 'love' is accompanied by increased levels of phenylethylamine, an amphetamine-related compound in the body (Fisher 1995). It is a commonplace that different cultures also treat this emotion differently, especially as a ground for a lasting social bond known as marriage. In some cultures 'love' is accepted as the primary rationale for marital

historically come into view, and what institutions and practices are they tied to? Third, when do ways of conceptualizing emotion come into play rhetorically in conversation?

7. See also LeVine (1984:82-3) for a discussion of the relative absence of psychologizing among the Gusu in East Africa.
8. I returned a year and a half later.

the ego in the grip of some singular, specific, although incalculable, force, creating a cruel dictatorship on the ego, drawing or sucking him or her into another microcosm. Falling, or 'being drawn into', love means to surrender to a higher power, in return receiving the experience of delicious intoxication that is a value entirely in own right. The lovers' lot, their morbid and painful delight is in abandoning their free will, in foregoing 'the choice' and rationality in surrendering to this brutal power. The force of love is imagined as elemental, as a storm, ruthless, merciless, trashing and tearing its victim, much like ocean waves batter the shipwreck against the rocks. The realm of love is a universe of its own; and the dark blessing of being drawn within its confines is considered as the most supreme fulfillment for those in its grips.

This (and the fuller explication below) may seem to be in contradiction with the accounts of the totalitarian Soviet state as puritanical and inimical to romantic love as a highly individualistic feeling that challenges the commitments to bigger collectivities and disrupts order. It has been suggested that love is related to personal freedom and respect for the individual (Collins and Gregor 1995). Therefore, tightly bonded love dyads are hardly tolerated in societies where other bonds are more valued, be they kinship ties in traditional societies (Hsu 1972), or those between the individual and the collective, as in the Soviet state (Timasheff 1968; Kharkhorin 2000).

It is certainly true that in the official Soviet discourse sexuality was nonexistent or presented as degrading (Kon 1995), and that the kind of love that was extolled was that of 'individual to the party', a fact that many jokes played on. However, the official discourse was not the only cultural discourse, and not even the most important one, that shaped individuals in Russia, even in the darkest Soviet times. Along with the official discourse, there was a dissenting intellectual discourse of tacit protest and resistance; and there was a popular discourse, derived from literature high and low, cinema, pop and folk songs, pulp fiction and trash poetry books and rural folk tradition (of which the love magic spells discussed below are part). In both of these spheres of Russian culture, romantic love was highly elaborated and valued as supreme. To an extent, romantic and erotic love, and sex as its expression, were practiced as a form of protest, even though the majority of people did not consciously spell it out that way. Moreover, love was the only form of protest that was politically harmless. It did not threaten the regime directly, and it was tolerated by it, unlike other forms of protest. To engage in romantic love (as well as in flirting and fornication, which could be preludes, substitutes or sincere illusions of love) in the Soviet times was the easiest (and most pleasurable) way to experience the illusion of freedom. For the working class and the social strata between the working class and intelligentsia, romantic love was by and large conceived as a joy of life, receiving its nourishment from cultural scripts, some of which are discussed below.

All these diverse discourses, appealing to different social strata, were and still are in agreement as to the cultural model or script of romantic love, the semiotic ground for the linguistic sign *lyubov'* shared across the culture. Love in Russia is formidable, creating its own totalized cosmos, and thus destructive of the everyday

relations, as in Malaysia (Karim 1999), or in the West. In others, as in China (if we believe Jankowiak 1995), it is considered to be too volatile and unstable to serve as a basis for more long-term arrangements. In some cultures it is viewed as madness to be contained or cured, in others it is hushed or concealed, but it does seem to exist everywhere, in some form or another. What varies is its centrality, its cultural elaboration, its salience, and its place in the moral domain. So do the criteria for choosing the objects of 'love': feminist scholars have long recognized that the 'head is our most erogenous zone', and our choice of the objects of passion is governed by the cultural ideas of the desirable (Bell, Caplan and Karim 1993).

While the semiotic Objects of romantic love are obscure, the Interpretants, the actions of love-stricken individuals, the situations these actions engender, the havoc sometime wreaked, are the stuff of life itself as well as of its endless reflections in popular and high culture. The Interpretants of 'love' will be explored through case studies, but in my explication of romantic love in Russia I resort to another, perhaps most murky and enigmatic term of Peircean semiotics: that of Ground. Peirce wrote that the sign (Representamen) stands for the Object 'not in all respects, but in reference to some sort of idea, the Ground of Representamen' (Peirce 1987). Peirce does not explain it any more than saying that 'idea is here in a Platonic sense, ... that one man catches another's idea'. Ground is thus a shared cultural knowledge from which the Object draws its meaning. It is the Ground of emotion terms that ethnographies Lughod (1990). It is the knowledge of the Ground that makes it possible to comprehend the logics of individual situations, for culture-bearers and ethnographers alike.

The Ground: Romantic Passion Russian Style

In a private conversation long ago, a Russian woman defined love as 'when you have no choice'. Love in Russia is conceived as a superhuman force, external to the two individuals, that attacks them unexpectedly and often brutally. The famous Russian writer Mikhail Bulgakov captured this in his 'Master and Margarita', in the description of the first meeting of the protagonists: 'Love struck them as a killer dashing from around the corner [and stabbing them in the back with his knife]'. The Russian word Bulgakov uses, *porazila*, means to strike or to stab, and the image of the killer turning up from nowhere evokes the same associations. Love strikes and stabs, ruthlessly and painfully, transforming its victims beyond recognition and allowing no return to the old life. Ideally, the two victims of this assault become one, fused together by the nuclear explosion of love into one totalized composite, inseparable, but separated from the rest of the world. The English colloquial term for this emotion is 'falling in love', which implies the loss of agency, inevitable when being exposed to the natural forces of gravity, stronger than the individual will. In the Russian equivalent *viubit'sia*, this connotation of losing agency is even stronger, connoting

one. Therefore love is expected to imply suffering and to be connected with pain. The idea of the destructive force of love, to which it is a sweet pain to surrender, is in the air the Russian person breathes growing up, irrespective of one's social provenance. Russian youth is brought up on such lyrics as 'with you, I forget about everything in the world; I plunge headlong into the abyss of love'.

The next line of this same song, however, introduces the inevitable dimension of inequality into the tormenting bliss, further deepening its painful dimension: 'But you are cold as an iceberg in the ocean, and all your sorrows are under the dark water'. Sometimes, in real life if not in Bulgakov's book, the killer stabs one person but the other remains intact and has to be drawn into the microcosm of love, causing the afflicted one ever more suffering, and pressing him or her to turn to all means available to break the resistance. This situation is indeed not a case where free will of another individual is to be respected (as it is not respected in other contexts of Russian life). This is where love magic comes into play, as a means to bend the will of another and to draw her into the microcosm of love. Love magic is considered to be the last resource, a drastic medicine, a combat for life or death.

Soft patience, forgiveness, unassuming humility bordering on subservience—all accepted Russian Orthodox values—are considered to be the means for a female to win over her object of desire. Another song by the same, at one time immensely popular, pop singer Alla Pugacheva, tells the story of a man who at one point neglected his love, but is then suddenly gripped by its element and rushes to call his beloved: 'and then you will yearn for the warmth that you once rejected, so much that you won't be able to wait for a couple of people in line at the telephone box'. This old song, written well before the era of mobile telephones, is still often replayed now, twenty years later, showing that cultural models are alive and well, despite the deep transformations rocking the society. The female narrator, the 'I' of the song, continues that she so firmly believes that this is going to happen, that she is prepared to wait by the door night and day, for her beloved to ring the bell.

These lyrics reflect the understanding that women, as more emotional beings, are expected to give themselves to the element of love with a much more unrestrained abandon and are generally more likely to let themselves be governed by their emotions. The Russian word for 'emotions', *emotsii*, is partly synonymous with that for feelings, *chuvstva*. The latter, however, denotes also physical sensations such as cold, tiredness, hunger or dizziness, while *emotsii* refers mostly to tumultuous, positive and negative, perhaps undefined feelings within the province of love (but also to other strong 'focal emotions' like anger and joy, felt in inappropriate contexts and taking the better of the person). Women are understood to be more prone to *emotsii*, while men are expected to be more restrained, keeping their 'sorrows under the dark water' of the tough manly facade. However, the element of love is supposed to make no distinction between the sexes, sweeping both men and women into its fold, wrecking their lives and victimizing them in its name. Romantic love in Russia

is to be distinguished from sexuality and sexual desire. There can be the former without the latter, especially in unilateral, unreciprocated loves, and in imaginary projections, like those of teenage girls to movie stars. Generally speaking, romantic love is expected to be consummated in the erotic fulfillment, and sexuality is expected to be given full sway in the storm of love, unleashing and satisfying deep desires that may very well challenge the rules of social propriety. But 'true love' is expected to change the lives of the protagonists beyond simple sexual encounters, as in the classic examples of Russian literature like Anna Karenina.

Bonds of Intimacy: Love, Marriage, Sexuality, and Friendship

Everyday life is known to kill love. The two natural elements, 'love' and 'life'—especially in the meaning of everyday routine, the resented *byt*—are seen to be distinct worlds, laying rivaling claims on the individual, and even clearly adverse to each other. 'The boat of love has crushed against the shore of everyday life' is a well-known dictum, coming from the Russian poet Mayakovski, himself a victim of love (as befits a poet). In the Russian version, the word used for the metaphysical rocks against which the boat of love has wrecked is *byt*. *Byt* is drab and suffocating everyday life with its chores, tribulations, efforts of overcoming its roughness, brutality and grossness. *Byt* is deadening for the soul and thus for love. Love is ideally expected to lead to marriage, and indeed does serve as a basis for many marriages (just as love leads to breaking old ones and making new marriages). Still, love and marriage in Russia form an uneasy alliance and are not necessarily compatible.

The acceptance of this fact is one trait that is different between the Russian and the Western romantic love. The institute of marriage in the West appears to be more morally sanctified than is the one in Russia. The high incidence of divorces in Russia is one of the sad sociological facts, taking its toll especially when people's means of existence are scarce, informal networks of kinship and friendship are unstable under the ongoing deep social and economic transformations, and more formal ones from the Soviet welfare state are demolished. One of the foremost tasks of the Russian Church is to restore the preeminence of sacredness of the institution of the family over the reign of romantic love. The dogmatic Orthodox discourse frames romantic passion as a dark, demonic force, one among many demons of desire, such as desires to possess the worldly or supernatural power, which is reflected in success, money or the healing gift. Love magic, as well as other sorts of magic, are therefore vehemently denounced by the Church. They thrive nevertheless.

The Platonic tale of the halves always in search of their second halves is well known in Russia; in fact, a colloquial term to refer to spouses is 'my [second] half'. A known maxim, dating back to the eighteenth century, is that 'marriages are made in heaven'. An alternative, cynical view is conveyed by a word pun playing on the two

meanings of the word *brak*. The Russian word for marriage, *brak*, is also a word for failed work, defective product, reject or waste. Playing on this word pun, a popular somewhat joking, saying states that a 'good thing can't be called brak'. To be sure, the cultural ideal of a life-long marriage built on love and nourished by love is still there, but the tacit understanding is that this ideal is not easily attainable. The worldly union immersed in the everyday *byt* is hard-pressed to sustain the force of love.

But, in terms of susceptibility to new loves, there is no finality to the Russian marriage. The element of passion can always sweep over persons, as the ninth wave, washing away the earthly structures of *byt* and marriage. Love might not survive the drabness of the everyday, but it can come back again, directed at other objects. For the abandoned party there is not much to do other than to turn to love magic.

Traditionally, Russian women are valued for their unselfish, sacrificial love, exemplified in the image of Natasha Rostova in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, tending for Prince Andrei when he is sick and dying. This giving up of the self for the sake of the beloved may be a form of romantic love, expected almost exclusively of women, and providing more space where love and sexuality may be separate pursuits. This facet of love is reflected in the phrases like 'she has given him everything', 'she has given him the whole of herself', etc., encountered, for example, in the descriptions of backgrounds of the female users of love magic rendered briefly in advertisements of magic services. In a recent conversation in Moscow a woman said that 'love that expects reciprocity is not a real love'. As a contrast, there is an idea of man as a hunter, an erotic conqueror, of male 'sexual energy' feeding on the female one, replenished and confirmed by more erotic victories (cf. Birth and Freilich 1995, on similar views in Trinidad). Romantic love can be a part of it, but does not need to, especially when it comes to male sexuality and the satisfaction of male sexual appetites. Here, again, love and sexuality are seen to belong to different domains, even though erotic fulfillment is seen as an important element of romantic love.

People in Russia may retrospectively admit to having been love's fools: to accept that what they thought was romantic love/true love/the love of their life/their second half was in fact just a mistake or an illusion. As elsewhere, in Russia there is a tendency, especially by women, to clothe sexual attraction in the garments of romantic love. Love is a power that has a supreme value and rivals the divine, while sexuality in Soviet times was, perhaps by older people, tacitly equaled with looseness, with the lowly, beastly instincts. (This attitude has been partly replaced by a more Western view on, especially, female sexuality, as one's natural inclination and intrinsic right to pleasure, but has not disappeared entirely.) Men are considered to be pawns of their sexuality to a greater extent than women, although this is rapidly changing and perhaps is no longer true for the post-Soviet environment: especially in popular culture, women are sometimes figured as active and even aggressive sexual agents who come and take what they want. Romantic love, however, spares no one and does not make a distinction between the sexes.

The conception of romantic love in Russia comes out in sharp relief if compared with another type of deep human connectedness, also highly valued and salient in this culture, namely the institution of friendship. If love is defined as a bond that presupposes intimacy, exclusivity and commitment, friendship in Russia is indeed a kind of love. There are, however, crucial differences. They can be illustrated through the reference to the notion of the 'soul', *dusha*. The Russian soul, even though being a deep contained essence, is relational to the extreme. It is known through others; it thrives through connectedness with others. The hedonistic luxuries that are conducive to soothing the soul are only good when they are achieved through relations with others and can only be enjoyed when shared with others. Suffering and pain through close relatedness, especially the pains of love, are seen as 'good for *dusha*', causing it to deepen, develop, and to know itself. *Dusha* unfolds, and fulfills itself, through sociality and sociability. Friendship, a foremost Russian cultural value, maybe rivaling romantic love in its centrality (but enjoying different relationship to *byt*), is this interpenetration of the souls, with insistent practical claims on the individual time and space. Friends share everything in thick and thin, including a considerable part of *byt*. As a friend once said, when a friend stands before the abyss, the friend's responsibility is to warn her; but when the friend is falling down into the abyss, the friend's duty is to fall together with her.

However, if friendship marks the terrains of the social universe of the Russian person, romantic love transgresses the borders of this universe, because it insists on delimiting the good of the soul to the two people only. The microcosm of romantic love strives to contain within it all that the two souls need to be utterly complete within one another, all the horizons and parameters of being that one could ever want or need, thus transgressing the most basic cultural rule of personal open-endedness and interdependence of many. Love thus claims to construct its own microcosm that is at odds with the normal social everyday one, presenting a challenge to all the other moorings and responsibilities. It is the force beyond the bounds of the normative that tends to demolish all other bounds of the existing moral universe, itself knowing no bounds except for the totalization of the other as integral to oneself. In contrast to Western relatedness, constituted through self and other, ideally connected in loving intimacy, but with one's deep innerness that is inviolable, Russian relatedness is realized through souls that are entangled, becoming parts of each other, or deeply ingrained in one another. Russian friendship is an index of this, partaking of some of the qualities of romantic love. This is why childhood friendships have the quality, the intensity, the intimacy that is striking, maybe unhealthy for the Western observer, and this is why Russians in exile often complain about the impossibility of making new friendships. Romantic love grows from this emotional space and overlaps with or feeds on the ethos and meaning of friendship in terms of interpenetrating of the souls. However, it always threatens to invade the space of friendship, to undo it, in its claim on totalizing the social cosmos to the microcosm of the two.

Magic in Russia is an important part of everyday life for many people, for solving everyday problems of health and relationships, especially those of love (Lindquist 2005). Both books and individual magi often admonish to the effect that, to attract someone, to arouse love against one's will, is an unnatural process, an act of violence, that disturbs and destroys the 'spiritual structures' of both the object and the subject of desire. But, when people are gripped by passion, they do not think about the consequences. They might know they should not; but here it is, the tool kit of spells, and, as practitioners say, the very fact that they survived through time testifies to the fact that they work as they did before.

There are divided opinions as to how the instruments of love magic should be used. One of my informants, who makes her living as a practitioner of magic, strongly discourages amateurs from engaging in this craft on their own. According to her, the spells work as 'energy vibrations', best applied by an impassionate professional. If the person is vehemently interested in the outcome of the process, her desire interferes with the subtle work of energies, and the result may be skewed or not forthcoming. Manuals of magic and amateur practitioners disagree. They maintain that, to work, the spell should become one with you. That is, it is not the words that effect change, but the human intentionality that, through these words, has taken shape, come out into the world. In the manuals, the users are instructed not to expect miraculous results, but to be stubborn and persevere, by repeating a spell many times, following instructions to the minute point, which sometimes takes considerable concentration of time and effort. Also, the recognition of the fact that spells are but vessels for passion is reflected in the injunction that spells are a strong weapon, and they should not be used just for nothing better to do, and not too frequently. Nor should they be shared with anyone; otherwise you risk diminishing their effect at best, incurring dire consequences at worst. In general, all magic, and especially love magic, loses its potency if drawn out of the dark of privacy, into public domains; all magical operations should be kept secret. It is also said to be dangerous to use love magic if your feeling for the person is not deep and intense enough. It is strongly recommended, before plunging into love magic, to analyze the situation thoroughly; love magic is believed to do any good only if the object of your desire is what fate has in store for you. All these caveats are designed as token, and ultimately futile, attempts to put back into the frames of morality and propriety that which, as everyone realizes, is utterly beyond it. After all, the spells of love magic are widely published, and the market abounds with practitioners who are prepared to give recipes to anyone who pays.

The ways in which bonds of love are conceived in Russian culture can be glimpsed already from the etiology of the key terms. The word *privorot*, which figures in the lists of services offered by most of the magi in Moscow, denotes a complex and protracted magical operation to secure attachment of another person.

It derives from the word *privorotivai*, meaning to magically bind someone to another person. An attractive woman can be called *obvorozhnaia* *nata*, enchanting, as if casting spells or charms on everyone around; this word is used colloquially outside magical contexts. Another, more archaic, and stronger word for attracting love is *prissushivai*, to bind a person to another so strongly as if the two have dried together, forming a kind of hard crust that cannot be separated other than shattered into pieces. It is connected to the verb *sobimut'*, generally meaning to dry up. Specifically in the matters of the heart *sobimut'* for someone means to be drying up out of love, as if all the bodily fluids have evaporated, maybe after the boiling of passion, killing the life in the body.

Privoroty, magical operations to attract love, consist of the textual part, the spells, and the ritual actions designed not as intricate structured rituals, but, rather, as simple pragmatic actions meant to support the verbal part. Spells are read over a substrate that is somehow connected with the object of desire, directly or indirectly, or that can be somehow associated with him or her. These readings must be made at carefully designated times, at specific places that have ritual significance in the context of the *privorot*, but the agentive locus of magic is the text of the spell itself. These texts are structured in the form of supplication and reflect the form of Orthodox prayer, also using some of its components. The request is made to various agents of change: sometimes natural or elemental forces of movement and fluidity like water, wind, or smoke; sometimes supernatural figures of the religious imaginary like Christ, Mary, or various saints; and sometimes even Satan himself. Irrespective of the agent invoked, the object of desire, and the targeted substrate of the magical change, is always referred to as *rab bozhii*, slave, servant, or serf of God, a canonical Orthodox designation of the human being. All the spells have the same endings as do Orthodox prayers: 'For ever and ever, amen'.

Following are some examples of love spells (readily available in popular books) that engage several themes that are repeated over and over again with different variations.

White smoke, curly smoke, go travel, my smoke, over all rivers, over all cities. Go fall down on the heart of God's slave (the name of the beloved is given, say, Ivan). Whatever path my destiny takes, let it not miss God's slave Ivan. So that he would not forget God's slave Elena not while eating, not while sleeping, so that God's slave Elena would be in his heart, in his mind, in his thoughts. Let my words be firm and sticky to God's slave Ivan [so that they can stick firmly to him], now and forever. Amen.

The user of this spell is instructed to fill the stove with birch wood and add bird feathers found in the woods, as well as certain precisely specified plants. The stove is lit at midnight, the valve is opened to let out the smoke, and the spell is read over the smoke coming out.

Here we do not deal with tepid or temperate emotions, nor is it a question of wishing well to the object of desire. Love is war, where all weapons are allowed. Interestingly, the word 'happiness' is never encountered in love spells. This illustrates the point made previously, namely, that romantic passion in Russia is conceived as a complete loss of agency and is equated with pain rather than pleasure. In these spells, as well as in other textual representations, passion is figured as obsession, a totalized state of being when the person is hit or struck, and totally possessed by its obliterating forces: a sickness, a state of paralysis.

Indeed, in passion, borders between life and death are blurred; the power of desire is as uncurbed, and as intractable, as the force of death itself.

Just as the God's slave Ivan, dead, would never more wear his hat, so God's slave Ivan, alive, would never live without me, God's slave Tatiana. Just as God's slave Ivan, alive, would never walk around, so God's slave Ivan, alive, will not stay alive without me. Amen. Amen. Amen.

This spell should be made on Monday, after sending a request in the church to pray for Ivan's health (a traditional Orthodox prayer made for the living) and for his life eternal after death (traditionally said for those dead), which is done in one day in three churches; three pinches of earth are brought from a cemetery, from three graves; the person goes to an open space and throws the earth against the wind, saying the spell, whose effect is supposed to hold until the death of both. Sometimes, co-opting the benevolent celestial powers, spells start with the opening 'I'm standing, blessed, I am walking having made the sign of the cross, out of the gates, down the main threshold, out into the open field'. Here, the agent undertakes to use socially acceptable, legitimate means to attain her goals, not needing to hide from people, attempting to remain within the boundaries of the moral. This is in line with white magic, where the agent appeals to the powers of good and light, the powers of God, but the result is understood to be limited by God's will. Black magic, though reprehensible, is understood to be much more potent in terms of attaining results wished for. It might have dire consequences, but passion is always in row, burning up in its flames both past and future.

It can happen that love is stated in terms of having, fulfillment, bringing joy, by invoking good things in life, and equating them with the state of passion. Such spells are rare, and even those tend to go over into invocations of lacking.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: Just as the evening sunset rejoices by the falling night, just as the dark night rejoices by the multitude of stars, just as the bright day rejoices by the sun, so God's slave Tatiana will rejoice by God's slave Ivan. So that she will look at him and rejoice as she would at seeing soul in the body, at seeing cross on the church. Just as a dead man cannot be without earth, just as fish cannot be without water, just as the infant cannot be without his mother, so God's slave

These spells would not be able to be without God's slave Ivan. Just as a witch has a God, so God's slave Tatiana will die up for longing to see God's slave Ivan, at any day, at any time.

Fear is the opposite side of passion, and passion is fearful (no wonder since it is deadly); and only she who is without fear may succeed in effectuating her passion, the spells seem to suggest, as in this one:

Under the burning stars there is a mountain of white stone; three boiling springs stream from this mountain; Christ the true and only stands by these springs together with his archangels and all the heavenly army. Everybody is terrified by this sight. I, God's slave Tatiana, am the only one who is not terrified, who is not frightened, who does not shudder. I will turn to them and ask them for water from these three boiling springs, to ignite in God's slave Ivan his light liver, his hot blood, his restless heart, so that he will be boiling and burning for God's slave Tatiana for ever and ever, amen.

These spells demonstrate the traits of cultural ontology of romantic love that have been sketched previously in more general terms. Love delineated by these spells is not a nice and kind story of dancing in the rain holding hands and singing sweetly, the image that Western pop culture often brings to mind. Romantic passion at its purest, at its very extreme (and the traits and expectations of such passion are hidden, as fatal seeds, in a most banal love affair) is betwixt and between nature and society, animal and human being. It negates sociality, or, more exactly, makes it irrelevant, in that it claims to build its very own relational field, limited to only oneself and the other, setting up the vectors of passion that reverberate and are conserved only between the two. The world contracts to the two persons, both slaves to passion. The drama of this cosmogonic transformation is a function of the power struggle that unrequited love can be: the vector of desire is directed to penetrate the other's soul as deeply and totalistically as can possibly be. The Russian soul is one that seeks another that reciprocates these feelings. If this response is not forthcoming, the vector of desire takes cultural equipment to arm itself, to achieve forced penetration into the soul of the other, to pervade, totalize and transform this other.

I see this as a contrast with romantic passion in the Anglo-Saxon cultures (but maybe not in the Latin ones), where the interior interpenetration of the selves, losing oneself in the other, is conceived as only fleeting and is considered unhealthy if it occurs for a longer time. Romantic love in the Anglo-Saxon West is not an ominous alternative to general sociality but its basic unit. The romantic dyad in the West is what it was admonished to be in Russia by the Communist ideology: the two people united by romantic love are a cell of the society (the Soviet version posited the family as that cell). In Soviet Russia this latter dictum was never uttered in folk parlance other than with mocking scorn; real sociality was a continuous tightly woven net or fabric, rather than consisting of 'cells'. Therefore, the morality of everyday reason and the

Temporality of love in Russia are inimical to each other, and therefore love in Russia is war and suffering: the hated by finally triumphs, and if love endures the grind, it takes forms other than romantic passion.

What are the structural conditions on which the spells can achieve their work of the magical transformation of the other, of ripping her out of the social universe and drawing her into the microcosm of romantic passion, shut off from the others and shared only with one other individual? In the spells, such microcosm is delineated, and they activate or present a force that moves through space, fluid or air-driven. The microcosm created is hierarchical, but its hierarchy is inverted—the Higher Powers of the ordinary universe are relegated to marginality on the borders of the microcosm of passion and to the service of the will and agency of the subject of desire. This microcosm works according to its own laws of causality that are thus postulated. Through the spells, a force is invoked, formulated, solidified, and directed towards a goal—the other, the object of desire who is thus drawn into this microcosm and caught inside it. For example, when the smoke travels, to fall on the heart of Ivan, it sticks to him, penetrating and invading all of his being, enveloping and totalizing him. Through this condition, the man has been transformed into the demizen of this microcosm of desire.

Metaphor here is used causally: white birch is burned together with bird feathers, the smoke is given means of locomotion, given wings to travel; or, the smoke is let out of the stove and sent its way, with direction and goal. Other agents of transformation work their way by force of their physical qualities, like boiling water, and inflicting the subject with grief and melancholy, the collaterals of love. Body with its restless heart, with its seventy-seven sinews, is invoked as a medium the two will share, even as the two are transformed into sharing the same body, rendering them post-factum not fully alive before. The two become zombies driven by desire, slaves of love, not God. Together, they become the crust that cannot be separated without fragmenting the whole and destroying them both. The transformation thus is enacted in both, rendering them one. There are two orders of transformation: (a) changes in the object of desire, in line with the will of the agent, and (b) changing the subject, the agent, and thus their relationship to one another, so that they become one, complementing and harmonizing one another. The destructiveness of love lies in that neither of the two are fully individuated again, never independent individuals with full agency.

In these texts, romantic desire takes shape as physical force, without bounds, without mercy, animal and elemental. Strong feelings are clad with words that turn back on the body, effecting physical changes, causing blood to boil, heart to beat, ripping it open and accessible for the desiring subject. In passion, the boundary between nature and culture, between the human being and the animal and elemental world is erased. In conquering the will of another human being, superhuman is drawn upon: saints and principle figures of the established religion, but also its anti-forces, those of evil, of Satan and his ilk. In being spelled out, these elemental

and supernatural forces gain presence in the shared world, sharpen the taboos of consciousness, and become a social force, bent on affecting the consciousness of another human being. Unauthorized, underground, cursed and banned, condemned, warned against, spells of love magic have, however, been used with a vengeance through many centuries, by successive generations of men and women, irrespective of historical calamities, political regimes, social orders. Concealed under their layers, deep inside the structures of meaning, the passions of romantic desire animated in the love spells remain something like an immutable element of Russian culture. Modern men and women, coming back from their industrial and bureaucratic labor, overwhelmed by desperation and pain of passion, in powerlessness, touch upon these cultural underground springs of power. These springs, conceived as superhuman, are in fact made real by the deeply human tool of language ripened on 'the thousand plateaus' of culture.

Elsewhere (Lindquist 2005) I suggested seeing spells as 'icons of power', because the relational dynamics they convey are homologous with the pertaining structures of power, sociality and affect. Those dynamic structures are deeply ontological, forming the very core of people as cultural beings. They are difficult to verbalize or pinpoint discursively, but they shape the very grounds of discourse itself and so, if perceived, can be illuminating for understanding this discourse. In the terms of Peircian semiotics outlined at the outset of this chapter, they are Representamina of the diffuse Objects that they denote, the original emotions of what here was referred to as 'romantic love'. In this semiotic function they can be seen as alternative to the linguistic term *litubov'*, but well fit for conveying to the students of emotions 'the inimitable 'tone-feeling' that is culturally specific. This is because spells, love spells included, are not just denotations, but rather what Susanne Langer called 'significant forms'. Speaking about art forms, such as music and dance, Langer notes that they 'present' rather than 'represent' or 'stand for'; they are forms immediately given to perception, revealing nondiscursive content of feeling, its raw quality, perhaps too painful or too overwhelming to be spelled out in the subject's own words (Langer 1986[1942]). As Representamina they are more complex than conventional linguistic signs—such as emotion terms—because they have import outside a conventional reference, presenting to consciousness what was beyond it—a quality of feeling prior to objectification or cognition. Prior to the complex of 'feeling-meaning-action' exemplified below they lend texture to what is then shaped as 'feeling', socializing chaotic sensations engendered by passion and desire into culturally acceptable, and thus potentially manageable, form.

Feeling-meaning-action: The Stories of Using Love Magic

As indicated above, concrete stories can give more substance to the bare bones of 'feeling-meaning-action'. The actions of people in love illustrate the 'ecological'

aspect of emotions, the peculiar logics of engagement that is permissible and thinkable. These stories both illustrate and fine-tune what I sketched previously as the semiotic Ground of emotions—the generalis of what is known about 'love', even though perhaps never spelled in so many words. As all life stories, these are unique as well as recognizable; the fact that an individual acted like this does not mean that all Russians do. It does mean, however, that this particular configuration of actions is possible—imaginable—within this particular cultural context, both recognizable and understandable to outside observers, and still uniquely keyed by culture. Thus, it gives us what we look for in anthropology of emotions: a particular 'tone-feeling' that reconciles the idea of emotions as universal human expressions with that of emotions as cultural constructions.

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Andrei was a talented artist, underground during the Soviet times. After perestroika, he mastered computer graphics and found a job where he could use his talent to earn very good money. When he came to Katerina (the magus I worked with, described in Lindquist 2005), he was in his late thirties. He was a warm, positive, and good-looking man with soft manners and kind eyes. But when he turned to the magus's help, he was a wreck of a human being. He was losing his wife Valentina, a smashing beauty fifteen years his junior. She had been having lovers openly, and she was all the time threatening to leave Andrei. But Andrei did not even want to consider the possibility. He said that Valentina was a pure, sincere creature, whose judgement was confused by the turbulent life in the capital. Andrei wanted Katerina to make his wife love him again, as she did some years ago, when they first met and the fatal passion flamed between them.

Andrei's previous wife had also been an artist, and they had a daughter together. It all started as a fun relationship with a lot of camaraderie and common interests, but then she got heavily on drugs and alcohol. They continued to live together, and Andrei was taking care of their daughter, while the wife was lying on the sofa disheveled in her nightgown, chain-smoking. This was when he met Valentina at a crowded party. Valentina had just arrived from a provincial town, she was barely twenty, full of life and energy, flirty with men but in a tender and innocent way, playful like a child. She planned to conquer the capital by becoming a fashion model. Andrei, being an artist, had a soft spot for beauty, and he was determined to help Valentina to make it in a big way. Before long he rented a room for Valentina and was considering divorcing his wife. At some point, after a hysterical row, his wife screamed at him: 'I curse you and your new whore! Don't you think you can build a life with her!' With these words she ran out of the house, and threw herself under a passing car. She died on the spot, and Andrei married Valentina.

He earned good money, Valentina stayed home, totally neglecting the little daughter, but sparing no effort to pursue her career as a model, as she saw it. Andrei took her pictures in the nude and half nude, and they sent them to agencies; Valentina got new acquaintances, she started to go out herself, and she was not interested in having

Andrei around. Men started to call at home, Valentina started to be missing in the evenings and sometimes through the nights. Her first steady lover, and Andrei's real rival, was a young man trying to get through in business. To give him a helping hand, Valentina took several hundred dollars from the home resources, to lend it to the new friend. This debt was never paid back, but Andrei was not able to fight with Valentina. Instead, he came to Katerina, to ask her for love magic, to keep his new wife with him.

Katerina was pessimistic about the situation. She told Andrei what she usually told me when we discussed love magic: love, according to Katerina, was a gift from God; no magic can change another person, no magic can force one human being to love another if this love is not already there. What magic could do, however, was to bind one person to another, to make one dependent on another, to make one come back once and again after having left. Many cases of love magic, according to Katerina, imply acting against God or nature, so the result cannot be good by definition. Your object of desire will come back to you, not for a happy and harmonious life, but to torture you more, to continue the war you have been engaged in. This is what Katerina says to people who come to her asking to make a *privorot*, a series of spells to attract the love of another person, and *otvorot*, a parallel set of measures to divert one's object of desire from other people.

Katerina tried to reorient Andrei's attention to his own needs, to make him realize that his life with Valentina was doomed to failure, that he was a captive of a delusion, that the person in front of him was not the one he saw. As with people in passion, Andrei did not want to hear; all he wanted was that Valentina would stay with him. He drove his daughter to the kindergarten, did groceries, drove Valentina to meet her lovers, and picked her up at restaurants at nights. Katerina did her love magic: Valentina stayed with Andrei for five more years, after which she did eventually leave him for a younger and much richer man.

Katerina considers this case a success story. Andrei recovered, he was not destroyed like many people in his situation are, and he was even capable of forming a new bond. Two years after Valentina finally left him, he came to Katerina with a photograph of a new girl, asking Katerina to 'examine' (*prosmotret'*) if this new relationship had good prospects. Katerina looked at the picture and gave her ok: she said that the girl was devoted, modest, loving, and a good homemaker; that she will stay at home and spare no efforts to make him happy. She warned Andrei that maybe he will be a bit bored with his new partner, that she lacked initiative, and that he will have to shake and move her in order to lure her out of the kitchen and sofa. This was the last time she met Andrei; from the fact that he never came back to her, Katerina surmised that his problems were eventually solved, and he had found a peaceful harbor.

*

Ovanes and Nina were a happy couple. They lived together, although without being officially married, for five years. Ovanes's family was from some place in the Caucasus, he was attached to his parents and his birthplace, but he had a good job

in Moscow and was quite content with visiting his kin once a year, coming back to Nina with wine, raisins and walnuts from his home town's open market. He never took Nina with him to visit his family; they both knew that the family would never accept Nina as one of them, and that the relatives would never endorse their union; but the relatives, even though well loved by Ovanés, did not have much say in his life anyway. At some point Ovanés received news from home that his mother was not feeling well, and he took time off from his job to go home and say goodbye to her. Nina did not hear from him for several weeks, and then she received a letter in which he told her that he was not coming back: his relatives had found him a wife, and he intended to marry her and to start a new life on his home turf.

This was when Nina was referred to Katerina. Katerina consulted her cards and told Nina: 'I do not see you apart. Don't worry, he will come back to you. Whether or not you decide to let him back is another thing.' Nina was definite that Ovanés was the only one she needed, and she was determined to fight to the end. Her worst problem was in fact that her beloved was too far away, and she was deprived of any possibility to fight other than through magic. In fact, Katerina's magic gave her the possibility to engage all her passion, longing, will, and creative potential into one goal: to bring back her man, and she plunged into the magic activities with all of the passion she had been previously giving to Ovanés. Katerina worked magically as well, giving spells to Nina and instructing her how to read them, instructions that Nina followed to the letter and with great fervour. Katerina told Nina that the love was there, but that Ovanés's discernment was blurred, partly by his mother's sickness and impending death, partly by some magic his kinsfolk back home were working on him. What she and Nina were doing was to restore justice, to help implement God's plan for the two of them, the design that was unsettled by some other people's mean designs. This was a situation where magic works, said Katerina, consoling Nina and convincing her that she should continue working and hoping, that everything would end well.

Katerina pointed out for Nina that the success of the operation only partly depended on magic, which, in turn, depended to a degree on how much Nina herself was working on reading the spells and exercising magical operations. It also depended a great deal on Nina's behavior should Ovanés eventually come back. Katerina instructed Nina not to ring him, not to write, not to make any signs of life; and also not to make quarrelsome scenes should he eventually appear on her doorstep. She would swallow her *obida*, not scold or reproach him, but embrace him as if showing that she understood his breakaway not as betrayal and cowardice but as a temporary confusion of the mind, caused by foreign and mean forces, of which both of them were unwitting victims.

And, indeed, Ovanés came back after a while. He turned up one evening, without prior notice, remorseful, saying that he just left his family and his hometown behind, without saying goodbye, and that he was back forever because he did not imagine his life without Nina. The couple is still together, and Nina is still Katerina's friend and client, calling her once in a while to ask for advice on one or

another complication of life. Their life is far from blissfully happy. The passion gone and the feeling of betrayal, *obida*, sits forever deep inside Nina, but the couple has formalized their union. Ovanés is registered in Nina's apartment, and he has a decent job. There are no storms, but, as Katerina says, family boredom is a plight of those happy ones who have managed to keep their family intact, defending it from the attacks of passions.

Coda

How do the terms like Object, Interpretant, and Ground give us better understanding of people torn apart by passions, grappling with failures and rejections, putting on the stake moral values and even turning to ruthless warfare to satisfy their desires? It seems to me that Peircian semiotics is a good tool, because it accounts for the processual and intersubjective character of human being as embodied consciousness. Emotions, passions and desires, and the actions they trigger, are the tumult of consciousness, but they are also factors that lie behind broader social and political processes. Microdynamics of individual lives help to account for macroprocesses of politics and economics. Therefore the investigation of emotions in cultures should go beyond the studies of discourses, into particularities of individual lives. Peircian semiotics offer a tool to analyze these particularities as worlds in their own right, but also as parts of a broader culture. In this chapter, exposing the cultural category of 'romantic love' as semiotic Ground, but also as a complex of Object-Representant-Interpretant—another way of grasping feeling-meaning-action—I tried to explore some ethnographic material beyond the studies of discourse. Part of it is esoteric—an ordinary person in the street of Moscow might never have heard about love spells, much less used one. Another part is sensitive, since using the blood and tears of individual loves as ethnography may be considered as preying or trespassing. Altogether, this chapter points at the deeply determining nature of cultural ontologies for the finest nuances of feelings and the most whimsical contingencies of actions that we call our personal, inner and social lives.

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