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Sympathy in the Russian Sentimental Letter of the 1770s

Under the influence of literary sentimentalism, elite Russians began in the 1770s to experiment with a new genre of correspondence, which emphasized spontaneity and sincerity, encouraging introspection and exchanges of intimacies. Articulations of sympathy—the capacity and willingness of sender and recipient to experience one another's sentiments—soon became a central component of the sentimental letter. This article investigates the experimentative way in which Russian correspondents first alluded to sympathy: what vocabulary they chose, what literary sources they drew on, to whom it was directed and what purposes it may have served them. Articulating sympathy was a means by which members of kin and clientele networks could enhance their bonds; it also constituted an exploration into new communicative and literary possibilities.

On the morning of 5 September 1769, Mariia Panina wrote to her 'dear friend' and brother-in-law, Count Nikita Panin. Her husband, Adjutant General Petr Panin, planned to leave home later that day to join the Russo-Turkish war, where he would assume command of Russia's Second Army. Panina wished to convey her feelings of loss and sadness: 'My known, heartfelt attachment to him will give you the means to see my current state even in your absence' [Izvestnaia moia k nemu serdechnaia priviazannost' podast vam sposob i zaochno videt' moe tepereshnee sostoiane] (Babich 1993: 168). By phrasing her thoughts in this way, she invited Nikita Panin to imaginatively experience the sentiments she described. In the same letter, she also accorded to herself the capacity to anticipate the feelings her letter might elicit in him. Today, we call this sympathy, or empathy, designating the transfer of a feeling or emotional state from one person to another.[1]

To the best of my knowledge, Panina's letter represents the

[1] I have chosen 'sympathy' as the concept developed by David Hume and Adam Smith in the mid eighteenth century to capture this phenomenon and its ethical consequences. Anglophone philosophers and psychologists have come to prefer the twentieth-century neologism, 'empathy', while acknowledging its debt to sympathy as Hume and Smith understood it. See Coplan et al. 2011: 212–213, 323–24.

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first example of a rhetorical device that became prominent in Russian letters of the late eighteenth century. Panina began with the phrase to 'see from afar' [zaochno videt'], and other correspondents of the 1770s built out the vocabulary: to 'conceive in a lively manner' [zhivo sebe predstavit'], or 'imagine' [voobrazhat', predstavit' sebe], which allowed them to perceive and thereby experience the same sentiments. This could sometimes be achieved by 'presenting a picture' [predstavit' kartinu] using words, though the transference might also result from drawing an inference based on what correspondents already knew of one another. Scholars have noted that literary figures began to experiment with this device in the late 1770s, though its use is best attested in the 1780s and 1790s.[2] This article seeks to expand the list of early experimenters by including figures from outside the literary arena, such as Mariia Panina, her sister Anna Chernysheva and the brothers Nikita and Petr Panin, before turning to the well-known literary figures, Denis Fonvizin and Mikhail Murav'ev. Of these, only one—Petr Panin—employed the eighteenth-century Russian equivalent of sympathy, namely '*sochuvstvie*', a term that rarely appeared in print before the 1780s. None used the Russian neologism, '*simpatiia*', nor, if they switched into French, did they use '*sympathie*'.

Expressions of sympathy were a core feature of the sentimental letter, a genre of private correspondence that heavily emphasized the sender's personality and momentary dispositions, and which began to spread across Europe around 1770. Introspective passages became more frequent, lengthier and more detailed. The tone to be cultivated was 'natural' and conversational, calculated to convey spontaneity and immediacy. Senders expressed their moods, by shifting topics suddenly, as if following their train of thought, and gestured at the impossibility of conveying their sentiments on paper. An author's personality and mood might also be expressed in the handwriting and format: the length of the paper, the breadth of margins at the top, bottom, and left side of the sheet shrank. Lines, once straight, sloped up the page, slanting sideways into a cursive

[2] Passing references to 'sympathy' [sochuvstvie, simpatiia] in letters of the late 1770s can be found in Lazarchuk 1972: 9; Lazarchuk 1979: 87; and Rossi 1995: 128. A fuller analysis of 'empathy' in Radishchev's correspondence in the 1790s is offered in Baudin, 2008: 314–7.

hand, even as letters continued to be written in rough and final draft. The mode of address and signature became less formal and might be omitted altogether. To correspondents well trained in epistolary etiquette, a glance at the unfolded sheet was sufficient to determine the nature of a letter (Nickisch 1969: 145, 167—78 195; Grassi 1995: 73; Steinhausen 1891: 274—294, esp. 290). The idiosyncratic format of each letter also contributed to the intimacy of the exchange, as if paper and ink could themselves convey feelings, a physical complement to written invocations of sympathy.

In adopting these new conventions, correspondents broke with a longstanding tradition of etiquette, dominant through the middle of the eighteenth century, which militated against speaking about oneself, either in conversation or by letter (Grassi 1995: 67—68, 71—73). As Lord Chesterfield warned his son in 1747, 'Of all things, banish the egotism out of your conversation, and never think of entertaining people with your personal concerns, or private affairs; though they are interesting to you, they are tedious and impertinent to everyone else' (Chesterfield 1973: 49). By the same token, personal character should in no way manifest itself in the content or style of a letter, its format, structure, or choice of words, even in 'familiar letters', exchanged between family members and friends (Nickisch 1969: 53—55, 91—92). By breaking with these norms, sentimental letter-writers deliberately took liberties, displaying confidence that the trivial events they described did indeed interest the recipient, who was also tasked with deciphering poor handwriting. In this respect, defying past epistolary conventions not only expressed intimacy, but asserted it.

Scholars have tracked changes in etiquette by surveying letter-writing manuals, which circulated widely across Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, several of which were translated into Russian (Scheidegger 1980; Joukovskaia 1999; Atanasova-Sokolova 2006). The cultivated spontaneity of the sentimental letter, however, made it difficult and even counterproductive to apply the rules and templates provided in these manuals (Nickisch 1969: 191, 201, 203). Instead, correspondents might turn for guidance to novels in letters by literati such as Samuel Richardson—himself the author of letter-writing manuals—and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In Europe, correspondents adopted phrases and techniques

from these novels to display their mastery of the latest cultural trends (Steinhausen 1891: 380), and the same applies to Russia.

Epistolary experimentation with sympathy in Russia may also be attributed to the broader diffusion of philosophical and moral introspection common among the late-eighteenth-century nobility (Marasinova 2009: 25–30). Yet, expressions of sympathy also furnished a new means to fulfil a much older task. As David Ransel argued in a widely cited article, the Russian nobility relied heavily on letters to maintain their clientele networks, which were highly personalized and depended for their success on lasting allegiances (Ransel 1973: 159, 162–3, 167). Case studies of correspondence between patrons and clients have borne this out, demonstrating how fulsome professions of personal devotion could enhance connections with political allies and family members in the 1790s and 1800s (Baudin 2008: 300, 314, 316, 322–23; Lavrinovich 2016: 92–94, 97). Expressions of sympathy were an exceptionally effective tool in this repertoire, precisely because they posited emotional identification between sender and recipient, strengthening the bond between them.

Sympathy

Sympathy became a hallmark of sentimental literature in the late eighteenth century, but its philosophical foundation was laid in early- to mid-eighteenth century Britain. Proponents such as David Hume and Adam Smith explicitly used the term 'sympathy' to describe the moral benefits of imaginatively conceiving others' sentiments. For them, sympathy was not an emotion in its own right, but described the manner in which feelings are transferred from person to person.

In his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–41), Hume described sympathy as 'a specific faculty of emotional communication', whereby one person's feelings or sentiments could be experienced by another (Frazer 2010: 41). A response to another's pain or pleasure, displayed in facial expressions and words, sympathy was elicited primarily by sensory impressions. Ideas and imagination were essential, however, in producing a 'lively' conception of the other's feelings, thereby generating a like experience. Transference also depended on resemblance and closeness between people. The greater the degree of contiguity and similarity, as between blood relations and friends, the more likely a

person was to 'enter into the sentiments of others'. Yet, force of imagination also made sympathy possible from afar (Hume 1978: 317–19, 385; Smith 1976: 75; Frazer 2010: 42).

Adam Smith developed Hume's ideas in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). Sympathy teaches individuals to judge virtue and vice, or the propriety and impropriety of their own actions. A man watches others' facial expressions and behaviour in response to his words and deeds and thereby recognizes when others 'enter into, and when they disapprove of his sentiments'. His own judgements develop accordingly (Smith 1976: 109–111). On the one hand, sympathy regulates individual behaviour, by creating critical self-distance. On the other, sympathy also creates self-identification with others. 'By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation [...] and become in some measure him' (Smith 1976: 9).

Not all emotions were deemed equally likely to elicit sympathy. Passions such as hatred and resentment were generally repugnant, and an individual's joy or suffering might not garner sympathy if the reaction appeared disproportionate to the cause (Smith 1976: 31–38). Nor were all persons equally likely to evoke sympathy. Social hierarchies played a role, as Hume remarked in a seldom-cited passage. Sympathy tended to move down, rather than up the social scale: 'our passions descend with greater facility than they ascend [...] it is more natural for us to love the son on account of the father, than the father upon account of the son, the servant for the master, than the master for the servant' (Hume 1978: 341–2). Even if few Russians read Hume, they adhered to this pattern. Of the examples featured below all but one—Mariia Panina's letters to her brother-in-law—extended sympathy from a social superior to a subordinate, inviting the recipient to partake of the sender's feelings.

As developed in Britain, sympathy was a self-consciously secularizing theory of morality, grounding altruistic inclinations—and morality more generally—outside of Christian norms (Herdt 2004: 304–7). It was calculated to replace a sacred vocabulary of benevolence, charity and pity, affects that had previously been assigned to God and Christian believers. [3] Per-

[3] Contrast the absence of sympathy, *sympathie*, *Mitgefühl*, and *sochuvstvie* versus the presence of mercy, and charity (*miloserdie, miséricorde, pitié, charité, compassion*) along with terms for courtly favour, such as bounty and kindness

haps for this reason continental writers were slow to adopt direct equivalents of the term 'sympathy'. In France, moreover, the word 'sympathie' was already occupied, referring to a special kind of attraction or affinity between two individuals, without any special moral implications (Jaucourt 1765: 736).

New genres, such as novels in letters and philosophical letters, too, were important in popularizing the view that emotional transference is essential to moral learning. Christoph Martin Wieland wrote his philosophical reveries, titled *Sympathies* [*Sympathien*, 1754], in the form of letters between fictional characters. He used the term 'sympathy' in its French sense to describe a 'secret and magnetic charm' that attracts two people. One of the core messages, however, was that the capacity to experience others' sentiments was essential to moral development. Knowing that others shared their feelings leant individuals the moral strength to cultivate their virtues. Identification occurs in *Sympathies* between senders and recipients. Wieland also encouraged readers to identify themselves with the protagonists of Richardson's novels as models of virtue (Wieland 2020: 4, 9, 19).

Richardson, a contemporary of Hume's, made personal concerns, states of mind, and moral dilemmas central topics in his novels, and his characters' letters were innovative in the conversational tone they adopted. They even provided a vocabulary in which to apologize for seemingly trivial content, or 'silly prattle', as the eponymous heroine of Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), put it. 'I shall write on […] though I should have nothing but silliness to write; for I know you divert yourselves on nights with what I write, because it is mine' (Richardson 1958: 39, 50). The quotidian details Pamela relates are predicated on the certainty of the personal interest that her addresses take in her. Occasionally, but relatively rarely, she invokes their sympathy: 'Well, you may believe how uneasily I passed the time […] Don't your heart ache for me?' (Richardson 1958: 27).

In *Eulogy of Richardson* [*Éloge de Richardson*, 1762], Diderot analysed the role that readers' self-identification with characters in Richardson's novels might play as a means of promoting virtue (though he avoid-

(*bonté*, *générosité*, *bienveillance*, *milost'*, *blagosklonnost'*, and *priiatstvo*) in one multilingual dictionary published in St Petersburg in 1763 (Slovar' 1763: 154–55, 166–67).

ed the term 'sympathy'). Readers recognized scenes that accorded with their prior experiences and dispositions: 'The passions he describes are those I have felt myself; they are stirred by the same objects, and produce the results I should have expected'. Such scenes not only replicated reader's experiences, however, but extended them. As Diderot wrote: 'I had been the spectator of a number of incidents, and I felt the richer in experience'. The novels were didactically effective because they conveyed moral truths without expounding on them, inviting readers to experience, or 'feel' [sentir] such truths. Alongside self-identification, the fictional nature of the account also allowed readers to maintain critical distance, subsequently engaging others in debate about the moral dilemmas presented in the novels, which encouraged them to reflect more deeply on their own judgments (Diderot 1893: 268).

The language of introspection deepened over subsequent decades, as seen in Rousseau's *Julie, or the new Heloise* [*Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*, 1761]. Initially, Rousseau had resisted the idea that emotional transference was a moral panacea. By the time he wrote his epistolary novel, *Julie*, he had reversed course, exploring how letters might extend self-identification to allow readers, both fictive and real, to embrace new experiences (Paige 2008: 134–36, 142). The vocabulary and techniques of emotional transference developed in *Julie* expanded considerably on Richardson's. Rousseau's characters recurred frequently to the putative impact of their letters on the recipients (Rousseau, 1961: 63, 111, 489, 702). The main protagonists, Julie and St. Preux, repeatedly asserted their ability to sense and relive one another's feelings and experiences, using verbs such as to 'imagine', 'judge' and 'share' [imaginer, juger, partager]. By invoking unity of feeling, they bolstered the sense of closeness between them, as Julie wrote to Saint-Preux: 'I say us, for I know my friend shares my impatience; he shares it because I feel it, and he feels it too on his account: I no longer need for him to tell me such things' (Rousseau, 1997: 49; Rousseau 1961: 61). For Saint-Preux, the capacity correctly to anticipate one another's responses was an essential precondition for correspondence itself.[4] Sympathy could be en-

[4] The dynamic is best displayed during their rupture: 'We are no longer each other's, we are no longer the same, and I no longer know to whom I write. Will you deign to accept my letters? [...]

hanced by claiming to withhold content. The recipient's capacity to anticipate the sender's dispositions rendered words unnecessary, even as characters inevitably filled in the blanks: 'I shall not describe to you the effect this unanticipated separation produced in me; I will tell you nothing of [...] my insane despair: you will gauge [jugerez] it well enough from the inconceivable distraction to which they both led me' (Rousseau 1997: 177–78; Rousseau 1961: 217). The claim to withhold information reinforced their putative bond, asserting mutual prior knowledge and the recipient's willingness to engage imaginatively with the sender. Letters conveying such sentiments became fetishized objects: 'Kiss this letter and leap for joy at the news I have for you' (Rousseau 1997: 91). Both Richardson and Roussseau were widely read across Europe, enhancing the vocabulary for intimate self-description and authorizing such expression.[5]

The Russian authors of the letters analysed below are unlikely to have read all of the works outlined above. Hume's *Treatise*, little known in Europe, would have been inaccessible to most, while Smith's *Theory*, first translated into French in 1764, found no reception in eighteenth-century Russia. By contrast, Richardson's novels and Rousseau's *Julie* enjoyed great popularity (Kostiukova 1993; Barran 2002), and Wieland's *Sympathies* were translated into Russian in 1778 (Wieland 1778). Even so, their impact on the correspondents below must remain speculative. Scholars have analysed their influence on Murav'ev—and to a lesser extent on Fonvizin—in detail, while the Panins' reading habits have garnered no scholarly analysis.

Overall, epistolary novels did more than offer templates for imitation, replacing one set of high-culture practices with another. They invited a different mode of exchange, a new set of expectations about the implications of writing and reading, along with new techniques for establishing intimacy on the page by invoking prior knowledge of the recipient's character and circumstances, along with the capacity to relive others' experiences. The status of the letter as a physical emblem changed accordingly.

Dare I still retain a former familiarity?' (Rousseau 1961: 189; Rousseau 1997: 155).

[5] On Germany, see Steinhausen 1891: 396–400.

Mariia Panina and Anna Chernysehva: Strengthening Family Bonds

As already noted, correspondence was critically important to the Russian elites' clientele networks, which organized politics in the eighteenth century, by shoring up interpersonal loyalty. Within this system, women's letters played a significant role, mediating within noble families to 'create intimacy' and to 'define and reinforce family relationships' (Cavendar 2002: 394–5, 402). Under these circumstances, invocations of sympathy would have furnished a valuable rhetorical device, which may explain why a woman, Mariia Panina, was among the first experimenters. The fact that epistolary novels, such as *Pamela* and *Julie* centered on women as correspondents may also have encouraged her. Her lack of training in chancellery correspondence, too, would have facilitated stylistic innovation.

Very little is known about Mariia Panina, born in 1746 to Rodion Veidel' (von Weidel) and Anastasiia Passek. She and sister, Anna, who was two years older, were raised at the court of Empress Elizabeth in the 1750s, becoming ladies-in-waiting [freiliny] in 1762 during the reign of Peter III (Babich 1993: 165–66; Nikolai Mikhailovich 1906: no. 131). Nothing is known of their education. Mariia married Petr Panin in 1767. Her letters to his brother, Nikita Panin, from 1769 to 1773, appear to be her only surviving writings. His letters to her have not been located. [6] Mariia Panina's husband, Petr, was a high-ranking military commander, yet he depended heavily on his older and more powerful brother, Nikita, chancellor for foreign affairs, who often interceded on his behalf at court. Though the two appear to have been close, writing frequently to one another (more will be said about their correspondence below), Panina appears to have functioned as an intermediary between them. Cultivating cordiality and intimacy through her letters, she may have helped to maintain or build trust between them.

The Imperial theatre, which Panina would have attended as a lady in waiting, may have been one source for her conception of sympathy. Marcus Levitt has argued that 'picturing' the moral dilemmas of heroes and hero-

[6] Panina is known to have written 16 letters, of which 11 were published in Babich 1993. Most originals are in RGB, f. 222, k. 6, dd. 6 and 7, though some were lost. Below, I will refer to the originals to indicate format and to Babich's edition for content.

ines became a key element of classicist tragedies of the later eighteenth century. Characters on stage used the verb 'to picture' [predstavit'], inviting each other to imagine, or enter into their moral dilemmas and emotional quandaries, thereby also drawing in the audience. While some of the works Levitt cites were staged in the 1780s, others were performed at the court theatre earlier, such as Rzhevskii's *The False Smerdius* [*Podlozhnyi smerdii*, 1769] (Levitt 2011: Chapter 4, esp. 86–87).

In Panina's letters, sympathy operated in three ways: by inviting Nikita Panin to participate in her feelings, by partaking of the feelings he expressed, and by speculating on the feelings her letters might elicit in him. In many cases, she appealed to their mutual sentiments about her husband. For example, in the letter of 5 September 1769 cited in the introduction, she expressed grief at her husband Petr's departure for military duty, inviting Nikita to see her pain from afar [zaochno videt']: 'my known, heartfelt attachment to him will give you the means to see my current state even in your absence' (Babich 1993: 168). His prior knowledge of her attachment to her husband made it possible for him to imagine her state of mind. Panina also partook of the feelings her brother-in-law described, expressing worry at his anxiety over political affairs: 'Your latest [...] letter, dear Count Nikita Ivanich, greatly alarms [trevozhit] me, because I do not know whether your mental anxieties [dushevnye bespokoistva] may not compromise your health, which is so dear to me' (19 November 1770, Babkina 1993: 172). On occasion, she also attempted to pre-empt his anxiety. For example, knowing that Nikita had not received letters from Petr Panin for some weeks during the war, she wrote to reassure him that Petr was in good health (2 September 1770, Babkina 1993: 172). She frequently expressed concern that reading and answering her letters took up too much of his time. On one occasion, admitting that her handwriting was atrocious, she claimed to have 'taken pity' on him, asking a scribe to copy the letter (Babich 1993: 168). On another occasion, knowing that her husband was mailing him a thick packet of papers, she said she would hold off on sending him a lengthy account of her recent travels, for 'fear that my joke may be as out of place as mustard after lunch' (Babich 1993: 170). Describing her letter as a 'thoroughly meaningless' [nichego neznachushee] sup-

plement to her husband's task-oriented correspondence, she begged Nikita's patience. Here, Panina may have intended to add levity to her husband's correspondence, enhancing the intimacy of the bond between the brothers. As promised, Panina sent the chancellor an account of her stay in Khar'kov by separate courier, again apologizing for these 'trifles' [bezdelki], which robbed him of valuable time (Babich 1993: 169).

These details point to another possible literary source for Panina: Richardson's novels. With regard to handwriting, which could not be represented in print, Richardson attempted in *Pamela* to reproduce the manner in which turbid emotions might transfer themselves to ink: 'I can hardly write [...] I cannot hold my pen—How crooked and trembling the lines!—I must leave off, till I can get quieter fingers' (Richardson 1958: 191). In addition, Panina's references to the 'trifles' she recounted in her letters recall Pamela's apologies for the details she relayed, calling them 'silly prattle'. As one scholar noted, references to 'trifles' or 'chatter' became typical of women's sentimental letters in Germany at this time (Steinhausen 1891: 296). As we will see, however, male correspondents also came to use such deprecating words. Such apologies may have served Panina in three ways: they signalled confidence that her news, for all its triviality, interested Nikita Panin; and they highlighted the status of her letters as distractions from weighty political affairs, building intimacy and levity into the correspondence between her husband and brother-in-law. Lastly, they cloaked or excused other deviations from proper epistolary decorum. Overall, breaches of protocol signalled that her letters were more than the fulfilment of a polite obligation, but a heart-felt need, as she stated several times (Babich 1993: 168–69, 171). To offset the seemingly idiosyncratic style of her letters, she adhered to mid-eighteenth century etiquette by observing prescribed margins at the top (3–3.5 cm) and left side (1.5–2cm) of the page, and placing the date at the top of the first sheet, as befit a more formal familiar letter. Some of her letters were scribal, others in her cursive hand. Only two autograph letters had tighter margins (Rossiiskaia gosudarstvennaia biblioteka [hereafter RGB], f. 222 k. 6, d. 7, ll. 1–3).

The function of women's letters as strengthening interfamilial bonds may also be observed in a postscript by Mariia Panina's sister, Anna Chernysheva, in 1778.

Like Panina, she had been raised at the court in St. Petersburg, but her biography and education remain obscure. She left behind only a few postscripts attached to her husband's letters in the later 1770s. Anna married Zakhar' Chernyshev in 1766. Because Petr Panin and Chernyshev were bitter political rivals, it unlikely that the sisters shared their letter-writing techniques with one another. Anna's husband, a General Field-Marshal and head of the army administration, wrote numerous letters to his niece, Ekaterina Chernysheva, with the first preserved in 1776, when he was 54 and she was 10. Her responses were not preserved. Ekaterina was the daughter of Zakhar''s younger brother, General Field-Marshal Ivan Chernyshev, head of the naval administration. Though the brothers were of equal rank, Ivan was far more successful at court. Corresponding with their niece allowed Zakhar' and Anna to cultivate an intimate bond with Ivan. In 1778, however, Ekaterina was gaining independent importance, appointed as a lady-in-waiting to Catherine II, which also promised a highly successful marriage.[7]

The post-script Chernysheva inserted into his letter in 1778, using French, displayed self-conscious experimentation with the genre of the sentimental letter. Chernysheva wrote in a clear, cursive hand, heavily slanted rightward, filling the page without regard for margins, a typical device in western European sentimental letters. Two lines stretched horizontally up the left side of the sheet, as if to highlight the urgency of the message: 'I embrace you with all my heart.' The postscript conveyed no news, only expressing affection for the recipient, her niece (GIM, f. 445, no. 245, ll. 650b–66 ob.).[8] Its format contrasted forcefully against her husband's observance of wide margins and stiff, upright lettering.

Zakhar's letters to his niece displayed his preoccupation with Ivan Chernyshev. Telling little of himself, he repeatedly urged Ekaterina to bring joy and comfort to her parents. Anna Chernysheva's postscript expressed the same feelings and advice. Unlike her husband, however, she played on her niece's imagination. Employing a device used

[7] Ten years later, Ekaterina married Fedor Vadkovskii a friend of Grand Duke Paul.

[8] The letters in this file are by Zakhar' Chernyshev, with several postscripts by Anna Chernysheva. All *list* numbers indicated in this section are to this file.

in Rousseau's *Julie*, she wrote that words were unnecessary to convey what her niece already knew: 'I repeat what you have known for a long time. That I cherish you like a daughter. That, however, should not occasion the belief in you that [I love you] for your own sake, not at all: you know why, and here is the reason that I shall not tell you: I know that you are very obliging by your diligence' (l. 66). Anna added that Ekaterina could prove their friendship by making herself a worthy child to her parents (l. 66). Here, the rhetorical gesture is repeated twice: the girl could imagine what her aunt might say without even needing to read the ink on the page, which merely reminded her of her prior knowledge. Chernysheva's stated omission of words established intimacy as well as promoting moral learning: her niece had already internalized the virtues required to earn her aunt's love and should cultivate them.

Separated by a decade, letters and postscripts by Mariia Panina and Anna Chernysheva display the willingness of members of high-ranking political families to experiment with innovative techniques in sentimental letter-writing and thereby shore up familial relations. Breaking prior rules of etiquette—itself a part of the etiquette of sentimental letter-writing—was a display of spontaneity, which in turn conveyed sincerity, whether real or feigned. In one respect, however, Mariia Panina's letters were unique: they expressed sympathy toward a higher-ranking individual.

Petr Panin and Denis Fonvizin: Sympathy and Political Favour

Sympathy could also be invoked when asking for favours, as can be seen in letters by Petr Panin to his brother, Nikita, and to his brother's secretary, Denis Fonvizin. In adopting the language of emotional transference, Petr Panin may have drawn inspiration from his wife's letters, though he used it to different ends. Petr Panin may also have been influenced by the spread of masonic culture, which set heavy store by 'shared experiences' and 'intense emotional responsiveness' to the 'needs, desires, or suffering' of fellow masons (Loiselle 2014: 196, 200).[9] Both Panin brothers were freemasons, and Nikita is known to have joined a St. Petersburg lodge in 1774 (Serkov 2001: 624–5). Fonvizin is not known to

[9] On the influence of freemasonry among sentimental letter writers, see (Kochetkova 2002–3).

have joined a lodge, though as a skilful poet and playwright, he was well versed in the language of literary sentimentalism and understood the basic tenets of freemasonry. Far inferior to the brothers, he ranked a modest seven on the Table of Ranks as court councillor [nadvornyi sovetnik]. He became Nikita Panin's secretary in 1769, reading the chancellor's correspondence, and frequently copying letters on his behalf.

Nikita and Petr Panin carried on an intensive correspondence, though only a handful of Nikita's letters remain from the 1770s (Panin 1871: 74–75, 86–87). Rough drafts of numerous letters by Petr to his older brother were preserved and published (Panin 1876; RGB f. 222 k. 7).[10] Addressing one another as 'kind' or 'amiable' friend and brother [milostivyi, liubeznyi, drug, bratets], both adopted features of the sentimental letter in their correspondence, leaving out the formal line of address, and incorporating their salutations into the opening line.

The early 1770s were difficult years, as Nikita Panin's influence at court waned. Petr Panin was forced into early retirement in 1770 (Ransel 1975: 198–99, 249). Temporary respite was offered by the crisis surrounding the Pugachev rebellion, which broke out in 1773. In 1774, Nikita Panin persuaded Catherine II to appoint his brother to head the military expedition that crushed the revolt. Petr Panin began to make use of the language of sympathy during this time, beginning with Fonvizin and continuing with his brother. Though their responses have not been preserved, none of their surviving letters to him contain such language.

Petr Panin engaged a considerably wider repertoire of sentimental devices in writing to Fonvizin than to his brother. He not only omitted the line of address, but selectively phoneticized spellings, repeatedly referring to Fonvizin as his 'deer friend' (daragoi, instead of dorogoi priiatel'), as if to underscore that the word came from the heart.[11] One letter of July 1774 stands out, however, invoking sympathy. Petr had just received two letters, one from Fonvizin and one from Nikita in Fonvizin's hand, confirming his designation as commander of the force against Pugachev. As Petr

[10] All references to *list* numbers in this section are to this collection.

[11] The phonetic spelling (daragoi) is replicated in three preserved rough drafts of 1774, and it was clearly intentional, as the unstressed o was preserved everywhere else (ll. 507, 510, 512).

Panin wrote, it was unnecessary to dilate on his reaction to these letters [rasprostraniat'sia mne […] net kazhetsia nuzhdy], because Fonvizin could well imagine it: 'your own feelings and devotion to me of course present you with the liveliest picture [vo vsei konechno zhivosti predstavliaet vam kartinu] of my current position'. Panin then launched into a lengthy description of his reaction, alluding to his fear, his sense of honour, faith in God and determination to sacrifice his life for empress and fatherland. The aim was not primarily to share his state of mind, however, but to ask Fonvizin to intercede with his brother: Petr and Mariia wished to travel to St. Petersburg, so that they could present themselves to the empress, and so that Mariia might remain in the capital while he departed for the theatre of war (ll. 507–ob.). A letter Petr wrote to Nikita Panin around the same time, by contrast, repeated the same request, copied some of the same patriotic phrases verbatim, but omitted any invocation of sympathy (Panin 1876: 12–14). Apparently, Petr Panin found it most appropriate to direct sympathy down the scale of hierarchy. It is not known whether Fonvizin interceded with Nikita on Petr's behalf, and his response to Panin was not preserved. At any rate, the results were negative: the chancellor ordered his brother not to come to St. Petersburg, but to join the army immediately (Panin 1871: 88).

Though Fonvizin's response to this letter is unavailable, others to Petr Panin were highly deferential and contained no hint of imaginative understanding. He followed Panin in omitting the formal line of address but referred to him by his title, 'your excellency', or as 'kind sir', not as a friend. As the subordinate in the exchange, Fonvizin regularly thanked Petr Panin for his marks of trust and esteem but did not presume to guess his sentiments (Fonvizin 1959: 360–94, 453–91, 499).

Having failed to obtain an audience at court, Petr Panin directed further letters to his brother requesting other forms of support. It was here that Panin used the word 'sympathy' [sochuvstvie] for the first—and only—time. Given his brother's 'perspicacity and, it seems to me, necessary sympathy', it was unnecessary for Petr to 'call to mind and represent' the many burdens now placed upon him [ne imeiiu ia nuzhdy voobrazhat' i predstavliat' vashemu, dorogoi drug, pronitsaniiu i kazhetsia mne neobkhodimomu sochuvstviiu]. He then furnished

his brother with a list of necessities, including money, personnel, medicine, and a doctor to accompany him, given his poor health and impending old age (Panin 1876: 15). If Petr hoped that invocations of sympathy would produce quick results, he was mistaken. A subsequent missive, written 12 days later, indicates that Nikita had not responded. This time, Petr omitted the language of sympathy, but referred repeatedly to his pregnant, loving and virtuous wife, Mariia, whom he entrusted to Nikita's care (Panin 1876: 18–19).

Petr Panin's failure to obtain favours by invoking the language of sympathy may only underscore the remarkable nature of this venture. Forty-seven at the time he wrote these letters and an experienced correspondent, he was nevertheless willing to experiment with new epistolary devices. His rough drafts show how carefully the sentimental letter was constructed to create the appearance of spontaneous and heart-felt exchange. Panin may have believed that the dramatic circumstances justified a departure from previous conventions, and that the potential benefits merited the extra effort.

Denis Fonvizin and Mikhail Murav'ev: Epistolary Virtuosity

Fonvizin's own experiments with emotional transference differed qualitatively from Panin's. A well-established litterateur, he understood the contents of familiar letters as a potential basis for publishable fiction writing, and he experimented extensively beginning in the early 1760s. The role of familiar letters as a 'laboratory' for the adoption of new vocabularies and literary forms has been observed by scholars commenting on the familial correspondence of Mikhail Murav'ev (Teteni 1983: 218, 225). Some twelve years Fonvizin's junior, Murav'ev was still obscure but already ambitious in the late 1770s. For Fonvizin and Murav'ev, letters to their fathers and more particularly their sisters became proving grounds for literary virtuosity. Innovations can be identified in the content, vocabulary and mixture of languages. Some facets of their experiments, however, could not be replicated in print, notably their handwriting and observance of margins.

Fonvizin had numerous reasons to be acutely aware of epistolary etiquette. In the 1760s and 1770s, he published in several Russian journals which featured many entries in the form of letters.

Further, as secretary to Nikita Panin, he was required to uphold the dominant conventions of letter writing, including the script, the size of paper and the margins. Fonvizin wilfully ignored these in letters to his sister, Fedos'ia, preserved from 1763, cultivating irregularities to convey spontaneity. From the very start, the style of address and even the style of paper were highly uneven: the sheets—ranging from 11 to 31 cm in length—were often too short or too long for the standard familiar letter, as if he had grabbed whatever scrap came to hand. The margins on the top and left, too, varied widely between 6 mm and 2 cm (RGB f. 472, k. 1, d. 2). Rather than the upright block letters typical of chancellery script that he would have used to copy Nikita Panin's letters, he adopted a cursive hand for his sister, slanted rightward in the French style. Differences between French and Russian alphabets vanished as he switched between languages (e.g. RGB f. 472, k. 1, d. 2, l. 9). Alongside visual presentation, Fonvizin's wording was also innovative, as when he assured his sister that it was his 'heart' that guided his pen; or when he labeled the news he conveyed as 'nonsense' [vzdor], proving, as he claimed, that he was telling her absolutely everything (Fonzivin 1959: 318, 326–27, 436).

Invocations of imaginary participation in one another's sentiments and experiences, however, appeared only in later correspondence sent from a trip through Poland, Germany and France in 1777–1778. During the voyage, Fonvizin wrote regularly to several addresses, and he did so with the intention of creating a travelogue in letters (Berelowitch 1995). Yet, he applied sympathy as a technique only in letters to his sister. He frequently invited her to call his situation to mind using phrases such as 'just think' [podumai], 'you can picture' [ty mozhesh' sebe predstavit'], 'you cannot picture' [ty ne mozhesh' sebe predstavit'], 'if you imagined' [esli vy voobrazhali], or 'I cannot adequately describe' (ne mogu vam dovol'no iz"iasnit') (Fonvizin 1959: 424–5, 437, 444, 449). Though it is unclear what literary models Fonvizin drew on—he was fluent in German and knew French well—the most plausible source is Rousseau, whom Fonvizin mentioned in letters to Fedos'ia as 'your Rousseau' (Fonvizin 1959: 438, 450).

The most complex and virtuosic invocation of sympathy was inserted in a letter to her on 29 September 1777 (OS), describing an accident that befell his wife,

Ekaterina, on their way to Warsaw. A pole shattered the window of their carriage, scattering glass on her face. 'Poor her, she was reading a book at the time, and suddenly, grabbing her eye with her hand, she cried out unconsciously. I froze, frightened, hearing what she cried: "Ah, the eye!" My God! Just imagine, how it was for me to hear her cries while watching the blood flow from beneath her hand. I cannot describe what I felt, but only remember that I cried out to her, "look [at me], little mother!"' (Fonvizin 1959: 413–4). Once they established that the eye itself was unharmed, fear and shock remained: 'That is how close my wife came to losing her eye amidst cruelest suffering and without any human aid!' By inserting the imperative, 'just imagine' [predstav' sebe], Fonvizin invited his sister to hear his wife's cry and witness the flow of her blood. By stating that he could neither fully remember, nor describe his feelings— 'I cannot describe what I felt' [Ne mogu opisat', chto ia chuvstvoval]—he further encouraged Fedos'ia to elicit the scene in her mind and to partake of it for herself. In addition, Fonvizin invoked sympathy for his wife, the terrible pain and sense of helplessness she would have experienced in losing an eye (Fonvizin 1959: 413–4).

Fonvizin's choice of addressee was clearly deliberate. Writing to a former schoolmate, Iakov Bulgakov, the very same day, Fonvizin did not relate his wife's accident, nor did he insert imperatives such as 'imagine,' or 'just think' in his letters (Fonvizin 1959: 491–2). The same was true of letters he sent to Petr Panin on the same journey. The dynamics of sympathy reached downward, from brother to sister. Fonvizin's wife was subordinate to both, as she was the daughter of a merchant. Indeed, the only other letter in which Fonvizin emphasized sympathy so heavily—again to his sister—was in a passage describing poverty in Paris, which he said, defied the 'human imagination' [voobrazhenie chelovecheskoe nikak predstavit' sebe ne mozhet]. He used the word pity [sostradanie] twice to describe an emotion lacking in Parisians (Fonvizin 1959: 444, 447).

The correspondent, however, who went furthest in experimenting with the language of sympathy was Mikhail Murav'ev in letters to his father, Nikita, and sister—also Fedos'ia—beginning in 1776. Though his correspondence has been analysed repeatedly by other scholars (see the bibliography in Ivin-

skii 2018), the context provided above will illuminate some of its most unique features. Fluent in German and French, acquiring Italian and English along the way, Murav'ev is said to have read all the Western writers listed above: Chesterfield, Hume, Richardson, Wieland, Diderot, and Rousseau. Murav'ev's debt to Richardson and Rousseau has been noted (Buhks 1985: 360–62). More than previous correspondents, Murav'ev was self-reflexive about the capacity of his letters to transmit emotions, though he was less experimentative when it came to the format.

Murav'ev was likely conservative with regard to the format because he addressed his missives to his father, with postscripts to his sister appended on the same paper. A small sample from 1776 shows that he adhered to the standard length of the familiar letter, around 22 cm, and the opening page usually observed a wide top margin, displaying proper deference (Gosudarstvennyi Istoricheskii muzei [hereafter GIM], f. 445, no. 48).[12] Similarly, he dated his letters at the bottom of the segment dedicated to his father, as befit the more formal style of familiar letter (Ivinskii 2018). Murav'ev adjusted his handwriting to each recipient, using clear, upright script for his father, and a right-slanting cursive, more difficult to read, for his sister (see most notably l. 2). There were deliberate exceptions, as on 18 January 1776, when he contracted the top and left margins, addressing his father in the same cursive scrawl. He excused himself in the fashion of *Pamela*, claiming that 'my writing is disorderly: because my soul is ensconced in the deepest grief' [Ia pishu besporiadochno: dlia togo chto dusha moia pogruzhena v glubochaishuiu pechal']' (l. 16).

Another device, instituted by Richardson, was his use of words such as 'nonsense' and 'trifle' [vzdor, chepukha, vrat'] (ll. 71 ob., 80; Murav'ev 1980: 260). As one scholar has remarked, such words leant his letters a cheerful and conversational tone (Teteni 224–25), but they also signalled that trivia were worth sharing, because they were of interest to the recipient. Writing anything at all was an end in itself, even if he had nothing to say (ll. 5, 7, 9, 12), and he demanded that his father and sister tell him 'everything' that happened to them so that he might partake of it [chtob ia s vami razdelial vse, chto vami sluchitsia] (l. 27). Dilating on certain points in exces-

[12] Below, all references to *list* numbers are to this file.

sive detail likewise invited his addressees to follow his train of thought: he had been carried away by 'some kind of inner motive'. These breaches of etiquette were 'testimonies of my sentiments; they flow from my soul' (l. 4). Such assertions both emphasized the ostensibly spontaneous nature of his compositions and suggested that the ink was itself a reflection of his state of mind—a paradigmatic feature of the sentimental letter.

Murav'ev commented extensively on the transfer of emotions between sender and recipient, in a manner resembling Rousseau's novel, *Julie*. He wished to convey his own 'imaginings' [voobrazheniia], 'feelings' [chuvstviia] and 'movements of the heart', lamenting his incapacity to put these into words (ll. 4, 22). He also claimed to experience the emotions conveyed in letters to him, as he wrote to his father: 'I esteem your tenderness and I wonder at its effect' [udivliaius' deistviia onoi] (l. 60). His sister's letters elicited even stronger expressions of participation. Writing in French, he praised them for conveying an 'image' of her state of mind (l. 29 ob). Her skill in conjuring this image facilitated the transference of emotions: 'Ah! The image of your sorrow distresses me infinitely: you are far too sensitive' (l. 119).[13]

Sharing her sentiments was also ethically meaningful, as their moral purity transferred itself to him along with her feelings. Fedos'ia's empathic nature was precisely what made this possible, the readiness of her soul to 'attach itself to anything, that it dimly perceives inside itself' [prilepit'sia ko vsemu tomu, chto ona temno sama v sebe chuvstvuet]. 'Your letter [...] filled me with the feeling that wrote it [....] I know the strength of your conviction, the quality of your soul [...which] cannot help but be captivated by features of virtue'. He begged her to 'mutually picture quiet virtue for me' [vzaimno predstav' mne tikhuiu dobrodetel'] so that his heart might see its traits, written in her beloved hand (Murav'ev 1980: 279). Murav'ev's hope to acquire virtue by seeing his sister represent it came closest to fulfilling the promise of Hume and Smith's conception of sympathy.

Though some scholars have addressed sympathy as a feature of Murav'ev's letters to his father

[13] Unfortunately, Fedos'ia Murav'eva's letters to her brother were not preserved. Her few surviving letters to her father from 1778-79 display none of the devices used by Mikhail. See GIM, f. 445, no. 51, ll. 22, 32, 34, 82, 83.

and sister, they are much more explicit about the place of sympathy in his later literary experiments, especially epistolary novels. Here, they observe that sympathy furnished an essential tool for moral learning. It was essential that the reader identify with the fictional recipient of Murav'ev's fictional letters of the 1780s and 1790s, thereby internalizing events 'refracted' through the addressee's perspective. 'Thus, it is precisely the form of the sentimental person's diary in letters, directed to a friend who does not take part in the plot, that permits the identification of the reader with the addressee [....] This status [allows the reader] to understand and sympathize with the writer, to occupy his point of view' (Rossi 1995: 128). In this respect, Murav'ev's purpose fully accorded with the ambitions Hume and Smith laid out in the mid-eighteenth century. Yet, Murav'ev's original corpus of letters engaged a more basic task: to establish identification between the sender, Murav'ev himself, and his addressees, especially his sister.

Conclusions

Historians never read letters uncritically, but they do tend to assume that letters capture the mindset and dispositions of the writer at the time of composition. As I have shown, the very assumption that letters do and should capture the letter writer's momentary thoughts and sentiments is itself the product of historical circumstances, arising in Russia from the late 1760s on. Denaturalizing the letter and such elementary sentiments as sympathy, we see why this mode of exchange and the cultivation of this type of self-expression would seem valuable and appropriate to members of Russia's political elites at particular points in time, even as they broke well-established rules in doing so.

In this article, I have used 'expression of sympathy' to denote passages in letters, where the author described an imaginative act, one that permitted a transfer of sentiments—such as yearning, grief, anxiety, and love—with the recipient, thereby creating or reinforcing a sense of identification between the two. Analysing these passages, one sees a strong conformity to philosophical notions of sympathy that circulated in Europe in the mid-eighteenth century, elaborated by writers such as Hume, Smith, Wieland, Richardson, Diderot, and Rousseau. The transfer of their ideas, how-

ever, appears to have been circuitous. Nothing is known about the reading habits of Mariia and Petr Panin, whose letters from 1769 to 1774 furnished early examples. It seems that erudition and literary ambition were not the most important factors in predicting who would experiment with new techniques, nor was age. Dmitrii Fonvizin was younger and far more sophisticated than Mariia and Petr Panin; he was not only witness to, but the addressee of Petr Panin's most innovative endeavours. Based on his surviving correspondence, however, Fonvizin did not put his knowledge into practice until 1777, around the same time that Murav'ev began his experiments.

Much more research would be required to establish patterns for the transmission of sentimental literary devices. This preliminary survey has at least shown that old people as well as young ones, women and men, were prepared to experiment, and it has suggested various motivations. Expressions of sympathy could serve to foster intimacy within high-ranking political clans, establishing a putative basis for seeking favour. They were also a means of demonstrating full command of the latest literary and cultural developments. These two purposes were not at odds with one another: after all, Fonvizin and Murav'ev saved their most innovative letters for their sisters.

In the 1770s, expressions of sympathy were not indiscriminate, but carefully calibrated to social hierarchies within the Russian nobility. They were authorized when directed at persons of inferior rank, particularly women. As breaches in etiquette, they were compensated by the belief, expressed by some correspondents, that sympathy itself facilitated moral learning. Positing identity between two people, the capacity to feel the same sentiments did not, however, create equality between author and recipient. In later decades, the 1780s and 1790s, sympathy became more common as epistolary conventions in their own right. Along the way, the rules shifted. As scholarship on Radishchev's correspondence shows (Baudin 2018), it even became permissible for clients to extend expressions of sympathy to their patrons, showing how firmly the new etiquette had been ensconced itself.

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