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► **To cite this version:**

Rodolphe Baudin. “Putting Things Right”: The Disturbance of Social Order in Woe from Wit, and Its Hypertextual Regulation. *Russian Literature*, 2021, 124, pp.1-20. 10.1016/j.ruslit.2021.09.001 . hal-03516543

HAL Id: hal-03516543

<https://hal.sorbonne-universite.fr/hal-03516543v1>

Submitted on 7 Jan 2022

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“PUTTING THINGS RIGHT”: THE DISTURBANCE OF SOCIAL ORDER IN *Woe from Wit*, AND ITS HYPERTEXTUAL REGULATION

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the disruptive nature of Aleksandr Griboedov’s play *Woe from Wit* (*Gore ot uma*) for 19th-century readers. After a brief review of the reactions of various notable writers and critics concerning non-canonical aspects of the play’s plot, structure, characterization and politics, it focuses on two lesser-known texts which document other aspects of *Woe from Wit*’s reception: a late nineteenth-century anonymous pornographic spoof and Evdokia Rostopchina’s 1856 sequel *The Return of Chatskii* (*Vozvrat Chatskogo*). As it turns out, both these hypertexts voiced deep concerns about the disturbing social order painted in *Woe from Wit* and aimed at fixing it by restoring the traditional gender and class roles shaken up in Griboedov’s original.

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Keywords: Griboedov; *Woe from Wit*; Reception; Hypertexts; Gender roles; Class roles

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ruslit.2021.09.001>

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Please cite this article as: R. Baudin, “Putting Things Right”: The Disturbance of Social Order in *Woe from Wit*, and Its Hypertextual Regulation, *Russian Literature*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ruslit.2021.09.001>

Introduction

The disruptive nature of *Woe from Wit* (*Gore ot uma*), Aleksandr Griboedov's celebrated 1823 play, is well known to specialists of Russian literature.¹ Its disruptiveness was multi-levelled. First, *Woe from Wit* was a literary pamphlet. As a "young archaist" ("mladoarkhaist"), as Iurii Tynianov (1929, p. 110, p. 134) defined him, Griboedov was hostile to Nikolai Karamzin and his preromantic followers; he therefore used *Woe from Wit* as a weapon to poke fun at several aspects of their aesthetics (Kichikova, 1996, p. 139, p. 142, p. 145).

The disruptive nature of *Woe from Wit* was also structural. Griboedov openly rejected the norms of contemporary drama by adopting an unusual 4-act structure and by seeming to despise the very notion of plot, to the dismay of many contemporaries, from Pavel Katenin (Griboedov, 2006, p. 87) to Aleksandr Pisarev (1825, p. 112) and Nikolai Nadezhdin (1831, p. 194).

Another disruptive aspect of Griboedov's play was its characters' moral ambiguity, which obviously caused unease among contemporaries. Aleksandr Pushkin (1979, p. 97), for instance, regretted that Griboedov's characters were not as monolithic as they should be. This concern was especially vivid regarding the two main characters of the play, Chatskii and Sof'ia. Was Chatskii a Christ-like figure bringing words of truth to a corrupted society that was deaf to any kind of morality, as suggested by the contemporary critic Ol'ga Lebedeva (2014, pp. 389-400)? Or was he a misfit, oddly unable to understand that he was not addressing the right audience, as Pushkin (1979, p. 97) noted? As for Sof'ia, whom Pushkin (1979, p. 96) referred to as "half whore, half Moscow cousin" ("не то <блядь>, не то московская кузина"), was she a negative character, as she came to be understood in the play's classical 19th-century interpretation? Or was she, on the contrary, wiser than Chatskii, as her first name tends to suggest, according to Gerald Janecek (1977, p. 329)?

Finally, Griboedov's play was politically disruptive. Of course, Griboedov's own political ideas were ambiguous. On the one hand, the sole character in the play easily identifiable as a member of a liberal secret society is Repetilov, whose ridiculousness, including as a comic doppelganger to Chatskii, has been widely commented on (Karlinsky, 1985, pp. 294-295; Lebedeva, 2014, pp. 371-381). Yet, Chatskii's fierce criticism of contemporary Russian society and his public behaviour were reminiscent of the views and behaviour of the Decembrists (Lotman, 1994, pp. 334-335; Troubetzkoy, 1990, p. 281), among whom Griboedov had many friends, which led to his arrest and interrogation in 1826 (Kelly, 2002, pp. 132-137).

All these disruptive elements clearly explain why Griboedov failed to have his play performed in a public theatre during his life and why he couldn't have

it published in an uncensored version (Fomichev, 2007, p. 123, p. 126). This publishing ban, however, did not prevent the play from enjoying a wide success through its private performances. It also enjoyed a wide circulation in the form of manuscript copies as early as 1824 (Reitblat, 2014, pp. 83-84). This popularity explains why the play was much discussed throughout the 19th century, even before its full publication during Alexander II's reign (Grishunin, 1979, pp. 182-227). Focusing largely on the play's non-canonical elements listed above, the general discussion of *Woe from Wit* involved some of Russia's most prominent writers, from Ivan Goncharov to Aleksandr Gertsen and Fedor Dostoevskii. The last two also used the discussion of the play's disruptive elements to voice their own specific ideological or political agendas. Gertsen, for instance, supported Chatskii, whom he designated as the embodiment of the Decembrist generation and with whose liberal ideas he sympathized (Arhipova, 1998, p. 205). Dostoevskii, on the contrary, criticized Griboedov's hero as the embodiment of the Europeanised Russian elite, estranged from the real Russia, i.e. from the Russian people, and therefore unable to live in the country (Bonamour, 1965, pp. 318-319).

Besides these widely discussed literary, structural, axiological and political elements which were all instrumental in canonizing *Woe from Wit* as a path-breaking text, Griboedov's play contained other disruptive aspects, which also caused puzzlement among contemporary and later 19th-century readers. Among these aspects was the untraditional treatment of gender and class roles staged by *Woe from Wit*. A cause of dismay for contemporary audiences, these questions were not openly discussed in critical literature. Instead, they were addressed in several hypertexts generated by *Woe from Wit* in the second part of the 19th century, which will be the focus of the present study.

Defined by Gérard Genette (1997, p. 5) as literary texts united to earlier texts (or "hypotexts") in "a manner that is not that of commentary", "hypertexts" are creative by-products which can take the form of serious or parodic imitations or sequels. In order to be appreciated by the public, they must be recognizable as such and consequently usually grow on famous texts rather than obscure ones. The above-mentioned success of *Woe from Wit* did generate a whole wave of imitations, several of which have been identified by Jean Bomanour, who mentions Nikolai Sandunov's *Woe from Madness* (*Gore ot bezumiia*, 1830), Aleksandr Fedoseev's *The Broken Engagement, or Woe from Wit or without it* (*Razstroennoe svatovstvo, ili gore ot uma i gore bez uma*, 1839), or Dmitrii Minaev's *Moscovites at a Philosophy Lecture* (*Moskvichi na lektsii po filosofii*, 1863) (Bonamour, 1965, p. 416).

A quick glance at the list of characters and plot of the first two plays shows that they are unconnected with Griboedov's original text and merely tried to arouse curiosity in the public by using the syntagm "woe from wit", which

they turned into an idiomatism, in order to capitalize on the fame of the original play. As such, they cannot qualify as hypertexts. Minaev's text, on the contrary, does. It resorts to Griboedov's characters and a (primitive) plot based on their narrow-mindedness, very much in accordance with its hypotext. Still, *Moscovites at a Philosophy Lecture* excluded Chatskii and Sofia from the list of characters it borrowed. As a result, it could not engage with the discussion of gender and social roles raised in Griboedov's text and will therefore not be studied further in the present paper. The same goes for two additional hypertexts, identified by Valentin Dmitriev (1987, pp. 136-143): Mikhail Voskresenskii's 1844 short comedy *The Morning Following Famusov's Ball, or Everyone is an Old Acquaintance* (*Utro posle bala Famusova, ili Vse starye znakomtsy*) and Mark Iaron's 1881 serious imitation, or "forgery" (Genette, 1997, p. 28), which used Griboedov's original title. Just as Minaev's text would some twenty years later, Voskresenskii's play excluded Chatskii from its list of characters (Dmitriev, 1987, p. 138). As for Iaron's imitation, it did not modify Griboedov's list of characters or original plot, but only relocated them in another historical frame, the 1880s, in order to discuss some aspects of the author's contemporary cultural and social context (Dmitriev, 1987, p. 143). An interesting hypertext as such, it did not engage with the disruptive gender and social politics of Griboedov's play, which is the topic of the present study.

This discussion, on the contrary, is offered in two additional textual by-products of *Woe from Wit*: an anonymous pornographic "pastiche" (i.e., in Genette's terminology, a serious imitation) (Genette, 1997, p. 28) from the second half of the century untitled *Woe from Wit. A Comedy in Four Acts in the Verses of the Poet Barkov* (*Gore ot uma. Komediia v chetyrekh deistviiakh, v stikhakh poeta Barkova*); and *The Return of Chatskii to Moscow* (*Vozvrat Chatskogo v Moskvu*), a "forgery" written as a sequel to Griboedov's original play in 1856 by Countess Evdokiia Rostopchina (Dmitriev, 1987, pp. 139-142). As pastiche and sequel, both texts perfectly qualify as hypertexts according to Genette. They repeated or developed Griboedov's original plot using exactly the same characters, including Sofia and Chatskii whose problematic behaviour offered disruptive readings of traditional gender and class roles. While emphasizing the disruptive nature of Griboedov's text on both issues, the two hypertexts at the centre of the present study also aimed at correcting *Woe from Wit*'s unacceptable representation of gender and class relations, and did it creatively, by resorting to drama, rather than literary criticism. Examining each play consecutively, this paper will focus on the dynamics of social regulation activated by both authors when resorting to the hypertextual mechanisms of parody and sequel production. Leaving aside the contextual meaning of both hypertexts, which, in the case of Rostopchina's play, has been studied by Andrei Ranchin (1996, pp. 14-15), I will focus instead on their ideologi-

cal dialogue with their common source. As I will demonstrate, the correction represented by these two plays testifies to the persistence of *Woe from Wit*'s ability to shock conservative readers and to the continuous need to correct it throughout the 19th century. In order to do so, however, I will start by highlighting what was wrong with Griboedov's depiction of gender and class roles in the first place.

I. The “Barkovian” *Woe from Wit*, or Women “put back in their place”

In his study ‘The Alive and the Living’ (‘Zhivye i Zhiltsy’), the Russian critic Vladimir Solov’ev, following Tynianov, noted the misogyny of Griboedov’s play. This misogyny, Solov’ev wrote, echoed Griboedov’s own attitude towards women, famously reported by Aleksandr Bestuzhev Marlinskii in his piece untitled ‘Знакомство мое с Грибоедовым’ (‘My Acquaintance with Griboedov’): “Он не любил женщин... Слова Байрона: ‘дайте им пряник да зеркало – и они будут совершенно довольны’ ему казались весьма справедливыми” (Solov’ev, 1970, p. 164; “He disliked women... Lord Byron’s words ‘give them a sugar-plump and a looking-glass and they would be perfectly glad’ seemed to him entirely justified”).

Woe from Wit's misogyny is first apparent in the characterisation of Sof’ia, whom Griboedov (2006, p. 75) himself called “a wretch” (“негодзяка”) in a letter to his friend Stepan Begichev. This negative assessment of Sof’ia has led critics such as Janecek to try to rehabilitate the main female protagonist of the play. In his study ‘A Defence of Sof’ia in ‘Woe from Wit’, Janecek (1977, p. 329) has tried to demonstrate that Sof’ia was the sole character in the play to hold any kind of reasonable position. By emphasizing Sof’ia’s decision to choose her lover independently from her father’s plans for her or the established rules of her social milieu, Janecek’s study (1977, p. 321, p. 328) also suggests that an additional reason for 19th-century readers’ hostility towards Sof’ia may have lain in the form of female empowerment she embodies.

This unacceptable inversion of established gender roles was the main expression of the misogyny of Griboedov’s play, which fustigates the way women seize power in Famusov’s circle. Indeed, as Tynianov (1968, p. 376) noted, power, in *Woe from Wit*, belongs to the female characters. First, all characters are hierarchized according to their ability to please and serve women, an aspect condemned by Platon Gorich in his disdainful remark to Zagoretskii: “Прочь! Поди ты к женщинам, лги им, и их морочь;” (Griboedov, 1995, III, 9, p. 80; “Get out of here! Go to the women, tell them lies and sneer”). Molchalin, in this respect, is very close to Zagoretskii. He benefits from Sof’ia’s favour, of course, but also from the favour of Khlestova, Famusov’s sister-in-law, whom he is also eager to serve. As numerous critics have noted, Molchalin aims to

become Sof'ia's servant, just as Platon Gorich, Chatskii's old friend, has become his wife's servant, and it seems that Sof'ia is eager to imitate Platon's wife Natalia Dmitrievna, which explains why she is teaching him music, just as Natalia Dmitrievna has with Platon. Repetilov is also a character obviously valued in Famusov's circle for his obedience to women. As Solov'ev (1970, p. 163) has pointed out, Repetilov does not believe the rumour about Chatskii's madness when he hears it from Zagoretskii, but finally accepts it when he hears it from the young princesses, whose female authority he cannot dispute.

It is the women who, as the critic Konstantin Polivanov has noted, open and close the play (Polivanov, 2015). Generally, they embody power on stage, but also offstage, at a senior level. Characteristically, offstage female characters like Tat'iana Iur'evna or Mar'ia Alekseevna have the power to make or unmake careers and/or reputations. Quoting the 19th-century critic Visarion Belinskii, Solov'ev (1970, p. 167) explains that the power enjoyed by women in Famusov's house metaphorically suggests that it is run according to the rules of the 18th century, that is, the century of female rule in Russia. This specific aspect clearly appears in the anecdote about a certain Maksim Petrovich told by Famusov in Act II, scene 1. The anecdote, whose central character succeeds at court only because he makes the empress Catherine II laugh at his own expense, suggests that men succeed socially only if they can please women, and refers directly to the 18th-century court practice of favouritism.² Another metaphor, explained by Konstantin Polivanov, also illustrates female domination in *Woe from Wit*. In Act II, scene 9, Skalozub tells of a Princess Lasova. After she fell from her horse, Princess Lasova lost a rib and is now looking for a husband to help her walk. The anecdote, explains Polivanov, reverses the famous myth from *Genesis*, where God, in order to help man, used Adam's rib to create woman (Polivanov, 2015).

Woe from Wit's misogyny has been explained diversely. Tynianov and Solov'ev suggest that the rejection of autocracy by the liberal part of the Russian youth, especially in the years preceding the Decembrist uprising, was closely associated with a rejection of female power. For the young male liberals, Alexander I was seen as effeminate, as he appeared to be dominated by his mother or other women in his entourage, such as Madame de Krüdener (Tynianov, 1968, pp. 376-377; Solov'ev, 1970, p. 165), and as he had promised to rule "in the spirit of his grandmother" Catherine II (Savos'kina, 2013, p. 242). Solov'ev adds that this rejection of female rule was vivid also in the realm of literature. The so-called young archaists, among whom many were close to the Decembrist ideology, were at odds with Karamzinism, a literary trend they considered effeminate. Karamzinism, the Russian strain of the literature of sensibility, was indeed a female oriented literary culture. It favoured small genres such as album verses, and valorised female taste as the ultimate mea-

sure of literary quality. The young archaists strongly opposed this culture and aimed at promoting another, supposedly more masculine, where patriarchal themes and forms, taken from a largely fantasized Russian past, dominated (Solov'ev, 1970, p. 165).

According to the critic Andrei Golubkov, *Woe from Wit's* misogyny also fed on social and cultural factors. Using women to achieve one's career goals was considered vile by Griboedov and his young contemporaries, as shown by Chatskii's scornful remark to Molchalin: "Я езжу к женщинам, да только не за этим," (Griboedov, 1995, III, 3, p. 70) "Sometimes I visit women but not with that intention,"). As Golubkov has pointed out, however, Chatskii's opposition to Molchalin in this respect should not be read only as a moral issue. It also arose on generational grounds. By using Sof'ia's favour as a tool for social advancement, Molchalin only conforms to an archaic mode of male conduct, developed in 17th-century French salon culture and transferred to Russia in the 18th century under the influence of Russian Francophilia. According to this cultural model, French noblemen had to abandon the traditional male identity of the military nobility in order to adopt the new identity of the gallant. In this hypergamic model, women were offered the role of teachers of men. They socialized them and assessed their achievements, as they turned them into a court aristocracy and a salon one. In order to achieve this change, both women and men could rely on a vast literature of manuals devoted to the education of the "honnête homme" (Golubkov, 2016, p. 129). The new type of man promoted by these manuals was a conformist. He was supposed to maintain an absolute neutrality of tone and gestures and to emphasize the qualities of his interlocutor, whom he was not supposed to disagree with, but to try to please at all costs. He was also supposed to acknowledge the moral superiority of women. According to Golubkov (2016, p. 130), Molchalin follows this traditional model of male behaviour, an expected social strategy for an individual of lower extraction. Chatskii, on the contrary, seems to share the disdain for this behaviour voiced previously by Montesquieu and Rousseau. In his *Lettre à d'Alembert*, Rousseau harshly criticized the submission of men to women prescribed by French gallant culture, presenting it as a dangerous violation of the state of nature (Golubkov, 2016, p. 131). His negative depiction of men turned into ladies' servants by the gallant code of salon behaviour seems to foresee Griboedov's depiction of Platon Gorich's behaviour, as well as that of Molchalin. Chatskii's brutal manners were therefore a rehabilitation of the masculine instincts determined by the state of nature, and a provocative response to the code of gallant culture, which had turned men into ladies' servants during the 18th century (Golubkov, 2016, p. 132).

Despite its severity, Chatskii's criticism is ineffectual. As Pushkin (1979, p. 97) noted, he does not address his interlocutors in a way they are able to

understand. As Lebedeva (2014, pp. 362-366) noted, they remain deaf to his criticism, and he has to leave Moscow without having changed their mind or, for that matter, restored the supposedly natural domination of men.

This ending was probably unsatisfactory to many male readers and called out to be corrected. This correction was carried out by the anonymous author of the first hypertext examined in this study: the late 19th-century spoof of Griboedov's play, known under the title *Woe from Wit. A comedy in four acts in the verses of the Poet Barkov*. As mentioned in the introduction, this spoof is a pornographic "pastiche" of *Woe from Wit*, as suggested by the name Barkov in the title. Ivan Semenovich Barkov was an 18th-century Russian poet, known for his pornographic odes.³ He was long dead by the time this spoof of *Woe from Wit* was written, but, as the critic Nikita Sapov explains, his name had become, throughout the 19th century, a generic name for any anonymous pornographic literary work (Sapov, 1998a, p. 16).

In the paratext of his spoof, the anonymous author explains that the sexual innuendos of *Woe from Wit* are perfectly clear to anyone ready to see them:

Все говорят, что неприлично / Коверкать 'Горе от ума', / Но это вовсе не логично, / Тут только истина сама. / Одна лишь истина святая, / Так не любимая судьбой, / Слагает стих правдивый мой, / В нем без стеснения называя / Пизду, как следует, пиздой. / Тут все ебутся без изъятия, / И мне тут, право, не понять, / Как эти милые занятия / Ебнею прямо не назвать? (Sapov, 1998b, p. 169)

(They say it's inappropriate / to tamper with *Woe from Wit*. / But this cannot be true, / For it is Truth / the sacred Truth, / that Fate dislikes, / that leads me in my verse / and makes me call a cunt a cunt/ Caus' in the play everybody's fucking all the time / And truly I don't understand / why we shouldn't simply call these lovely pleasures / fucking?)

Indeed, the sexual innuendos shocked many of Griboedov's readers, starting from the 19th century. Solov'ev (1970, p. 162) notes that the censor Lev Tsvetaev found the opening scene of the play shocking, considering that it was unlikely that Molchalin and Sof'ia had spent the whole night in Sof'ia's room just playing music. Similarly, Sapov (1998a, p. 8), quoting the memoirs of the Russian actress Aleksandra Shubert, reminds us that, during the 19th century, many actresses refused to play Sof'ia's part, considering it shocking ("непристойная").

Turning what Griboedov's readers saw as innuendos into actual deeds, the anonymous author describes several characters having sexual intercourse. In the spoof, Molchalin has sex with Sof'ia (in Act I, scene 1 and Act III, scene 1).

He also tries to rape Liza (in Act II, scene 7 and Act IV, scene 3), who has sex with Famusov (in Act I, scene 2). What's important to this study however is to see how the depiction of sexual intercourse between the play's main characters helped restore male domination over women, thus correcting the unacceptable description of gender relations presented by *Woe from Wit*. In the pornographic spoof, sex is used to restore male domination in three types of scenarios:

First, the spoof shows male characters imposing sexual relations on the female characters who dominated them in the original play: in Act I, scene 2, Famusov forces Liza to have sex with him, whereas she managed to avoid this in Griboedov's text; in Act I, scene 7, Chatskii has sex with Sof'ia, who rejected his courtship in the original play; in Act III, scene 4, Platon Gorich tells Chatskii that he and his wife are having sex constantly, whereas in *Woe from Wit* he embodied the submissive husband, obliged by his wife to play the flute in order to please her. Similarly, Platon's departure from the ball in Act IV, scene 1 of the spoof is not the consequence of his melancholy as in the original play (Act IV, scene 2), but of his urge to have sex with his submissive wife.

Secondly, the mention of men's sexual prowess in the spoof grants them the symbolic power they were lacking in the original play. In scene 5 of Act III of *Woe from Wit*, the old princess has her husband invite Chatskii to their place, before cancelling the invitation when she hears that the young man has no money. In the spoof, the subject of Chatskii's impecuniousness is replaced, in the information the old princess receives about him, by the reference to his sexual exploits while he was abroad. As a result, the princess's invitation is not cancelled (Act III, scene 5). Similarly, whereas in the original Zagoretskii confirms the rumour about Chatskii's madness using arguments presenting him as a victim - it is said that a bullet fragment entered his skull when he was in the Caucasus (Act III, scene 19), or that he has become an alcoholic (Act III, scene 21) - in the spoof (Act III, scene 7), the hero's madness is presented as a consequence of his sexual hyperactivity: instead of a victim of war or alcoholism, Chatskii is turned into a hero of masculine domination, as other characters tell how he sadistically humiliates prostitutes in brothels (Act III, scene 7). If mad, Chatskii is nevertheless a real man, comparable to the hypermasculine figures of Russian romanticism, from Denis Davydov to Mikhail Lermontov or Nikolai Bestuzhev-Marlinskii and the male characters of their military narratives.

Finally, the spoof shows how men control women by controlling their access to sex. In the original play, Zagoretskii, Molchalin and Skalozub are eager to serve the old lady Khlestova, but in Act III, scene 6 of the spoof, she complains about being neglected by men, who for the last five years have all been refusing to have sex with her. Similarly, in Act IV, scene 4 of the spoof, Famusov punishes Sof'ia, not by sending her back to the countryside, as in the

original, but by shaving her genitals, thus depriving her of her secondary sex characteristics, which designate her as a grown-up woman, and thereby of her access to sexuality by turning her back into a female child.

The date when this pornographic spoof was written is unknown. According to Sapov (1998a, pp. 19-20), who notes that, in his memoirs, the writer Aleksandr Kuprin mentions reading it as a young man in the 1880s, it dates from the second part of the 19th century. As such, it testifies to the enduring success of Griboedov's play. But it also testifies to the desire of its anonymous author to restore traditional gender hierarchies, after they had been turned upside down in *Woe from Wit*. Admittedly, Griboedov's depiction of the reversal of proper hierarchies was satirical, as the author himself did not approve of it. Yet his anonymous reader may have thought that denouncing female power in Famusov's circle was not enough, and that *Woe from Wit*'s upended gender relations needed to be put right. In a way, this pornographic spoof engaged in a polemic with its hypotext and corrected it, transferring Griboedov's criticism of female domination from words to action in order to restore the masculine order.

The second text examined in this study also corrected an aspect of the play which must have been disturbing to 19th-century readers: Chatskii's failure of loyalty to his own social milieu. Here again, the play's hypertext both polemicalizes with its source and corrects an aspect of Griboedov's text which was considered to be socially unacceptable.

II. The “Rostopchinian” *Woe from Wit*, or Chatskii “in his right place”

The second hypertext at the centre of this study is *The Return of Chatskii to Moscow* (*Vozvrat Chatskogo v Moskvu*), a loose play consisting of thirteen scenes written in 1856 by Evdokiia Rostopchina (1811-1858) and published after her death in 1865 (Vacheva, 2013, p. 89). An acclaimed poet in the 1830s and 1840s (Vowles, 2002, p. 73), Rostopchina is mainly known for her lyrical poetry and novels (Goscilo, 1994, p. 541), though her work was more diverse than the few poems on whose basis scholarship has traditionally granted her the status of mere “poetessa” (Greene, 2004, pp. 105-111).⁴ *The Return of Chatskii* belongs to her lesser-known works, together with an imitation of Aleksandr Voeikov's 1814-1838 satirical poem *Bedlam* (*Dom sumashedshikh*), entitled *The Moscow Bedlam in 1858* (*Dom sumashedshikh v Moskve v 1858 godu*) (Ranchin, 1996, p. 10). While showing an undisputable interest in hypertextuality, both works, written in the same period, also testify of Rostopchina's attempts to root her own work in the legitimacy of canonized literature. As Andrei Ranchin put it, Rostopchina enrolled both Voeikov and Griboedov on her crusade to fight the new trends of a literary market from which she felt in-

creasingly estranged (Ranchin, 1996, p. 10). This sense of rejection was only reinforced by Rostopchina's geographical isolation. By the time she composed *The Return of Chatskii*, she was living in Moscow, a city she hated, after Nicholas I had deprived her of the right to live in the capital because of a poem she had written expressing sympathy for the oppressed Poles (Greene, 2004, p. 94). With growing hostility towards the radical writers of the 1850s, who held her and her supposedly out-dated work in contempt (Goscilo, 1994, p. 542), Rostopchina felt no sympathy either for the Slavophiles, whose conception of history she deemed foolish (Ranchin, 1996, p. 12). She therefore used her play to fight the ideas of both camps, which she found equally risible and/or dangerous (Vacheva, 2013, p. 96), and chose *Woe from Wit* as a convenient model for setting up a gallery of ludicrous characters and ridiculing them. While the choice of Griboedov as a literary authority may have helped her in this endeavour, I challenge Ranchin's (1996, p. 10) idea that Rostopchina's attitude towards her hypotext was only one of total adhesion. Indeed, not only did *The Return of Chatskii* polemicize with the contemporary ideas of both Westerners and Slavophiles, but it also challenged some aspects of its own hypotext.

In *The Return of Chatskii*, the Slavophiles are embodied by the poet Eleikin, a satire of Aleksei Khomiakov and/or the brothers Konstantin and Ivan Aksakov (Ranchin, 1996, p. 14), as well as by the couple Gorich. As for the Westerners, they are represented in the play by Professor Feologinskii, a satire of Timofei Granovskii and/or Nikolai Chernyshevskii (Ranchin, 1996, p. 14), who shocks his opponents by suggesting that Ivan the Terrible was a protestant, as well as by two poor students, Petrov and Tsurmaier (Vacheva, 2013, p. 90, p. 95). The progressive Westerners also include two of the former "young princesses" from Griboedov's play, Princess Mimi and Princess Zizi, who advocate female emancipation, under the influence of George Sand's ideas (Vacheva, 2013, p. 95).

Though less humorous than Griboedov's play, whose style it imitates to the point that Rostopchina often mixed Griboedov's verses with her own, *The Return of Chatskii* is much more caustic than the original (Vacheva, 2013, p. 96). It is also less ambiguous, as Rostopchina's characters are more one-sided than the characters of *Woe from Wit*.

Platon Gorich, for instance, is depicted by Rostopchina as a mere imbecile, whereas he was weak but clever in Griboedov's play. Similarly, Sof'ia is deprived here of the qualities highlighted by Janecek (1977, pp. 327-328) about the original character. In *The Return of Chatskii*, she is no longer proud, clever and audacious, but only aggressive. She is also depraved, as she is said to be constantly cheating on her husband Skalozub (Scene 3, p. 319).

Last, but not least, this loss of complexity also affects Chatskii who, as Ranchin (1996, p. 12) noted, is no longer ridiculous. This psychological simplification is presented as the result of the character's intellectual maturation during the twenty-five years separating *Woe from Wit*, whose action Rostopchina situates in 1825, and *The Return of Chatskii*, which she accordingly situates in 1850 in her "Note from the author" ("Примечание от автора") (Rostopchina, 1991, p. 310). True, as Vacheva noted, Rostopchina's Chatskii retains something of the romantic character drawn by Griboedov. For instance, he declares having loved only one woman and having renounced love after Sof'ia rejected him (Vacheva, 2013, p. 91). On the other hand, he is no longer a rebel and has lost the anger which drove him in 1825. If the stupidity of the Moscow upper class still shocks him, as it did twenty-five years earlier, his ideological position has changed radically. Far from holding onto the *Sturmer's* anger of his youth, he now appears as a moderate, a stranger to the excesses of both slavophilism and socialism. As critics have noted, this moderate position embodies the reasonable values of the liberal aristocracy (Ranchin, 1996, p. 15; Vacheva, 2013, p. 97). These values are shared by the only other positive character in the play, Princess Tsvetkova, a double of Rostopchina herself, who convinces Chatskii to stay in Moscow at the end of the play (Ranchin, 1996, p. 14; Vacheva, 2013, p. 96).⁵

Chatskii's decision to stay in Moscow instead of fleeing again, as in *Woe from Wit*, is presented in Rostopchina's play as the consequence of the character's maturation. But it can also be interpreted as the consequence of the character's simplification. This simplification appears at three different levels. In Rostopchina's play, Chatskii has become a social conformist, an apolitical man and a wise scholar, three unexpected new identities which deserve a closer look.

In *The Return of Chatskii*, the main character has not only lost the radical views of his youth, but he has also become a conformist. This change is particularly apparent in his attitude towards Petrov, the young socialist commoner of the play, who denounces social injustice. Though Petrov's indignation is reminiscent of Chatskii's in *Woe from Wit*, Rostopchina's hero blames him for his radical ideas (Rostopchina, 1991, scene 12, p. 378). Later on, Chatskii demonstrates social conformism again when he kicks out the same Petrov from Famusov's house for daring to court one of Sof'ia's daughters (scene 12, p. 383). Chatskii's argument at this moment is clearly about the social impropriety of a romance between a rich noble girl and a poor commoner. Threatening the student, he utters the following words: "Рука дворянская, не шпагою, а палкой / подобных вам встречает подлецов" ("The hand of an aristocrat chastises villains of your kind with a stick, not a sword") (scene 12, p. 384). Clearly, Chatskii's social prejudice voices Rostopchina's class hostility

towards the *raznochintsy* here. It is also metatextual, as it echoes the grievances expressed by previous and contemporary aristocratic writers at the prospect of seeing commoners challenging their domination over the literary field.⁶ Interestingly, Chatskii's decision to kick out Petrov assimilates him with the traditional theatrical role of the comedy father or older man, who defends a territory where he keeps female characters from the predatory behaviour of external and younger male characters (Corvin, 1994, p. 162). From this point of view, Chatskii seems to replace Famusov, one of his most radical antagonists in Griboedov's original play.

The evolution of Chatskii towards the conformist type is a consequence of Rostopchina's depoliticization of the character. This process is apparent in the way Chatskii explains his conduct back in 1825. According to him, the conflict he went through in his youth was only love-related (scene 1, p. 312; scene 13, p. 387). He fled because love betrayed him, not because his radical ideas made him a misfit and his ideal of social justice and intellectual freedom appeared a threat to order in the years of the *Arakcheevshchina*. This depoliticization process described by Rostopchina, however, has deeper roots. It is also a consequence of the profound change undergone by Russian society in the middle of the 19th century which saw the development of capitalism and the impoverishment of the Russian nobility (Mills Todd III, 1986, p. 1). Of course, *The Return of Chatskii* echoes the ideological debate opposing the Slavophiles and the Westerners, seemingly suggesting that the play is about ideas and politics just as much as Griboedov's original. But this debate is soon presented as trivial, as Chatskii deplores its excesses and as the play reveals the real divide structuring contemporary Russian society between the declining nobility and the rising commoners.

One of the striking aspects of Rostopchina's play is indeed its representation of the material collapse of the nobility and the triumph of money over birth.⁷ Chatskii or Princess Tsvetkova may still be well off (scene 1, p. 312; scene 8, p. 356), but Princesses Zizi and Mimi, as well as the granddaughter of Countess Khriumina, are broke (scene 8, p. 344). And if Famusov seems to have kept some of his previous wealth, it is managed by the commoner Molchalin (scene 1, p. 314), himself a rich man now, who does not hide his contempt for Chatskii (scene 4, p. 321). Last but not least, all the secondary characters, be they Slavophiles or Westerners, are courting Zagoretskii, who has become a millionaire, that is, in the words of Countess Khriumina's granddaughter, "much better than a prince":

"- Чацкий: Кто это? – Принц вельможа? - Графиня: Нет, лучше – мильонер!" ("– Chatskii: Who's that? A grandee, a prince? – The Countess: Even better than that, a millionaire!") (Scene 10, p. 354).

Birth, therefore, has lost its former value and cannot be opposed to money anymore. Only science can, as its symbolic value as risen in the eyes of the play's characters. The Slavophile characters admire the poet Eleikin, whereas the Westerners worship Professor Feologinskii. Of course, both these characters are ridiculous, but Chatskii is not, though he too has become a scholar, who publishes papers on geology and statistics in foreign journals (scene 1, p. 311; scene 5, p. 325). This prestige of science explains why the young Princesses, whose lack of fortune prevents them from marrying in the aristocracy, fall in love with Professors. Or why Vera and Nadia, Sof'ia and Skalozub's daughters, though rich, fall for the socialist students Petrov and Tsurmaier (scene 6, p. 332; scene 12, p. 382). The end of birth as an instrument of social domination is presented as the reason for the Gorichs' interest in slavophilism, which they understand as a mere call to restore the fading world that granted them a dominating position.

If the Gorichs choose nostalgia to run away from reality, they are not the only ones trying to escape from reality. So does Chatskii, again, at the end of Rostopchina's play. This time, however, leaving Famusov's Moscow does not mean leaving Moscow itself. Receptive to Princess Tsvetkova's arguments, the hero leaves Famusov's house to join the Princess's circle, where birth and intellectual superiority are not opposed but synonymous (scene 13, p. 388).

Instead of embodying the romantic pariah as in Griboedov's play, where his inability to fit in made him leave Moscow, Rostopchina's Chatskii embodies the alliance of birth and science that grants him access to the upper circle of aristocracy, which owes money without worshipping it and values knowledge without taking part in the sterile debates of the time.

Admittedly, its social and intellectual sophistication makes Princess Tsvetkova's social group very tight and suggests its fragility, especially in a world much changed from what it was in *Woe from Wit*. First, the world of Rostopchina's play is globalized. Chatskii is said to have been in India and in Manila (scene 5, p. 329). Secondly, it is technologized. At the beginning of the play, the hero has just arrived from Brussels by boat and *train* (scene 1, p. 311)⁸; later on Zagoretskii refers to his use of the telegram (scene 9, p. 350). Last, but not least, this new world is dominated by the new consumerist culture which was developing in Russia in the 1850s. Rostopchina's stage directions depict furniture and clothing in detail, which also suggests the oncoming triumph of money and material culture over birth and intellect.

It is unlikely, however, that Rostopchina, when she wrote her play, understood the fragility in the long term of what she represented as Chatskii's triumph. More important to her was that, in the short term, this triumph gave back his rightful place to Chatskii. Instead of an outcast clumsily addressing imbeciles before fleeing his own social milieu, he has at last become the em-

bodiment of what this very milieu could best offer. Chatskii's second departure is therefore an exit *from the top*, which rehabilitates Griboedov's character and part of his milieu by not reducing it to the satirical depiction inherited from *Woe from Wit*.

Disputing with her hypotext, Rostopchina corrected Griboedov's representation of a conflict between birth and intellect. *The Return of Chatskii* forged a new alliance between these two principles so that intellect could serve and preserve birth for a little longer. Interestingly, this new alliance of intellect and birth changed Chatskii's use of words, which was an important feature of *Woe from Wit* (Vinokur, 1990, p. 240), from the oral expression of anger in Griboedov's original play to the tamed prose of scholarly work in *The Return of Chatskii*. It also changed Chatskii's concerns: whereas Griboedov's restless hero was infuriated by the social stagnation of Russia in the early 1820s and craved for social change, Rostopchina's tamed character seems to have developed a taste for stillness. As a scholar, he is interested in geology, a perfect metaphor, if not of the preservation of the status quo, of a liberal political agenda of slow and reasonable progress.

Conclusion

The two hypertexts at the centre of the present study engaged in polemic with their common model and tried to correct its socially inadequate representations. The anonymous pornographic spoof "put women in their place" by restoring a traditional picture of male domination threatened by the awkward gender relations in *Woe from Wit*. Rostopchina's sequel overcame the conflict between birth and intellect staged by Griboedov's play in order to demarginalise Chatskii and give him back his "rightful place", that of a leading part in Russian society.

While polemicizing with their common hypotext, these two plays also commented on the on-going evolutions in contemporary Russian society. Indeed, the middle and second part of the 19th century saw major changes in Russia, including a (modest) movement towards female emancipation and a (real) economic weakening of the nobility, which fuelled anxiety among the male and/or noble segment of the population. Remarkably, the Barkovian *Woe from Wit* and *The Return of Chatskii* both used Griboedov's classical text to voice contemporary concerns. This ability of *Woe from Wit* to encapsulate the anxieties generated by social change owed a lot to the fact that it was regularly staged in Russia, starting from the mid-19th century and especially after 1863 when the ban on the play was lifted. It became obvious again at the end of the NEP era, in Vsevolod Meyerhold's 1928 production of the play.⁹ As Jennifer Louise Wilson has shown, Meyerhold used Griboedov's text to express vari-

ous anxieties from the end of the NEP, strikingly related to the two topics at the centre of this paper: the culture of sexual emancipation initially fuelled by the Revolution and which Stalin's Great Turn terminated by rehabilitating traditional family values and gender roles; and the consumer culture developed by the so-called *Nepmany*, which the Party decided to fight as it considered it a threat to the moral and intellectual values of communism (Wilson, 2012, pp. 143-144). A disturbing text at various levels, *Woe from Wit* confirmed its remarkable ability to adapt to new social contexts and to address evolving issues through the various productions, sequels and spoofs it generated over time, even when these hypertexts, aiming to correct the troubling social order Griboedov had initially depicted, replaced it with more conservative conceptions of gender and class roles.

Notes

1. Besides the works on *Woe from Wit* used in the present paper and mentioned in the bibliography, see (in chronological order) Piskunov, N.K. (1928), *Tvorcheskaia istoriia "Goria ot uma"*. Moscow: Gosizdat; Tomashvskii, B. (1946), 'Stikhotvornaia sistema "Goria ot uma"', in A.S. Griboedov, 1795-1829. Moscow: Goslitmuzei, pp. 74-109; Nechkina, M.V. (1947) *Griboedov i dekabristy*. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura; A.S. Griboedov. *Tvorchestvo. Biografiia. Traditsii* (1977). Leningrad: Nauka; Zorin, A.L. (1977) '“Gore ot uma” i russkaia komediografiia 10-20-kh gg. XIX v.', *Filologiya*, vyp. 5, Moscow, pp. 68-81; Borisov, Iu.N. (1978) "Gore ot uma" i russkaia stikhotvornaia komediia. Saratov: Izdatel'stvo saratovskogo universiteta; Fomichev, S.A. (1983) *Komediia A.S. Griboedova "Gore ot uma". Kommentarii*. Moscow: Prosveshchenie; Kosny, W. (1985) *A. S. Griboedov, Poet und Minister: die zeitgenössische Rezeption seiner Komödie "Gore ot uma" (1824-1832)*. Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz; Saussure, L. de (1994) 'La trace de l'auteur dans *Le Malheur d'avoir trop d'esprit* d'A.S. Griboedov à la lumière d'une approche polyphonique du texte de théâtre', *Cahiers de linguistique française*, 15, pp. 297-324; *Problemy tvorchestva A.S. Griboedova* (1994). Smolensk: Smolenskii gosudarstvennyi universitet.; A. S. Griboedov. *Khmelitskii sbornik* (1998). Smolensk: Smolenskii gosudarstvennyi universitet; Baumgarten, Caroline (1998) *Die spätklassizistische russische Komödie zwischen 1805 und 1822: Studien zu Šachovskoj, Zagoskin, Chmel'nickij und Griboedov*. München: O. Sagner; Strakhova, A. (2002) *Vek nyneshnii i vek minuvshii: komediia A. S. Griboedova "Gore ot uma" v russkoi kritike i literaturovedenii*. St. Petersburg: Azbuka klassika; *Aleksandr Griboedov's "Woe from Wit": a Commentary and Translation*

- (2005). Lewinston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press; Wilmes, J. (2012) ‘Anticipating Chekhov: Tragicomic Elements in Griboedov’s *Woe from Wit*’, *Pushkin Review*, Volume 15, pp. 125-142; Velizhev, M. (2017) ‘Chaadaev i Chatskii: bezumie i komediinaia intriga v ‘Gore ot uma’ in *Zamechatel’noe shestidesiatiletie: ko dnju rozhdeniia Andreia Nemzera*. Tom 1. Moscow: Izdatel’skie resheniia. Ridero, pp. 58-73.
2. For an interesting overview of all the satirical allusions to Catherine II and her reign in *Woe from Wit*, see Pchelov, E.V. (2009) ‘Obraz i epokha Ekateriny Velikoi v komedii A. S. Griboedova ‘Gore ot uma’ in Tychinina, L.V. (ed.) *E. R. Dashkova: velikoe nasledie i sovremennost’*. Moscow: MGI im. E.R. Dashkovoi, pp. 294-311.
 3. On Barkov, see Stepanov (1988); Zorin (1992); on Barkoviana, see Sapov, N. (1992).
 4. For a recent study on Rostopchina, see Shumilina N.D., *Vzaimodeistvie poezii i prozy v tvorchestve E.P. Rostopchinoi i K.K. Pavlovoi*, dissertatsiia na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata filologicheskikh nauk, Tomsk, 2014.
 5. Rostopchina’s decision to have Chatskii and Princess Tsvetkova agree on everything is a way to gap the gender divide staged by Griboedov’s original play. In the *Return of Chatskii*, the main character is no longer a critic of women, but their obedient servant, as long as they are wise and reasonable. All references to Rostopchina’s play are to Rostopchina (1991) unless otherwise stated. All translations are the author’s unless otherwise stated.
 6. For an analysis of social tensions in Russian literature and a sociological approach to 19th-century Russian literature in general, see Mills Todd III (1986); Debreczeny (1997); Reitblat (2001). On class relations within the field of literature in the 19th century and class anxieties experienced by noble writers at the prospect of seeing literature conquered by commoners, see Reyfman (2012) p. 28 (on Pushkin’s contempt towards Nadezhdin); Hruska (2000) on Tolstoi’s contempt for Chernyshevskii and his own anxiety at the idea of being a marginal in high society, just as the commoners were; on non-noble writers (raznochintsy) in general and Chernyshevskii as their embodiment, as well as on aristocratic reactions to their engagement with literature, see Paperno (1988) pp. 75-78.
 7. On money in Russian society and literature in the second part of the 19th century, see Porter, J. (2017) *Economies of Feeling: Russian Literature under Nicholas I*. Evanston: Northwestern UP, and her chapter, as well as the chapter by V. Shneider (2020) in Vaisman, A., Vdovin, A., Kliger, I. and Ospovat, K. (eds.) *Russkii realizm XIX veka*. Moscow: NLO.

8. Rostopchina's Chatskii traveled to Moscow by train only from Saint Petersburg, using the Saint Petersburg - Moscow railway opened in 1851 under Nicholas Ist. From Brussels to the capital city of the Russian empire, he obviously traveled by boat.
9. On Meyerhold's production of "Gore umu", see Law (1974).

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