

Fiction As a Phenomenon of Intercultural Communication

Valery Evseev
*Department of Architecture
 and Design
 Industrial University of Tyumen
 Tyumen, Russia*

Saltanat Makasheva
*Department of Intercultural
 Communication
 Industrial University of Tyumen
 Tyumen, Russia*

Tatyana Somikova
*Humanities Institute of
 Northern Studies
 Ugra State University
 Khanty-Mansiysk, Russia*

Abstract—This article treats fiction as one of the intercultural communication phenomena that promotes people’s awareness of a foreign culture, contributes to the understanding of its peculiarities. Reading foreign fiction, recipients interact with another culture, familiarize themselves with its artefacts, and adapt themselves to this foreign culture. Reading foreign fiction is seen as the most effective way of intercultural communication, which provides means for surmounting stereotypes and cultural differences. A dialogue of cultures inspiring creative work is an important part of intercultural communication. This article presents this dialogue as a case study of literary works by Bernard Shaw and Eugene Zamyatin.

Keywords—intercultural communication, fiction, reader, culture, mindset, mentality, worldview, Pushkin, illustration, Bernard Shaw, Eugene Zamyatin, entropy, energy, reminiscence, dialogue

I. INTRODUCTION

Intercultural communication is based on a productive dialogue between people of different nations. Such a dialogue presupposes certain awareness about the characteristic features and peculiarities of the interlocutor’s national culture. In this regard, fiction is a unique opportunity for the reader, who usually follows the story line and the heroes of a literary work with enthusiasm, to plunge into the life of another nation and get acquainted with its culture. The hero’s thoughts and feelings are existentially close to the reader. Many national realia that were alien to the reader before in this context are taken for granted and viewed as an integral part of life, which triggers natural interest, understanding and acceptance, not resistance and rejection. Such works as “War and Peace” by Leo Tolstoy, “Eugene Onegin” by Alexander Pushkin, “Quietly Flows the Don” by Mikhail Sholokhov are called “encyclopaedias of Russian life” because there unfolds the life of all strata of Russian society taken at a certain historical moment, with a detailed description of the national lifestyle: food, clothes, everyday life, holidays, traditions and beliefs, and, which is the most significant, the mental peculiarities of people in Russia, their mindset, the so called “Russian psyche”. In this respect, fiction is

very important for the reader’s perception of another national culture because a literary work, thanks to its imagery, is able to render all main components of this culture: history, national lifestyle, religious beliefs and traditions, peculiar features of national character, and, at length, masterly eulogized nature of the country. The images of a birch tree and an ox-eye daisy flower, a pussy-willow branch and a red snow-ball tree, the images of red summer and golden autumn, mother of winter and spring, the year’s new morning, have become national symbols of Russian nature and its phenomena.

II. THE ROLES OF FICTION IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Landscape images in the novel “Eugene Onegin” by Alexander Pushkin render different aspects of the national worldview, where nature reflects everyday life and practical activities of people in different seasons, national mindset peculiarities. The following poetic descriptions of different seasons in Alexander Pushkin’s novel “Eugene Onegin” are taken as examples of such imagery, and the images are analyzed with regard to the ethnocultural component they have.

The following table contains excerpts with nature descriptions from the novel “Eugene Onegin” by Alexander Pushkin [1]. Columns and lines of the table are numbered to be referred to in the column “ethnocultural component of the image”.

Thus, as it is seen in the above table, familiarity with the novel “Eugene Onegin” by Alexander Pushkin, which has been translated into many languages, enables a foreign reader not only to get acquainted with the nature of Russia depicted in different seasons, but also to perceive the culture of Russia, to understand mental and psychic peculiarities of Russian people’s worldview. It should be noted in this context that all the images created by the author of “Eugene Onegin” to portray winter, spring, summer and autumn are united by one common feature – dynamics. Landscape images by Alexander Pushkin may be considered to render one of the peculiarities of the Russian mindset: to see the world not as something static, but as something dynamic, moving, constantly developing. This echoes the

Corresponding Author: Tatyana Somikova, Humanities Institute of Northern Studies, Ugra State University, Khanty-Mansiysk, Russia.

dynamic image of the “bird-like troika”, through which Nikolai Gogol expressed his views on Russia.

TABLE I. LANDSCAPE IMAGES IN THE NOVEL “EUGENE ONEGIN” BY ALEXANDER PUSHKIN

#	Seasons	1	2	Ethnocultural component of the image
1	Winter	Winter! The peasant celebrating / Renews the track as his flat sled jogs; / His nag, the snowy air inhaling, / Somehow trots out, or homeward plods; / Two downy ruts in the roadway crushing, / There flies the kibitka, swiftly rushing, / The coachman upon his box sits brash. / In his sheep-skin coat and bright red sash. / A servant-boy not a moment lingers, / On the sledge his puppy he has sat, / Himself becomes the horse like that. / The rascal's already frozen his fingers. / They tingle with pain, and yet he laughs. / While mother threatens him through the glass... (Ch. V, part II)	And now the north, its snow-clouds rolling / Has breathed, then howled - now here she comes, / The sorceress winter, who everything numbs. / She comes, and snowy blobs she scatters, / And on the oak-tree branches spills; / And lies in carpets with wavy patterns / Among the fields, around the hills; / The sloping bank-sides of the river / She levels with a downy cover; / The hoar-frost gleams. And we give thanks / For Mother Winter's mischievous pranks. (Ch. VII, part XXIX-XXX)	Excerpt 1.1 depicts realia of Russian peasants' everyday life: “drovni” (a peasant's sled to carry firewood or hay), “kibitka” (a tilt cart), “yamshchik” (a coachman), “tulup” (a sheep-skin coat), “kushak” (a wide belt, here a bright red sash), “salazki” (a sledge). Excerpt 1.2 reproduces a generalized image of “Mother Winter”, “Fairy Winter”, which is transforming the world. This image renders Russian specificity of world perception.
2	spring	By sunny rays of springtime driven / From hills around, already the snow / In turbid streams the ice has riven, / And flooded all the meadow-land so. / And nature's smile is clear and warming, / Through slumber greets the year's new morning; / The skies are growing sparkling blue, / And still transparent, the forests too / As if with finest fluff are greening. / The bees fly from their waxen cells / To gather the tribute of the dells. / The drying vales with flowers are teeming; / The herds are lowing, the nightingale / Is heard in the silent nocturnal dale. (Ch. VII, part I)	O spring, O spring, the time for love! / And what a languid agitation / Moves in my soul, and in my blood! / Under what a tender emotional pressure / I luxuriate, and take my pleasure, / In the springtime breeze which fans my brow, / On the bosom of country quiet now! (Ch. VII, part II)	Excerpts 2.1 and 2.2 show a typical for the North of Russia start of spring, joyful and boisterous after a long winter period. The nature welcomes this time as “the year's new morning”, the beginning of life rebirth, and people look forward to it as the time of long-awaited love.
3	summer	But, as you know, our northern summer / Is a southern winter's caricature. / It fades and dies, leaves not a glimmer, / Though we won't admit it, it's seen for sure (Ch. IV, part XL)	And some young woman from the city, / For summer in the country pretty, / A-hastening headlong her horse-whip wields, / And gallops alone through the (Ch. VI, part XLI)	Excerpts 3.1 and 3.2 acquaint the reader with peculiarities of the northern Russian summer, short and cold, which town-dwellers prefer to spend in the country.
4	autumn	Already the heavens were autumn breathing, / Iready rarer the sun was gleaming, / And ever shorter drew in the days. / The forest's secret shady ways / With the moaning noise of wind grew barer; / On the fields the creeping mists began; / With cries the noisy geese-caravan / Stretched south; and winter drew ever nearer. / A rather tedious time had arrived; / November stood in the yard outside. (Ch. IV, part XL)	And soon begins the autumn golden. / And nature's trembling, pale, beflecked, / Like an offering festively bedecked... (Ch. VII, part XXIX)	In excerpt 4.1 the reader sees a picture of autumn, a remarkable feature of which is a personalized image of nature created by the poet using gradation of personifications: “autumn breathing”, “the sun was gleaming”, “with the moaning noise of wind grew barer”, “on the fields the creeping mists began”. In excerpt 4.2 the poet eulogizes the image of golden autumn, which the reader associates with the picture “Golden autumn” by Isaac Levitan.

National specificities of nature accompanying the plot of “Eugene Onegin” by Alexander Pushkin were masterly depicted by the artists who illustrated this verse novel. The picture by Lidiya Timoshenko [2] portrays Tatyana Larina on a sunny summer day, against the background of blooming ox-eye daisies and thin white stems of young birches, whose branches are swaying in the soft breeze. With the help of sunlight flecks, the illustrator emphasized the birches and the ox-eye daisies, which traditionally symbolize purity and chastity, often with regard to young girls. The landscape not only renders the charm of youth, but also accentuates the central national feature of Tatyana's character, eulogized by the poet: her “true Russian heart and soul” (Picture 1).

The picture by Yury Clever [3] is an illustration to the passage from the novel “Eugene Onegin” that starts with the following words “Winter! The peasant celebrating...” [1, ch. V, part II]. Depicting winter, the artist aimed at rendering nationally specific manner of perceiving winter in Russia, and the joy of the Russian people for the coming of winter (Picture 2). This phenomenon of Russian culture is precisely described in terms of images and meanings in the following excerpt: “Tatyana (heart and soul true Russian, / But even herself not knowing why), / Loved winter in the Russian fashion...” [1, ch. 5, part 4].



Pic. 1. "Tatyana in quiet forest groves...". Lidiya Timoshenko. About 1950-1955.

In his picture Yury Clever reproduced such ethnic elements as peasant's sled, kibitka (a tilt cart), yamshchik (a coachman), etc.; but the most important part of the painting is the dynamic and life-asserting source that is defined in Russian culture as "Russian Winter" thanks to Alexander Pushkin. This period, full of Orthodox religious holidays, outdoor festivals and traditions, glorified in folklore and literature, reflecting peculiarities of the national view of the world, and traditionally occupied a special place in Russian culture. The illustration by Yury Clever precisely renders the way Russian people comprehend winter as "Mother of Winter", "Fairy of Winter", which are reflected in the novel by Pushkin.



Pic. 2. "Eugene Onegin. Winter." Yury Clever. 1909.

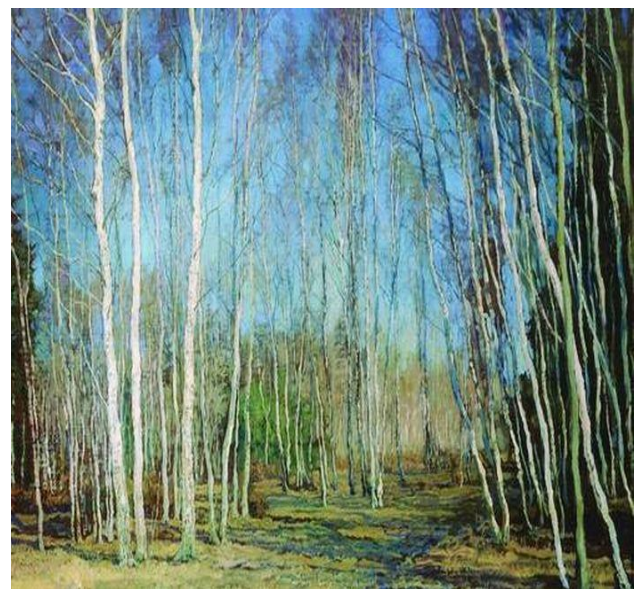
It is notable that the theme of golden autumn from the verse novel "Eugene Onegin" (1823-1830) by Alexander

Pushkin was so deeply elaborated on later in his poem "Autumn" (1833): "Oh, mournful season that delights the eyes, // Your farewell beauty captivates my spirit. // I love the pomp of Nature's fading dyes, // The forests, garmented in gold and purple..." [4]. The unique image not only reflects the charm and beauty of Russian autumn, but also inspires many artists. This image is most precisely reproduced by Isaac Levitan in his picture "Golden Autumn" [5], whose name is an obvious reference to Pushkin's works (Picture 3).



Pic. 3. "Golden Autumn". Isaac Levitan. 1895.

Pushkin's portrayal of spring is a hymn to reviving nature, where "The skies are growing sparkling blue, // And still transparent, the forests too // As if with finest fluff are greening" [1, ch. VII, part I]. The landscape "Blue Spring" by Vasily Baksheev [6] echoed the above cited lines from Pushkin's verse novel. The picture most fully reproduces the specificity of the Russian spring landscape: dazzling white stems of thin birch-trees, which are distinctly delineated against the background of the bright blue sky (Picture 4).



Pic. 4. "Blue Spring". Vasily Baksheev. 1930.

When a Russian literary work is published in a foreign language, it is reasonable to illustrate it with pictures that reproduce ethnic specificities of the world view of Russian people and serve the function of a special commentary explaining peculiarities of Russian national culture.

This acquaintance of the reader with a foreign culture through literary works is only one role that fiction plays in intercultural communication. Another important role of fiction in fostering intercultural communication is connected not only with reading foreign literary works, but with creating new works of literature under the influence of a foreign culture or the world culture.

A genuine masterpiece of art resorts to the eternal universals of human life (birth and death, love and hate, war and peace), goes beyond geographic borders, time frame and ethnic boundaries, which contributes to rapprochement between different peoples and convergence of their cultures. The concept world view of the most distinguished literary works is based on national realia, but it strives to comprehend the universal meanings of being, which helps to decide on the mainstream spiritual development of humanity.

III. CASE STUDY OF LITERARY WORKS BY BERNARD SHAW AND EUGENE ZAMYATIN

The concept world view in the pentalogy “Back to Methuselah” by Bernard Shaw reflects the view of the opposition between energy and entropy in the novel “We” by Eugene Zamyatin. In his article “Genealogical tree of Wells” (1921) Zamyatin named some literary works by foreign authors that were close in their genre to the novel “We”. Among other works he mentioned the dramatic pentalogy “Back to Methuselah” by Bernard Shaw (1921).

The plot of this play is human evolution from the moment the first people appeared to 31,920 A.D. According to critics, Shaw did not aim at giving a model of the ideal future [7, p. 257]. He created an image of a probable future that could emerge in the process of human development. The playwright wanted to show the opposition of two elements: the vital force and the dead matter. The eternal struggle between these two elements causes evolution. At the end of the fifth part there appeared Lilith, who created Adam and Eve and observed the development of their descendants. Summing up the whole narrative, she states: “Best of all, they are still not satisfied: the impulse I gave them in that day when I sundered myself in twain and launched Man and Woman on the earth still urges them <...>. I gave the woman the greatest of gifts: curiosity. By that her seed has been saved from my wrath <...>. I say, let them dread, of all things, stagnation; for from the moment I, Lilith, lose hope and faith in them, they are doomed” [8].

Shaw considers life is endless in its development, and ends when the development ends. Evolution started with vital force, pure life energy, pure power, pure will, and the matter was a means to realize it. People live while they

realize their life energy and work at changing the matter. If there is no work at changing the matter, there will be neither development nor movement. There will be stagnation and eternal rest. This opposition between the vital force and the dead matter echoes the opposition between energy and entropy in “We” by Zamyatin.

The opposition between energy and entropy in the novel “We” reveals itself in the relationships between I-330 and D-503. Moved by the energy of the rebellion, the heroine breaks into the entropic life of D and tries to change it. Identifying revolution with energy, I-330 says: “There are two forces in the world—entropy and energy. One leads to blissful quietude, to happy equilibrium; the other, to destruction of equilibrium, to tormentingly endless movement” [9]. The heroine sees life as a constant struggle, eternal opposition to entropy, everlasting collision with dead matter, endless revolutions: “Then how can there be a final revolution? There is no final one; revolutions are infinite. <...> Is it not clear to you, a mathematician, that only differences, differences in temperatures – thermal contrasts – make for life? And if everywhere, throughout the universe, there are equally warm, or equally cool bodies... they must be brought into collision – to get fire, explosion, Gehenna. And we will bring them into collision” [9].

In the first part of the pentalogy by Shaw, Adam and Eve, accustomed to their eternal existence in the Garden of Eden, met the serpent, who changed everything. Some details make it possible to draw an analogy between the image of the serpent in the play and that of I-330 in the novel. Writing about I’s appearance, D always accentuates her “snake-like” body, her “biting smile”. I-330 plays the same role in the life of the main hero as the serpent does in the life of the first people in the play.

Shaw’s serpent appears as the spirit of contradiction, the embodiment of dialectics and vital force. It starts speaking to Adam and Eve when they come to understand the finitude of being. The idea that their existence is not eternal raises mixed feelings in them: fear of death and fear of eternal life. The serpent teaches the first people not to be afraid of death, explains that death is not the end of everything. It is the end of something old and the beginning of something new. Death is thrown away, giving way to birth in the process of life renewal: “I made the word dead to describe my old skin that I cast when I am renewed. I call that renewal being born” [8]. Thus, death is a necessary condition for a new life to appear. Imagination is an important part of life renewal. It makes this new life meaningful, sets a direction to its development, serves as a basis for will to realize this meaning in a creative act: “...imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire; you will what you imagine; and at last you create what you will” [8]. Adam has both fear and desire to renew his life: “It is the horror of having to be with myself for ever. I like you; but I do not like myself. I want to be different; to be better, to begin again and again; to shed myself as a snake sheds its skin. I am tired of myself” [8].

It is the serpent that makes Adam wish to become different, better, to use will to start everything from the very beginning, to start a new life. The serpent shows Adam and Eve that their static existence they got used to in the Garden of Eden is not real life. Real life is unpredictable; it is changing constantly and ends in death. The resolution of the initial conflict between “to be” and “not to be” leads to new conflicts. Every new discovery they make, prompted by the serpent, brings its opposite into their life. The idea of birth and renewal is connected with the idea of death. Hope is connected with fear and despair, love with jealousy, good with evil.

I-330 prompts D-503 to make the same discoveries, to come to the same contradictions, to find a way to resolve the same conflicts. Thanks to I, D understands that there is no bliss without pain, no happiness without suffering. Real knowledge is closely connected with (and is impossible to reach without) creative imagination, fantasy.

I-330 awakens D’s feelings. She makes him hate her, sink into this negative emotion, get drowned in it with all his being, and even his memories about the past are now coloured with hate. Describing their first date, D writes about I: “I definitely felt: now I hate her again. But why the “now”? I have hated her all the time. <...> I hate her, hate her, hate her!” [9]. However, this hate brings love into D’s heart: “Why, why is it that for three whole years O and R and I have had that fine, warm friendship, and now – a single word about the other one, about I-330... Is it possible that all this madness – love, jealousy – exists not only in those idiotic ancient books? And to think that I... Equations, formulas, figures, and... this! I don’t understand anything... anything at all...” [9].

Love makes the hero break the limits of his habitual existence, extent his being to new horizons. The whole life changes in I’s presence, gives D new and strange for him sensations, which he describes in his usual manner: “And I am a crystal, I dissolve in her. I feel with utmost clarity how the polished facets that delimit me in space are melting away, away – I vanish, dissolve in her lap, within her, I grow smaller and smaller and at the same time ever wider, ever larger, expanding into immensity. Because she is not she, but the universe” [9]. It seems to D-503 that he gets lost in his love, loses his identity, turns into nothing, dies. The hero has never thought about death before, but now he feels very close to it: “I am like a machine set at excessive speed: the bearings are overheated; another minute, and molten metal will begin to drip, and everything will turn to naught. Quick – cold water, logic. I pour it by the pailful, but logic hisses on the red-hot bearings and dissipates into the air in whiffs of white, elusive steam. Of course, it’s clear: in order to determine the true value of a function it is necessary to take it to its ultimate limit and it is clear that yesterday’s preposterous “dissolution in the universe,” brought to its ultimate point, means death. For death is precisely the most complete dissolution of self in the universe. <...> This is why I am afraid of I-330, I resist her, I don’t want to... But why does this “I don’t want”

exist within me together with “I want”? That’s the full horror of it—I long for last night’s blissful death again. That’s the horror of it, that even, today, when the logical function has been integrated, when it is obvious that death is implicit in this function, I still desire her, with my lips, arms, breast, with every millimeter of me...” [9].

On meeting I for the first time, D states: “Until now, everything in life was clear to me (no wonder I seem to have a predilection for the very word “clear”). Yet today... I cannot understand it” [9]. D lived a simple and predictable life before I; he always knew what would happen the next day: “Tomorrow I will see the spectacle which is repeated year in, year out <...>: the mighty chalice of harmony, the reverently upraised arms. Tomorrow is the day of the annual elections of the Benefactor. Tomorrow we shall again place in the Benefactor’s hands the keys to the imperishable fortress of our happiness. <...> Needless to say, among us, in this respect as in all others, there is no room for eventualities; nothing unexpected can occur” [9]. I-330 deprives D of his certainty about tomorrow, his confidence in the future. She says to the hero: “And tomorrow... <...> No one knows what tomorrow will be. Do you understand— I do not know, no one knows— tomorrow is the unknown! Do you understand that everything known is finished? Now all things will be new, unprecedented, inconceivable” [9]. D again feels the sensation that seems to him close to being dead: “No, I did not understand. But I nodded silently. I was dissolved, I was infinitely small, I was a point...” [9]. In this state D experiences fear whose cause is the unknown. The hero explains his fear in the following way: “A point contains more unknowns than anything else; it need but stir, move, and it may turn into thousands of curves, thousands of bodies. I was afraid to stir: what would I turn into? And it seemed to me that everyone, like me, was terrified of the slightest movement <...>. What will happen tomorrow? What will I turn into tomorrow?” [9]. The hero’s wish to get rid of this fear suppresses his desire to be with I, to dissolve in her, in the universe of love. That is why he welcomes the news of the Great Operation that will make all the numbers come back to their habitually predictable, machine-like existence in the One State. However, I-330 chooses freedom, freedom to keep her human nature, freedom “to tremble with fear, with joy, with wild rage, with cold” [9].

Adam’s communication with the serpent gradually brings him to the same shock. At first he feels confused: “My old trouble was heavy; but it was simple. These wonders that you promise to do may tangle up my being before they bring me the gift of death. I was troubled with the burden of eternal being; but I was not confused in my mind” [8]. Then Adam starts to experience fear. His life is not predictable any more, and the loss of confidence in the future frightens him. Eve may die or fall out of love with him. He is afraid of losing Eve and being left alone. He is afraid that he may accidentally die or be killed before Eve dies or before he really wants it. He tries to suppress his fear and get back his confidence in the future: “I will bind

the future. I will be delivered from fear” [8]. The serpent embodies the will to live, and she takes life as it is, with all its contradictions. The serpent chooses the freedom to be uncertain about the future, chooses the right to keep her own free will: “It means that I fear certainty as you fear uncertainty. It means that nothing is certain but uncertainty. If I bind the future I bind my will” [8].

I-330 fights for her right to live with the same uncertainty about the future, to have her free will. When D (during the flight of the Integral) asks her what will be next, she answers enthusiastically: “I don’t know. Do you realize how wonderful it is to fly, not knowing where – to fly – no matter where... And soon it will be twelve – and who knows what’s to come? And night... Where shall we be at night, you and I? Perhaps on grass, on dry leaves...” [9].

So, the novel “We” by Eugene Zamyatin and the philosophic pentalogy “Back to Methuselah” by Bernard Shaw have many similar components, which comprise the central motif of the opposition between energy and entropy. This motif in the novel can be considered a reminiscence to the play by Shaw, which illustrates a typological connection between the two literary works. This connection is the result of intercultural communication when the concept world view of the Irish playwright Bernard Shaw gave creative impulse to the spiritual search of the Russian writer Eugene Zamyatin.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, reading foreign fiction, recipients interact with another culture, familiarize themselves with its

artefacts, and adapt themselves to this foreign culture. In this context, reading foreign fiction is seen as the most effective way of intercultural communication, which provides means for surmounting stereotypes and cultural differences. A dialogue of cultures inspiring creative work is an important part of intercultural communication. Such a dialogue happens when the writer’s concept view of the world aims at understanding universally shared meanings of being.

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