

Dissertation Abstract
Poetry in Perpetuity: Desire, Death, and the Beloved in Afanasy Fet's Lyrics to Mariia Lazich
Patricia Hswe
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Afanasy Fet's poems about Mariia Lazich are rarely examined in depth, yet they encompass some of the richest, most enigmatic and ambitious verse he ever wrote. They also present a compelling problem in scholarship on Fet: since none of the poems is explicitly dedicated to Lazich, their exact number remains unknown. Although past scholars such as Boris Bukhshtab and L. M. Sukhotin provided finite listings on Lazich poems in their works on Fet, recently Tomas Venclova, V. N. Toporov, and Emily Klenin have suggested an open-ended approach to the study of the lyrics.

The open-ended way in which the Lazich lyrics were composed coheres significantly with what they are about: enduring grief, guilt, and desire, and the recurring details and imagery that resonate with those feelings. Drawing on the writings of Sigmund Freud, Judith Butler, and Peter Brooks, Chapter One of this dissertation explores the question of what defines a poem to Lazich and provides a theoretical basis for an exploration of mourning and desire in the lyrics. Chapter Two analyzes Fet's account of his relationship with Lazich in his memoir. Both the memoir and his letters of that time are fascinating for what they disclose about his awareness of boundaries and transgressions in social situations, for the contradictions inherent in their representation of his romance with Lazich, and for their depiction of Lazich herself.

This dissertation examines the Lazich lyrics individually and in relief against the corpus as a whole. Chapter Three looks at the little-known 1850 cycle of poems, which were written mostly likely when Lazich was still alive; it foreshadows on several levels what is seen in subsequent lyrics. In Chapter Four, Fet's views on poetry and language in his 1859 essay on Feodor Tiutchev and a consideration of Aleksandr Pushkin's "Sozhzhennoe pis'mo" / "The Burned Letter" anchor the analyses of two Lazich lyrics. Chapter Five investigates notions of self, the other, gender, and identity in Lazich poems that date from Fet's middle and late periods.