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'Уж не пародия ли он?' Quixotic echoes in Pushkin's 'Evgeny Onegin'

Pushkin is widely acknowledged for his profound appreciation for and perceptive understanding of European culture and literature, and it is in 'Evgeny Onegin' that the reader finds perhaps his most evident literary melting pot: at first glance, Onegin is modelled on Byron and his heroes, Tat'yana is influenced by French sentimental literature, and Lensky is inspired by both sentimental literature and German romanticism. However, there is one more literature which played a fundamental role in the creation of Pushkin's characters and consequently helped to shape the work as a whole: Cervantes' 'Don Quixote'.

In this paper I shall begin by providing evidence of Pushkin's familiarity with Cervantes' oeuvre and appreciation for the 'Quixote', before moving on to typological discussion of the quixotic nature of the two protagonists, Tat'yana and Onegin. I shall expand on previous scholarship on the former—which Pisarev initiated in his comparison of her with Cervantes' mad knight—and offer a new perspective on the latter by exploring how his faux-Byronism is in many ways akin to quixotism. This will be done primarily through comparative intertextual analysis of the authors' respective works and will be supported by examination of Levin's notion of the quixotic principle: the idea that people and literature are finely interwoven. The aim of this paper is not to detract from 'Evgeny Onegin's' established sources, but rather to demonstrate that Pushkin's inspiration extends more widely and penetrates more deeply into European literature than is commonly acknowledged.