

# When the undecipherable acquires a special value: Code of communication in the correspondence between Juri Lotman and Boris Egorov<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** A distinctive creative atmosphere, dialogue, and the application of ‘language for oneself’ (in Juri Lotman’s terms), along with other features, characterize the intellectual environment of the Tartu–Moscow School of Semiotics. These elements are vividly reflected in the 1960s correspondence between Juri Lotman and Boris Egorov – two prominent members of the school, who developed a unique code of communication through creative devices. The publication of their letters brings to light the paradox discussed by Lotman in his article entitled “The text and the structure of its audience”: a text gains value through its undecipherability for a new audience. The study aims to identify the main techniques that act as carriers of creative memory, drawing on Lotman’s concept of ‘language for oneself’ and his theory of cultural memory. A semiotic approach is used to decipher the code of communication and reconstruct the underlying contexts, revealing the layered meanings within the correspondence. The analysis delivers a deeper insight into the intellectual discourse of both authors, in which the code of communication accumulates indirect information about the past, and the creative devices employed in it serve not only as a form of intellectual play but also reveal a subtle “draft of the past”, including what was impossible or undesirable in the USSR. Thus, the research highlights the role of epistolary practices in sustaining the intellectual tradition of the Tartu–Moscow School of Semiotics and in developing a poetics of memory that ensures the continuity, cohesion, and subtle transmission of its cultural and creative legacy.

**Keywords:** Juri Lotman; Boris Egorov; Tartu–Moscow School of Semiotics; code of communication; creative memory

<sup>1</sup> The title refers to a passage from Juri Lotman’s work entitled “The text and the structure of its audience” (Lotman 1982). The form ‘undecipherable’ has been preserved as a reference to the specific translation.

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## 1. Introduction

One of the key characteristics of an academic school is the presence of a shared language. This relates not only to a common terminology for describing research objects or a unified categorical framework but also to the communicative practices among its members. Boris Gasparov observed that a special semiotic code of scholarly interaction emerged in the Kääriku Summer Schools, linking it to “norms of everyday behaviour and interpersonal relations” (Gasparov 1994: 280). Memoirs of the Tartu–Moscow School of Semiotics frequently describe what is called its “exceptionally relaxed atmosphere”, in which “presentations naturally turned into discussions, and the main role was played not by monological but by dialogical forms of communication” (Uspenskij 1994: 271).<sup>4</sup> Vladimir Toporov (1994: 335) formulated it as “a co-creative spirit in which all personal and individual differences mutually supported one another, expanding the creative space and contributing to an atmosphere of special openness, insight, sociability, responsiveness and sympathy for one another”.

Among the most important sources for reconstructing the atmosphere are epistolary materials. Correspondence partially preserves the code of oral communication, since it captures its forms and nuances, allowing further interpretation through Lotman’s concept of ‘language for oneself’, as described in his work entitled “The text and the structure of its audience”. He discusses the creation of a text for a specific addressee, noting: “There is no need to burden the text with unnecessary details which can be found in the memory of the addressee. An allusion actualises them. This text will develop elliptical constructions, localised semantics, and tend to use a ‘domestic’ and ‘intimate lexis’” (Lotman 1982: 83). At the same time, he emphasizes an intriguing paradox: the text will be valued not only for its dimension of decipherability by a specific addressee, but also for its dimension of undecipherability to others (Lotman 1982: 83).

This article explores correspondence as a message composed in the ‘language for oneself’ (in Lotman’s terms), as exemplified by the early letters (from 1954 to the 1960s)<sup>5</sup> of two colourful representatives of the Tartu–Moscow School of Semiotics, Juri Mihailovich Lotman (1922–1993) and Boris Fedorovich Egorov (1926–2020). The aim of the study is to identify the main creative techniques that serve as carriers of memory upon which the code of communication in the correspondence was crafted, as well as to define their role. The analytical framework combines Lotman’s concept of ‘language for oneself’ with the classification of cultural

<sup>4</sup> The quotes from all sources are presented in translation by the authors of the article, except when indicated otherwise.

<sup>5</sup> The texts of the letters are quoted according to Lotman 2018.

memory.<sup>6</sup> In particular, the study draws on Lotman's distinction between two forms of memory in culture: informative memory, which preserves factual knowledge, and creative memory, which enables the generation of new meanings – see his “Memory in culturological perspective” (Lotman 1992a; 2019: 134–135). Although he primarily regards literary works as carriers of creative memory, this form of memory is also manifest in non-fiction texts, including personal correspondence. The letters functioned not merely as repositories of information but also as vehicles of creative expression that shaped the dynamics of the authors' intellectual exchange. Therefore, the analysis, conducted using a semiotic approach and focused on deciphering the code of communication, is based on materials that directly exemplify the theoretical assumptions, while also requiring the reconstruction of relevant biographical, scientific, social, historical, and political contexts. Annotated editions of the letters and Lotman's biography by Egorov constitute the basis for this reconstruction (Egorov 1999; Lotman 1997, 2018).

Boris Egorov arrived in Tartu from Leningrad in 1951, following his wife, a chemist who had been assigned a position at the University of Tartu upon graduating from Leningrad University. After completing his postgraduate studies, Egorov began his academic career at the University of Tartu, where he joined the Department of Russian Literature and later served as its head from 1954 to 1960. Juri Lotman, who had graduated with distinction from Leningrad University in 1950, was affected by the consequences of Stalin's anti-Semitic campaign, then at its height. Denied the opportunity to remain at the university and unable to obtain any academic position in Leningrad, he moved to Estonia, where manifestations of anti-Semitism were less pervasive. There he was appointed a lecturer at the Tartu Teachers' Institute and, in the same year, began lecturing at the University of Tartu. With the support of Boris Egorov, Lotman assumed the position of Senior Lecturer in the Department of Russian Literature in 1954. During the period of the ‘Khrushchev Thaw’, Lotman and Egorov succeeded in launching the series *Trudy po russkoj i slavyanskoj filologii* (from 1958). Egorov shared and encouraged Lotman's interest in structuralism; he also participated in the First Summer School on Semiotics. He also served as the editor of Lotman's first structuralist monograph (Lotman 1964) and authored several publications within the framework of the Tartu–Moscow School of Semiotics: two articles (Egorov 1965b, 1973), a co-authored article (Gushanskaya *et al.* 1974), and two theses of presentations (Egorov 1964, 1970). Egorov's scholarly interests were primarily focused on the history of literature and journalism. Nevertheless, his methodological approach – analysing texts in relation to their cultural and

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<sup>6</sup> See the main English translations: Lotman 2019.

historical contexts – was closely aligned with the central concerns of cultural semiotics. Several of his studies explicitly addressed semiotic problems, such as the semiotics of card games and literary plots (Egorov 1964, 1965b).

Mihhail Lotman recalled that the friendship between his parents and the Egorov family was grounded not only in shared professional interests but also in common social and ethical orientations, which he characterized as nonconformist. He emphasized that the two families complemented each other exceptionally well and noted that his father always referred to the years during which Egorov served as head of the department as particularly happy ones (Lotman 2012: cover page 4). However, for members of the Tartu–Moscow School of Semiotics, he was above all “the architect of an active scholarly community” in Tartu (Uspenskij 1994: 271) and Juri Lotman’s closest friend. Boris Uspenskij wrote that he was “illuminated by the light of YM and Egorov’s friendship” (Uspenskij 2016: 110); Vyacheslav Ivanov referred to Egorov: “[...] one of the closest friends of that time of communication with our Tartu–St.Petersburg–Moscow semiotic company, which meant so much to each of us in conducting research, teaching and life” (Ivanov 2016: 33).

Lotman and Egorov’s amicable dialogue contributed to the School’s distinctive atmosphere. It is worth noting that, at the same time, the exchange was grounded in the authors’ personal and intellectual experience and operated within broader forms of textual and cultural memory. Once published, their components – originally assessed by the criterion of decipherability for a specific addressee (Lotman 1982: 83) – became undecipherable, acquiring exceptional significance for both the researcher and the reader. This significance relates to what Lotman defines as ‘language for oneself’, that is, the original code of communication underlying the correspondence. The letters of Juri Lotman and Boris Egorov demonstrate a pronounced tendency toward playful engagement with linguistic forms, literary reminiscences, stylistic dimensions, cultural and political allusions. In Lotman’s letters, this approach is extended through visual elements such as drawings, thereby expanding the semiotic scope of the texts.

To date, the only studies directly addressing this issue are Veronika Parsamova’s works (Parsamova 2004a, 2004b), which focus on language devices in Lotman’s letters and identify the following levels of analysis: the lexical level (nonce words formed through word-formation processes, wordplay involving proper names, parody of foreign pronunciation, play with words from other languages, phonetic or graphic “errors”, idiomatic expressions); the morphological level (play with allegedly homologous word forms); and the syntactic level (transformations, inversions, etc.). Both studies rely on the only available edition of Lotman’s letters at the time (Lotman 1997). In recent years, however, several new volumes of correspondence have been published, most notably the exchange between Lotman

and Egorov (Lotman 2012, 2018). These publications make it possible to consider the authors' complete epistolary "voices" within a dialogue that unfolded over time, rather than as isolated texts. Moreover, it becomes increasingly more important to broaden the research perspective by shifting the analytical focus to the code of communication – understood as a medium for transmitting multidimensional meanings encoded in the text – and, in line with Lotman's theoretical approach, to the concept of the 'memory of a text', used here to denote the text's capacity to condense and preserve information (cf. "The semiotics of culture and the concept of a text" – Lotman 1992b: 129–132; see also Lotman, M. 2019: 248).

## 2. From the publication history of the correspondence

Boris Egorov was the first to recognize the scholarly value of the epistolary texts as a vital component of Lotman's heritage. He diligently preserved all the letters he received from the colleague and, shortly after Lotman's passing, began promptly collecting the letters Lotman had sent to his relatives, classmates, and colleagues at the Tartu–Moscow School of Semiotics, preparing them for publication (cf. Lotman 1997).

Over 20,000 letters addressed to Juri Lotman and his wife, Zara Grigoryevna Mints (1927–1990), a professor at the University of Tartu, are preserved at the University of Tartu Library and the Juri Lotman Semiotics Repository of Tallinn University. Most of the correspondence with colleagues was conducted with members of the Tartu–Moscow School of Semiotics, including Boris Egorov, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Vladimir Toporov, Boris Uspenskij, as well as scholars from Germany, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Italy. Notable correspondents include Harald Raab, Miroslav Drozda, Renata Mayenova, Stefan Żółkiewski, Bogusław Żyłko, Jerzy Faryno, Wiktoria and René Śliwowski, Vittorio Strada, Umberto Eco, and Claude Lévi-Strauss, among others. Until 1986, Lotman was restricted from travelling to capitalist countries, despite an invitation from the International Association for Semiotic Studies, where he served as a vice-president. Following a search conducted by the KGB in Lotman's flat on 30 January 1970, related to the case against the prominent human rights activist Natalia Gorbanevskaya, his correspondence came under scrutiny. Nevertheless, letters, together with occasional meetings with Western colleagues, remained the sole means of maintaining a dialogue with the research community beyond the Soviet Union's borders, as such contacts were strictly controlled.

The correspondence with Boris Egorov is the most extensive, spanning several years. From 1954 to 1962, both scholars worked together in the Department

of Russian Literature at the University of Tartu, maintaining correspondence primarily when away from Tartu. In 1960, Egorov relinquished the chair to Lotman as he gradually moved to Leningrad for personal reasons; in 1962, he settled in Leningrad and began working at Leningrad University. Despite this geographical separation, their intense dialogue continued through letters. Boris Egorov remained actively engaged with the department, contributing as an editor of publications and participating in conferences organized by the University of Tartu. The correspondence continued until Lotman's death and was gradually published from 1997 to 2018,<sup>7</sup> with Egorov playing a central role and authoring the only academic biography of Lotman to date (Egorov 1999).

This epistolary dialogue is distinctive in several aspects. Firstly, one of its authors occupied a dual role as both author and commentator. Over more than two decades (1996–2018), Egorov enriched the epistolary dialogue with personal reminiscences and insightful commentaries, offering context to forgotten realities, recounting stories from the life of the Department of Russian Literature at the University of Tartu, and reflecting on scholarly activities and everyday details. Over time, with the emergence of a new generation of readers, the text required additional commentary. As a result, the correspondence transformed into a “growing text”. During the presentation of the last volume of correspondence published in Tallinn (Lotman 2012) to scholars and students at the International Semiotic Seminar at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków on 4 June 2014, Egorov remarked:

The correspondence is filled with various incomprehensible hints and mysterious names. It needs explanations – thank God I'm alive. You know, if I weren't here now, many intriguing hints and names would not have been explained. There are things that only a few of us, Zara Grigoryevna and Juri Mihailovich, can decipher. [...] There are many such instances, so the explanations are sometimes as complex as the letters themselves.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Lotman's letters were saved by Egorov. In 1997, he published most of them (255 letters; Lotman 1997: 111–365) and donated the originals to the library of the University of Tartu, where part of the Lotman archive is held, including the letters from Egorov. However, in the Juri Lotman Semiotics Repository at Tallinn University, where the second part of the Lotman archive is preserved, about 20 more letters by Egorov were found. This resulted in the idea of publishing the correspondence from the period 1954–1965, including letters from Zara Mints (Lotman 2012). The third stage was the publication of the complete correspondence. The book also included letters from Egorov's wife – Sofia Nikolaeva (1924–2008) (Lotman 2018). In total, about 300 letters by Lotman and about 500 letters by Egorov have been published. In between, journal publications have also appeared (Egorov, Kuzovkina 2010, 2016; Egorov *et al.* 2011; Egorov *et al.* 2014).

<sup>8</sup> From Ewelina Pilarczyk's private archive.

Secondly, the correspondence with Egorov is notable not only for its humorous tone and irony but also for its profound emotional intensity. For example, when Egorov informed Lotman of his final decision to move from Tartu to Leningrad, Lotman responded as follows:

Dear Boris Fedorovich,  
Your letter truly pained me, although I cannot help but try to dissuade you (...). As for me, with your departure, I will shift from dialogue to internal monologue as the primary form of artistic expression. (Lotman 2018: 82–83)<sup>9</sup>

In 1989, Lotman's health began to deteriorate significantly, and in 1990 his wife Zara Mints died unexpectedly. By 1991, the establishment of a state border between Estonia and Russia further complicated communication. As personal meetings became increasingly rare over time, both scholars recognized that their correspondence could end soon. The gravity of the situation prompted more candid and direct exchanges between them. On 19 February 1993, Lotman wrote to Egorov:

Dear Borfed,  
I am sending you this letter and at the same time a request that I am writing, as Vladimir Monomah said in his will, "sitting on my bones". If I started writing to you all the heartfelt things that I would like to tell you when leaving, there would not be enough paper. If the word 'friendship' has meaning in its highest and truest sense, then this can be called what binds me to you (I'm afraid to write 'love', although this would be more accurate, but in our relationship, there has always been restraint of expression, based on trust and sympathy, i. e. unity of feelings, i. e. restraint of expressions (635).

To this, on 1 March 1993, Egorov replied:

My Dear YurMih!  
Thank you for your heartfelt words. I love you too, probably immensely, as only one can love someone of the same sex without it being a deviation. I have never experienced such intensity and constancy of feeling for any of my companions. And look, we have walked side by side in quite difficult years for almost half a century and not once has a black cat run between us... (637).

Thirdly, unlike typical correspondence within the Tartu–Moscow School of Semiotics, Lotman and Egorov's exchange exemplifies a unique multi-layered text with superadded semantic and connotative order. The letters are composed in the

<sup>9</sup> In the following, the text of the letters is quoted from Lotman 2018, referencing the page number in brackets.

'language for oneself' and employ a range of creative techniques to encode significant, often implicit, information, grounded in a deep shared memory developed during Lotman and Egorov's years of living and working together in Tartu.

### 3. 'Language for oneself': Carriers of creative memory

In the correspondence, we identified five main types of creative techniques: wordplay within the frame of the letter, literary reminiscences, stylizations, mystifications, and substitution of words with drawings (especially in Lotman's letters). These techniques appear both within the structural components of the letters and in their core content. Additionally, the analysis covers telegrams and greetings.

#### 3.1. Wordplay within the frame of the letter

Wordplay techniques are evident in the microelements of the text structure, particularly in the salutations and closings of the letters dating back to the 1960s. On several occasions, Lotman addresses Egorov using his full name and patronymic 'Boris Fedorovich', adhering to the formal structure of the Russian epistolary tradition. However, Egorov does not employ this form of address for Lotman. Instead, he combines the initial part of Lotman's first name with the initial part of his patronymic in various ways, for example by creating nicknames or playful abbreviations: including 'Yurmih', 'Yu. M-ch', 'YurMih', 'Yur. Mih', 'Yuri Mih-ch', 'Yur-Mih', and 'Yur-Mishek'. Lotman also uses a similar approach: 'B. F.', 'Boris', 'Borfed', 'Borfyod', 'BorFed', and 'Borfedik'. The use of abbreviations in the Russian language became prevalent after the October Revolution of 1917; syllabic abbreviations emerged during this period. The following was pointed out by Egorov during the preparation of one of his publications: "Our nicknames 'YurMih' and 'BorFed', which later became popular in a wider circle, emerged in the late 1950s. Interestingly, at first, I used a lowercase letter 'm': 'Yurmih', and only later did the letter rise: 'YurMih'"<sup>10</sup> (Lotman 2012: 499). The forms of address 'Borfed' and 'Yurmih' found in the correspondence extended beyond the epistolary context and became widely used in the oral communication between Egorov and Lotman, as well as among their colleagues and students. The use of these forms came to be recognized as a distinctive feature of the Tartu academic community.

The salutations used by both Lotman and Egorov vary, reflecting the nature of the relationship with the addressee and the subject of the letter. For instance,

<sup>10</sup> In Lotman's addresses to Egorov there are transcriptions of foreign-language addresses: 'Sir!' (13); foreign-language loanwords: 'Clarissime!'; diminutive and affectionate forms: 'Bobastik!' and 'Borfedik'.

Egorov employs a range of salutations such as “Fiery greetings!”, “Dear and crazy the Lotmans–Mints [Lotmany–Mintsy]!”. In some letters, Egorov’s greetings immediately provide contextual evidence. His letters to Lotman occasionally open with introductory remarks that establish the context, for example: “Greetings to the lonely YurMih! (or maybe Zara has come back?)” (a letter dated 22 February 1962); “Greetings to the very old Lotman!” (a letter written after Lotman’s birthday); “Dear Zara, who can’t search for confirmation letters!”; “Greetings to the recovering ones!”; “Greetings to the gloomy old Lotman!”; “Greetings – where is the delegation money?!” At times, Egorov playfully reproaches them for the lack of responses to his letters, and he conveyed his dissatisfaction: “Hello, unresponsive souls!”; “Greetings and other complaints”; “Grumbling regards to the Lotmans and Mints”.

The closing line of the letters also demonstrates emotional resonance and creative variation. Greetings can be ‘warm’, ‘fiery’, ‘tender’, ‘lengthy’, ‘distinct’, referring to St. Petersburg or the capital, ‘pre-New Year’, or ‘New Year’s’. Sometimes, they are conveyed by addressing each individual member of the addressee’s family ‘*in corpore*’ (Lotman’s letter to Egorov, 30–31 May 1972; 374). A closing can act as a reminder of lively conversations of the past: “I give you, in your manner, a punch in the side, and to Zara and the family, I send respectful regards” (letter from Egorov, April 1965; 210); “Greetings and kisses to those nearest, and without kisses to those far away!” (second half of March 1964; 164). These phrases serve to sustain and vivify the enduring bond between the sender and the recipient.

Of particular interest are the forms that contain allusions to historical and political contexts. At times, the correspondents employed features of the official Soviet style, such as “Dear Comrade [tovarishch] Mints” (85); “Dear Compatriots [sootechestvenniki] and Cotartuans [sotartuantsy]” (110); “Fiery May Labour Day greetings!” [“Plamennyy pervomayskiy privet!”] (126). In a letter dated 14 November 1963, Egorov writes: “Physical education (without a cult!) greetings” [“Fiz(bez kul’ta!) privet!”] (140), ironically referring to the customary greeting of Soviet athletes: “Physical education greetings” [“Fizkul’t privet!”]. The word ‘cult’ [‘kul’t’], placed in brackets, evokes political associations with recent events: the debunking of the cult of Stalin’s personality. The address “Archigreetings! (maybe better – neo-greetings!)” [“Arhiprivety! (mozhet byt’, luchshe – neo-privety)”] (193) is based on the double meaning of the prefix ‘arhi-’ (meaning both ‘old’ and ‘very’ – in the latter context, Lenin often applied it to signify ‘very important’). The use of one of Lenin’s favoured words is a noticeable feature of the era when his quotes were displayed on posters, incorporated into slogans, memorized in schools, and echoed in the media. The ‘arhi-’ versus ‘neo-’ opposition relates to the central themes in the scholarly research of Lotman and Egorov – namely, the study of the literary process’s evolution.

Literary reminiscences related to current research themes can also be observed within the epistolary frame. For example, Egorov, a specialist in the history of Russian literary criticism, opens his letter dated 28 October 1962, with: “Dear non-bald JurMih!” – the critic Vissarion Belinskij addresses the author and critic Vasilij Botkin as “Dearest and baldest Vasilij”. At the time, Egorov was working on a comprehensive article about Botkin for publication in the *Acta et Commentationes Universitatis Tartuensis* series, and on a bibliography of Botkin’s works (Egorov 1963).<sup>11</sup> Beyond literary allusions, the correspondents also employ combinations of words and drawings in their salutations. In one of Egorov’s letters (late July–early August 1959), a rebus-drawing replaces the conventional address (22). In a letter from November 1965, Lotman creates an address-fraction: ‘deeply’ in the numerator, ‘not’ in the denominator, followed by ‘Dear BorFed!’ (221).

The examples presented above demonstrate the essential mechanisms involved in constructing the ‘language for oneself’. These mechanisms appear in condensed form in the salutations and closings of the letters and are also employed extensively in the body of these.

### 3.2. Literary reminiscences

What is unique about this epistolary dialogue is the wealth of literary references it contains. The correspondence creates an effect of an intertextual polylogue that reflects the research interests, erudition, sense of humour and emotions. This is particularly evident in descriptions of the scientific atmosphere and academic routines are particularly infused with reminiscences. The polylogue involves references to Vissarion Belinskij, Alexander Blok, Gavril Derzhavin, Ilya Ilf and Yevgenij Petrov, Sergej Yesenin, Mihail Lermontov, Vladimir Mayakovskij, Nikolay Nekrasov, Boris Pasternak, and Kornej Chukovskij. Nevertheless, the most frequent practice is the utilization of quotations from the literary texts of Alexander Pushkin<sup>12</sup> and Nikolaj Gogol.<sup>13</sup> In order to provide a more comprehensive overview, a number of salient examples are considered.

The first group illustrates lesser-known aspects of the history of the Department of Russian Literature at the University of Tartu. On 15 September 1962, Lotman wrote to Egorov from Pskov, where he was staying in a hotel, working alone on his inaugural monograph on structural poetics (Lotman 1964). Immersed in the ambience of Pushkin, he planned to pay a visit to the museum-estate

<sup>11</sup> The second part (Egorov 1965) was published two years later.

<sup>12</sup> Lotman’s first article on Pushkin (Lotman 1960) appeared in a collection dedicated to Boris Tomashevsky. His biography of Pushkin (Lotman 1981) and his commentary on *Eugene Onegin* (Lotman 1980) are widely known.

<sup>13</sup> The most widespread of these are Lotman’s article on the literary space in Gogol’s works (Lotman 1968) and a later article on Gogol’s realism (Lotman 1996).

in Mikhailovskoe. In the letter, he provides a detailed account of a productive discussion with the rector of the University of Tartu concerning the augmentation of the staff of the department. Rector Feodor Klement (1903–1973) supported the academic work of the department; nonetheless, Lotman customarily described his interactions with him in a light-hearted tone, adding a touch of humour even in discussions of formal matters. When recounting the favourable response from the rector, Lotman cites the epigraph to Chapter XI of *The Captain's Daughter* by Pushkin: “Although by nature fierce, the lion sated lay...” (Pushkin 2026). It activates the recipient's memory by recalling the plot of the chapter: the successful outcome of Pyotr Grinev's conversation with the rebel leader Pugachev. The same humorous undertone is also conveyed through literary reminiscences of Pushkin and Gogol. For example, in a letter to Egorov dated 8 January 1960, Lotman reports that he was reprimanded by the rector for having written the programme of the jubilee conference of Anton Chekhov carelessly, whereas the programme had actually been prepared by Egorov and Valmar Adams. He reproaches his colleagues for writing the programme “Between Lafitte and Veuve Cliquot” (Pushkin 1943: 176) and reports that he was obliged to justify himself: “I babbled: It was my inexperience, Your Excellence, it was nothing but my inexperience...”. In a footnote to this obvious reference to Gorodnichy's line justifying himself to Khlestakov in Gogol's play *The Inspector-General*: “It was my inexperience. I swear to you, it was nothing but my inexperience...” (Gogol 2010).<sup>14</sup> Lotman added: “As a reproach to you: since the document was signed by me, the rector considered me to be the author of the text; I did not lead him astray (friendship, that sacred feeling...)”. The final words are a quotation from Pushkin's article “On Prose”, which is added to the reminiscence of Gogol's text. In this instance, Lotman encourages the addressee to recall the main notion of this article: “Precision and brevity – these are the prime qualities of prose” (in the original: Pushkin 1949: 18–19).

Another salient theme for Lotman is the position of his work within Soviet literary studies of the time. In a letter to Egorov dated 24 April 1964, he ironically predicts the reaction of his opponents to his studies of Pushkin<sup>15</sup> and his innovative theoretical approaches: “Quelle horreur!” (168): “For example, if I had studied

<sup>14</sup> Gogol, Nikolay 2010. *The Inspector-General*. (Seltzer, Thomas, trans.) Project Gutenberg. Available at: [gutenberg.org](http://gutenberg.org).

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, how Lotman recalled the reaction of the famous literary scholar Boris Eichenbaum to the Pushkin studies of the eighteenth-century specialist Grigorij Gukovskij: “At the discussion of the first of these books (the discussion took place in an atmosphere of undisguised ill-will/hostility on the part of a number of authoritative professors of the department), B. M. Eichenbaum, after Gukovskij's introductory report, remarked with a smile: ‘He is in a hurry to live and in a hurry to think’” (Lotman 1995: 62).

Merzlyakov<sup>16</sup> all my life, I would already be ‘the greatest Merzlyakov specialist’ in 10 years – ‘our venerable Merzlyakov expert’” and in another ten years an academician, a hero, a navigator and a Plotkin<sup>17</sup> (168). The word ‘plotnik’ [‘carpenter’] from Pushkin’s quotation is replaced by the similar-sounding surname of Lev Abramovich Plotkin (1906–1978), a successful literary scholar who followed a professional trajectory characterized by adherence to official Soviet ideology in its formal aspects. In the letter, Lotman also reflects on the peculiarities of the academic environment: “(...) people who have spent all their minds on intricacies and almost scientific labyrinths do not realize that one can be simple and clever at the same time (or rather, that this is the only way to be clever)” (168).

Requests for information regarding fees and various payments are not uncommon in the letters, and they are often phrased in the words of Khlestakov, the protagonist of Gogol’s comedy *The Inspector-General*. For example, Lotman’s letter of 14 May 1964, concludes as follows: “Ask Yakov Semenovich Bilinkis if I have been paid for my defence – I would like to get it on the way back (An even stranger thing happened to me on the road. I ran entirely out of cash [poizderzhal’sya])”<sup>18</sup> (173). Egorov employs the same quote; for instance, in his letter dated 30 March 1962: “You know, strange as it may seem, I have recently bought a lot of clothes for the spring season, and I quite ran out of cash [poizderzhal’sya]” (73). Similarly, both correspondents employ the same catchphrases in reference to different topics. A prime illustration of this literary device is the expression “Selected Passages from Correspondence with My Friends”. Lotman responds point by point to Egorov’s letter (October 4, 1960), whereas Egorov forwards ‘selected passages from his correspondence’ with Dmitri Maximov, co-organizer of the Alexander Blok conference (21 February 1964).

Reminiscences and quotations from Pushkin also feature in discussions of personal themes. In a letter dated 12 November 1964, Lotman informs Egorov that Zara Grigoryevna is departing for Leningrad, commenting on the matter: “The

<sup>16</sup> Lotman was the editor of a collection of poems by Moscow University’s professor Alexander Merzlyakov (1778–1830) in the series *Biblioteka Poeta* [Poet’s Library] (see Merzljakov 1958).

<sup>17</sup> Pushkin wrote about Peter the Great in the poem “Stances” (1826):

Now an academician, now a hero,  
Now a navigator, now a \*carpenter. [\*plotnik]  
He is an all-encompassing soul  
On the throne was an eternal worker.

[<https://www.gale.com/intl/databases-explored/literature/alexander-pushkin>]

<sup>18</sup> In Gogol’s comedy *The Inspector-General*: “A strange thing happened to me on the road. I ran entirely out of cash” (Gogol 2010).

moment of happiness – catch it, catch it!!!” (190), modifying a quotation from Pushkin’s poem “Adeli”: “The hour of revelry / Catch it, catch it!”. In his letter dated 25 December 1965, Egorov, while informing Lotman of the sale of a house in the village of Ozerki near Leningrad, where he had lived with his family for several years, cites a poem by Pushkin: “Two feelings are wonderfully close to us...” (1830): “Love for the home ashes perished, / Love for the fathers’ sacred graves” (225).<sup>19</sup>

It is noteworthy that the reminiscences often reflect the context of the time. A case in point, the letter dated 25 January 1965, refers to the anti-Semitic policy in the USSR, a policy both correspondents had to confront. Egorov wrote to Lotman: “I’m waiting for a summons to Tartu like a youthful, eager lover (or a not-so-young Solomon for a tourist voucher). Don’t keep me waiting!” (201).<sup>20</sup> Adjacent to the quotation from Pushkin’s poem “To Chaadayev” (“Thus waits a youthful, eager lover / The moment of the promised date”)<sup>21</sup>, the widely known literary scholar Solomon Abramovich Reiser (1905–1989) is referenced. Upon the letter’s publication many years later, Egorov explained: “In Soviet times, tourist vouchers for travel abroad were not sold openly, but were actually distributed at the discretion of the administration, trade union and party authorities under the control of the KGB” (201). Both Lotman and Reiser had to confront manifestations of ethnic intolerance on multiple occasions. The absurdity of the functioning of the Soviet bureaucracy is further highlighted through literary reminiscences. In his letter dated 4 July 1970, Egorov describes a scandal at the Sterlitamak Pedagogical Institute, in which a former colleague at the University of Tartu, the literary scholar Peter Aleksandrovich Rudnev (1925–1996), was accused of immoral behaviour – divorcing his wife and marrying his student, and professional incompetence – not including proletarian poets in his twentieth-century literature course, following a denunciation by a local teacher: “In Sterlitamak it began stormy and ended

<sup>19</sup> In Pushkin’s poem, “Two feelings are wonderfully close to us...”:

The vital bread our spirit craves  
Comes from two loves divinely cherished:  
One for our home to ashes perished,  
One for our fathers’ sacred graves

[transl. by Andrey Kneller]

<sup>20</sup> This statement can be seen in relation to the use of the Aesopian language in the Tartu–Moscow School (see Vólkova Américo 2019).

<sup>21</sup> In Pushkin’s poem “To Chaadayev”:

The day of freedom we await, –  
Thus waits a youthful, eager lover  
The moment of the promised date.

[transl. by Andrey Kneller]

quietly. P<etr> A<lexandrovich> was demoted to senior lecturer (from acting assistant professor), and the same with his opponent ('punish both of them!')" (397). The last sentence quotes Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter*: it is the retort of Captain Mironov's wife to the punishment of those who quarrelled over a pan of hot water. Egorov's attitude toward the Soviet administration's accusations is demonstrated by this quote.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the number of references to Pushkin's and Gogol's texts diminished noticeably, but the Pushkin theme remained present in the letters. The correspondence actively engages with Lotman's conception of the poet's final years in relation to the publication of his biography of Pushkin (Lotman 1981; for details, see Egorov 1994).

Considering the above, an additional conclusion emerges. The analysis of reminiscences and quotations reveals not only the correspondents' perspective on personal and scholarly matters but also their attitude to the political context, which they do not express openly. This allows for a reconstruction of the historical time, that is rich in meaning and deepens our understanding of everyday life in the Soviet Union. Literary stylizations further enhance the picture.

### 3.3. Stylizations

There are sequences in the correspondence in which the entire text of a letter undergoes a stylistic transformation. For example, in a letter from late July or early August 1959, Egorov humorously recounts the arrival of Pavel Semenovich Reifman (1923–2012), a colleague of Lotman's and Egorov's at the Department of Russian Literature. Reifman travelled from Leningrad to Tartu to deliver lectures at the university and wished to stay in Lotman's apartment, as Lotman had travelled to Suhumi. However, he could not enter the apartment because of a confusion with the keys. In this letter, instead of a salutation, the author employs a rebus that can be interpreted as 'cattle' ['skoty']. Egorov opens in the style of Soviet newspapers: "The workers of Tartu have solemnly and joyfully welcomed P. S. Reifman – a comrade [tovarishch] who arrived today by train from Riga" (22). The letter then describes how Reifman entered the apartment through an open window. Following this, the style shifts, and Egorov transitions to direct speech: "No! I can't write in such a calm tone anymore. The pale Dina B-na walks nervously around the room. She is still nervous" (23). The anxiety of Dina Borisovna Gabovich (1915–1965), a friend of the Lotman and Egorov families, resulted from the fact that the letters sent to Suhumi were undelivered and returned to Tartu. Egorov then conveys the inner speech of all the friends of the Lotmans who remained in Tartu: "Did the Lotmans get eaten by a bear trapped in the mountains? Did the chauffeurs

take Zara away? Were the Lotmans sent to the penal colony for intentional non-payment? (...) But why didn't the Lotmans themselves notify D. B.?" (23). It is noteworthy that the author employs a blended quotation from the Old Testament and Korney Chukovskij's poem "Wash 'em Clean", slightly altered: "'Shame and disgrace on unclean chimney sweeps [nechistye trubochisty]!!!" (23).<sup>22</sup> There are three signatures at the end of the letter. The first belongs to Egorov: "May all your letters reach the goal! Amen! B. E.". The second is a wordplay on Pavel Reifman's phrase: "With authentic scurrility ['skverno'] (instead of 'truth' ['verno'] – T. K.; E. P.), P. Reifman". The third is Dina Gabovich's note: "Egorov has made up all sorts of nonsense here, but generally, he is right - you really are (repeated rebus 'cattle' ['skoty'] – T. K.; E. P.). If you want to receive letters, send the right address! And close the windows, too. D. B. G." (23). This example demonstrates the stylistic diversity of epistolary play. It employs references not to orthodox lexis and Soviet rhetoric only, but also to the representation of inner speech and polylogue.

The letter contains elements of theatricality, which enhance the "circle" (community) style of communication – one of the manifestations of the 'language for oneself'. In the epistolary context, the 'language for oneself' functions in a dual manner: it preserves the introspective, self-reflective quality typical of inner speech, while at the same time, theatrical and dialogic techniques perform a communal function, drawing the reader into a shared space of interaction. The use of polylogue, role-shifting, and staged dramatization transforms the private monologue into a performative form of communication, in which 'for oneself' effectively becomes 'for the circle'. This highlights the dynamic interplay between personal introspection and collective engagement, emphasizing both the individual and communal dimensions of epistolary language.

Understanding certain texts is only possible by reconstructing the contextual framework. As we turn to Lotman's congratulatory telegram from 31 December 1961, we find the following: "NEW YEAR'S GREETINGS FIFTH RECORD-BREAKER FEMALE SOW FARROWED YESTERDAY WITH GREAT DIFFICULTIES PIGLET WEIGHING 630 DELIVERED TO FRIEND LAUGASTE =YURMIKHOV'S (FARM)HOUSE ADMINISTRATOR=" ["POZDRAVLYAEM NOVY'M GODOM SVINOMATKA REKORDSMENKA PYATAYA OPOROSILAS'

<sup>22</sup> Korney Chukovsky's poem "Wash'em Clean":

Who're always dirty –  
Lasting shame!  
Lasting shame!

[transl. by Eugene Felgenhauer]

[<https://riverses.com/korney-chukovsky/wash-em-clean/4155/>]

VCHERA BOL'SHIMI ZATRUENENIYAMI PRIPILOD VESOM 630 SDAN DRUGU LAUGASTE =ZAVXOV YURMIXOV="] (62). The style of the telegram parodies the tone of newspaper headlines reporting on the success of Soviet animal husbandry. Lotman compares the number of pages to the weight of a newborn piglet. The closing phrase is constructed in the same manner, reflecting the language of Soviet newsspeak. The telegram refers to the fifth volume of *Studies in Russian and Slavic Philology*, which was presented to the editorial board of the *Acta et Commentationes Universitatis Tartuensis* series. Egorov knew that the Estonian folklorist, Eduard Laugaste (1909–1994) opposed the publication of individual departmental volumes (see 14), so he could appreciate the irony of the expression 'friend Laugaste'.

To uncover the next congratulatory message – namely, the one on the birth of Lotman's third son, Aleksej – it is also necessary to consider biographical and literary contexts, as well as be familiar with the official language of the newspapers of the time. On 18 April 1960, Egorov sent a telegram: "ON BEHALF OF THE FIRST HUSBAND AND THE STAFF OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH, I ALSO CONGRATULATE THE COLLECTIVE OF THE CLINIC ON THE FULFILMENT OF THE PLAN = OSTAP"; ["IMENI PERVOGO MUZHA I SOTRUDNIKOV MINISTERSTVA ZDRAVOOHRANENIYA PRIVETSTVUYU TAKZHE POZDRAVLAYU KOLLEKTIV KLINIKI VYPOLNENIEM PLANA = OSTAP"] (32). The parody relies not only on the vocabulary (e.g. 'sotrudniki' ['staff'], 'kollektiv' ['collective']) but also on the idea that the birth of a child constitutes yet another element of planned policy reigning in the Soviet Union. Egorov signed his name as Ostap Bender – a character known as a master of pranks and mystifications in the famous novels by Ilya Ilf and Yevgeny Petrov. In this telegram, he recalls how he pretended to be Zara Grigorievna's husband to deliver her an Easter gift at the maternity hospital, where only immediate family members were permitted to send gifts. This biographical episode became the subject of numerous jokes within the circle of Egorov's and Lotman's friends (see 32). It is worth noting that not only do the stylizations reveal details absent from the sources on the history of the Tartu School of Semiotics, but they also reflect an ironic stance towards the official Soviet style.

### 3.4. Mystifications

It was customary for Tartu academic teachers to play pranks on one another on 1 April, some of which even found their way into their correspondence. For example, in March 1962, Lotman received a letter addressed to Egorov from C. E. Smith, the publisher of the Saskatoon University Press. This letter had in fact been

written by Egorov himself, translated into English by one of his friends, and typed on stationery with the original letterhead of the Canadian hotel the Bessborough (now the Delta Bessborough), using a rare Latin-alphabet typewriter, as Egorov later explained in his commentary. The stationery with the letterhead had been delivered to Egorov by his wife's uncle, a dancer who was on tour in Canada. In the letter, a representative of the Saskatoon University Press stated that he was prepared to publish the memoirs of the poet Alexander Blok,<sup>23</sup> which had appeared in *Acta et Commentationes Universitatis Tartuensis*, in English, with commentaries and references. In his view, this publication would be of interest to English-speaking readers; he also promised prompt payment for the work (75). After receiving this letter, Zara Mints, who was on a work trip in Leningrad, discussed the matter with Egorov. Concealing his authorship, Egorov continued the joke. He wrote to Lotman, stating that it was necessary to verify the authenticity of the letter and even suggesting that it might have been a prank orchestrated by Lotman or his colleagues: "If this is your work (or that of your agents), it is well done, I am impressed" (75). Having received no response, he wrote again on 7 April: "And what do you think of the Canadian letter? – you haven't written a word" (79). Lotman joined the prank, telling everyone about the interesting proposal from Canada and saying that he intended to discuss it with the Rector: "I have advanced the Canadian business – everything is going as well as it should. Sergej<sup>24</sup> will tell you in detail" (79). He then telegraphed to Egorov, stating that he had made an appointment with the Rector. On 13 April 1962, a frightened Egorov responded without admitting his authorship, instead reporting the prank: "I'VE BEEN TRICKED BY A LETTER FROM APRIL FIRST URGENTLY CALL THE RECTOR TELEGRAPH HIS REACTION" (80). Egorov then sent a second telegram, asking whether it would have been better to explain everything to the Rector himself. And on 14 April 1962 (i. e. 1 April 1962 according to the Julian calendar), Lotman and Mints completed the story with the following telegram: "SECOND GREETINGS ON THE FIRST APRIL THE OLD STYLE DATES DON'T CALL RECTOR WRETCH REPENT FOR YOUR SINS", signed using an assumed surname, as a play on the name of the Canadian city from which the letter supposedly arrived: "ZARA MINTS SASKATOON-CANADIAN" (80). Another example: in April 1965, Egorov placed advertisements on the walls of houses in Leningrad, announcing that Lotman was selling an attractive and

<sup>23</sup> In fact, Blok's memoirs have been published by Elena Tager, Valentina Verigina and Natalia Volohova (see Maksimov, Mints 1961).

<sup>24</sup> Sergej Gennadievich Isakov (1931–2013) – graduate of the University of Tartu (1954), lecturer at the Department of Russian Literature (since 1955), professor (1978), head of the Department (1980–1992).

well-priced dacha in Narva-Jõesuu – a popular resort in Estonia, then a republic of the USSR. Lotman, who realized that this was another prank, directed those interested in viewing the dacha to Egorov and wrote to him about it on 5 April 1965: “So, I have decided that you are right, and I am forwarding all those who wish to purchase our common quiet dacha directly to you. I hope that the trouble of selling it will not distract you too much and will make for a pleasant and varied leisure time” (209). Three days later, Lotman continued the game: “For God’s sake! Suspend the sale of the dacha! I’ve changed my mind!!!” (210) Egorov admitted to arranging the prank and apologized: “I understand your tears – I am ashamed and repentant. I hope that now buyers will stop attacking you” (210).

Both mystifications play on constraints that were emblematic of the Soviet era. The former underscores that establishing scholarly contacts between Tartu academics and their colleagues from countries outside the “socialist camp” was entirely out of the question. The latter shifts the focus to a different, more everyday type of limitation – one rooted in material conditions and social privilege. This image draws on the Russian tradition of spending the summer at a dacha, which under Soviet authority remained a luxury, as land for dacha construction was allocated by the state, and at that time neither Lotman nor Egorov owned a dacha. In this context, such mystifications served to highlight a socially visible yet unattainable reality.

### 3.5. Drawings

Juri Lotman was skilled in drawing. Throughout his school and university years, he designed wall newspapers, and after the end of the war, he worked in the army theatre as an artist-decorator (a position equivalent to a set designer). More than 500 of his drawings are preserved in the archive. They are found on separate sheets, in the margins of manuscripts, and in letters. The majority of them are humorous self-portraits. In these, Lotman depicts himself in various situations and roles, often dressed in historical costume, and at different stages of his life. However, they are more than mere sketches, as “the need to communicate in the language of images is one of the manifestations of Lotman’s urge to ‘recode’ reality, to artistically recreate it” (Kuzovkina, Daniel 2016a: 56). The majority of the self-portraits have been published (Kuzovkina, Daniel 2016b).

Drawings can also be found in Lotman’s correspondence with Egorov in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The earlier example appears in the letter dated 2 February 1959, in which Lotman recounts a meeting with the folklorist Laugaste and includes a drawing of two profiles in a kiss. The first is a self-portrait, while the second depicts Laugaste. The composition is framed in the shape of a heart, with the following inscription around the edges: “To whom I love, I give my love” [“kogo lyublyu, togo daryu”]. (Fig. 1). This humorous drawing encoded an entire plot, the meaning of which was understood by both correspondents. After a period

of time, Boris Egorov explained in a commentary that Laugaste was the head of the faculty's editorial board and often delayed the publication of the journal *Studies in Russian and Slavic Philology*. His opposition to certain departmental publications was the reason for this. Meetings and conversations with him were generally formal in nature (14–15). In the letter, Lotman informs Egorov of a new meeting with Laugaste, during which they discussed the review of the collection, its timeframe, and Laugaste's unexpected goodwill. Egorov also describes the circumstances surrounding the writing of the letter. However, he does not provide any commentary on the folkloric connection. The inserted image refers to the tradition of giving heart-shaped gingerbread decorated with a picture of two kissing birds and the inscription "To whom I love, I give my love" ["Kogo lyublyu, togo daryu"]. Through this image, Lotman encodes his attitude to Laugaste's kindness. The irony introduced by the drawing is further reinforced in the description of the conversation and in the final sentence: "A long kiss on the diaphragm" (17).

Lotman frequently turned to graphic representations to illustrate his inner state. In the letter dated around 20 September 1961, in which the author discusses the redistribution of the teaching load, he declares his intention to conduct a special course. This message is accompanied by a self-portrait in which Lotman depicts himself as an overloaded camel with two humps (58) (Fig. 2). The sad appearance of the animal expressively conveys Lotman's emotional state, obliged to accept additional responsibilities. In the letter dated 29 September 1960, he mentioned that he is required to deliver "lectures for the radio, reports and plans in no small number, be? a speaker at Kallaste" (40), at the times when no other? members of the department are present. At the end of the letter, he includes a self-portrait of himself running, with six hands: three are writing, the fourth one is pointing at something, the fifth is pointing forward, and the sixth rests in his pocket (Fig. 3). An illustration of the same motif appears in a letter dated 4 October 1960. Lotman writes: "I have spiralled! And nothing can save me anymore", drawing a spiralling thread with a small profile self-portrait at one end (42) (Fig. 4).

All the drawings included in letters form part of their textual structure, enhancing the meaning of the words and adding layers of complexity to the text. Reflecting on the function of this drawing, we can infer that the author is both attempting to depict his emotions and to distance himself from them.

#### 4. Conclusions: The poetics of memory

The analysis of the early correspondence between Juri Lotman and Boris Egorov identifies the creative techniques that act as carriers of memory and clarifies their role in shaping the distinctive code of communication embedded within the letters. The code can be situated on intertwined levels of the poetics of memory,

while underscoring the significance of the (un)decipherable elements (cf. Lotman 1982). The image of the past emerges not only from the explicit content of the letters but also through creative devices that encode and activate memory.

At the personal level, intellectual identity, traces of thought and interpreting the world through the shared perspective emerge within the dialogic exchange between Lotman and Egorov, grounded in their past, memory, and knowledge of cultural history. The correspondence provides a space in which the authors' jointly developed code of communication operates, generating a 'language for oneself' (cf. Lotman 1982) and enabling 'co-authorship' (cf. Skwarczynska 1972, 2006). This process produces a unified text that reflects the correspondents' collaborative meaning-making (cf. Paperno 1974) and establishes an autonomous domain where memory has been preserved, consolidated, and enriched through their dialogic interaction. The code of communication operates through creative devices that allow the authors not only to encode information but also to express or distance themselves from their emotions.

At the cultural level, the letters, as textual artefacts, extend beyond their immediate dialogic context. They function as carriers of creative memory that actively construct, rather than merely preserve, the past, exemplifying the text's temporality in Lotman's terms (cf. Lotman, M. *et al.* 2019) and are situated in line with the research area outlined by Mihhail Lotman as the "(re)construction of the draft of the past" (cf. Lotman, M. 2019: 245–262). This perspective emphasizes how past narratives are integrated into cultural memory and opens new ways of decoding and rereading the epistolary dialogue, revealing the dynamic and generative nature of textual memory.

At the collective and social level (cf. Halbwachs 2008), the code of communication preserves subtle elements of the intellectual traditions of the Tartu–Moscow School of Semiotics.<sup>25</sup> Understood as a set of "unwritten" rules and patterns, it functions as a mechanism of integration and continuity, ensuring that the community's practices and values are transmitted across generations (cf. Halbwachs 2008). Its operation extends beyond the studied correspondence, appearing in oral and written interactions, social customs, and subsequent accounts of the school (cf. Gasparov 1994; Uspenskij 1994; Toporov 1994), where it shapes collective perception both within and outside the community. The letters, in this context, demonstrate the transformative power of language in shaping collective memory.

<sup>25</sup> If we employ Aleida Assmann's terminology, we can note that in the correspondence considered, the code of communication acts both as a canon that fixes communicative patterns and as an archive that records subjective narratives that can be reinterpreted in changing contexts (Assmann 2008).

In conclusion, the correspondence between Lotman and Egorov shows that epistolary practice is far more than a medium for exchanging information. Their sustained dialogue constitutes a site where memory, identity, and intellectual culture are actively co-created. Through their dialogic engagement, the letters reveal how personal interactions ripple outward to shape broader cultural and intellectual frameworks, sustaining collective continuity. In this way, the correspondence not only documents a historical exchange but also illuminates the enduring mechanisms through which creative memory and shared understanding are produced, negotiated, and transmitted. Thereby, new perspectives are opening for the study of the informal networks and scholarly discourse of the Tartu–Moscow School of Semiotics.

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### **Gdy szczególnej wartości nabiera to, co nieczytelne.**

#### **Kod komunikacji w korespondencji Jurija Łotmana i Borysa Jegorowa**

Wyjątkowa twórcza atmosfera, dialog oraz posługiwanie się „językiem dla siebie” (w rozumieniu Jurija Łotmana) – obok innych wyróżników – definiują środowisko intelektualne tartusko-moskiewskiej szkoły semiotycznej. Cechy te znajdują swoje odzwierciedlenie w korespondencji z lat 60. XX wieku prowadzonej przez Jurija Łotmana i Borysa Jegorowa – dwóch czołowych przedstawicieli szkoły, którzy stworzyli oryginalny kod komunikacji oparty na twórczych środkach wyrazu. Publikacja ich listów unaocznia paradoks sformułowany przez Łotmana w pracy „Tekst i struktura audytorium”, który brzmi: tekst zyskuje na wartości wówczas, gdy staje się nieczytelny dla nowego odbiorcy. Celem artykułu jest identyfikacja kluczowych technik pełniących funkcję nośników pamięci kreatywnej w perspektywie koncepcji „języka dla siebie” oraz teorii pamięci kultury w ujęciu Łotmana. Podejście semiotyczne pozwala ujawnić kod komunikacji i zrekonstruować konteksty, które leżą u jego podstaw, odsłaniając tym samym wielowarstwowe znaczenia zawarte w korespondencji. Przeprowadzona analiza umożliwia głębsze wnikięcie w intelektualny dyskurs obu autorów, w którym kod komunikacji nie tylko gromadzi informacje o przeszłości, lecz także, poprzez zastosowane w nim twórcze zabiegi, pełni rolę gry intelektualnej i jednocześnie odsłania nieoczywisty „szkic przeszłości”, w tym odniesienia, o których w czasach ZSRR nie można było mówić bez obaw wprost. Rezultaty badania uwidaczniają rolę praktyki epistolarnej w podtrzymywaniu tradycji intelektualnej tartusko-moskiewskiej szkoły semiotycznej, jak i w kształtowaniu poetyki pamięci, która zapewnia ciągłość, spójność i subtelne przekazywanie jej twórczego i kulturowego dziedzictwa.

### **Kui dešifreerimatu omandab erilise väärtuse.**

#### **Suhtluskood Juri Lotmani ja Boriss Jegorovi kirjavahetuses**

Tartu–Moskva semiootikakoolkonna intellektuaalset atmosfääri iseloomustavad eripärane loominguline õhkkond, dialog, „keel enese jaoks” (ka Juri Lotmani mõttes) ning muud tunnused. Need elemendid kajastuvad eriti elavalt 1960. aastate kirjavahetuses koolkonna kahe silmapaistva liikme – Juri Lotmani ja Boriss Jegorovi – vahel, kes kujundasid välja ainulaadse suhtluskoodi. Nende kirjade avaldamine toob esile paradoksi, mille üle Lotman arutab teoses „Tekst ja auditooriumi struktuur”: tekst omandab väärtuse just tänu oma mõistetamatusele teiste lugejate jaoks. Uurimuse eesmärk on tuvastada peamised tehnikad, mis toimivad loomingulise mälu kandjatena, tuginedes Lotmani kontseptsioonile „keelest enese jaoks” ja tema kultuurimälu teooriale. Suhtluskoodi dešifreerimiseks ja selle aluseks olevate kontekstide rekonstrueerimiseks kasutatakse semiootilist lähenemist, avades kirjavahetuse mitmekihilisi tähendusi. Analüüs pakub ülevaate mõlema autori intellektuaalsest diskursusest, milles suhtluskood kogub kaudset teavet mineviku kohta ning selles kasutatavad loomingulised võtted ei ole mitte ainult intellektuaalse mängu vorm, vaid paljastavad ka peene „visandi minevikust”, mis hõlmab Nõukogude Liidus võimatut või soovimatut. Seega rõhutab uurimus kirjavahetustava rolli Tartu–Moskva semiootikakoolkonna intellektuaalse traditsiooni säilitamisel ning mälu poeetika arendamisel, mis tagab selle kultuurilise ja loomingulise pärandi järjepidevuse, sidususe ning varjundi-rohke edasiandmise.