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Anna Chapman in Plagiarism Scandal

By Jonathan Earle

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Former spy-turned-sex symbol and conservative it-girl Anna Chapman has found herself in the middle of a plagiarism scandal after penning an article on Alexander Pushkin only to be accused of ripping off a notorious propagandist.

Chapman — whose previous appearances in print have largely been limited to stories about her U.S. arrest for spying and scantily clad photo spreads in men's magazines — penned the politically charged article about her love for the great Russian poet in Monday's edition of Komsomolskaya Pravda.

But the attempt at literary criticism quickly whipped up a storm of scorn as bloggers accused her of ripping off whole passages from a book by famed United Russia spin doctor Oleg Matveichev.

In his 2009 book, "The Sovereignty of the Soul," Matveichev claims that Pushkin's untimely demise in an 1837 duel with French officer Georges-Charles de Heeckeren d'Anthes was the result of a European plot to weaken Russia and sent the country down a road to disaster

instead of cultural supremacy.

Mirroring Matveichev almost word-for-word, Chapman wrote that the poet turned to conservatism after becoming disillusioned with "high society" and was on the verge of writing masterpieces that would have placed Russia on the right path when he died.

"A half-century [after his death], liberals and socialists swamped Russia and killed the tsar, and later set the course for revolution. I'm convinced that everything would have been otherwise if Pushkin had managed to write his mature works," she wrote.

Matveichev serves on the board of Chapman's charity and is currently vice governor of the Volgograd region. No stranger to controversy, he caused an uproar last year when he wrote on his blog that he dreamed of mowing down opponents of the regime with tanks — like at Tiananmen Square.

He later said the comment was a "normal Internet provocation," designed to show how easy it was to "rabble-rouse."

Chapman, 29, has kept a high public profile since she was deported from the United States with nine other "illegals" in an international spy ring in 2010. She has since appeared at United Russia conferences and on the pages of Maxim magazine, and hosted a television show on Ren-TV about paranormal events. The pro-Kremlin Young Guard group once called Chapman a "hero of our generation," and appointed her a member of their social council.

Princeton University professor Caryl Emerson, an expert on 19th-century Russian literature, said Pushkin's work has long been used for political aims.

"The history of such uses of Pushkin is a trashy novel in its own right," she said by e-mail. "The rumor that Pushkin was killed by 'Western conspirators' was a staple of the Stalinist 1937 death centennial."

"'Had Pushkin lived there would have been no —' [It's] absurd always to reason like that," she noted. "But that a creative force like Pushkin living into the 1860s would have changed the face of Russian literature — you bet."

Chapman did not respond on Tuesday to an e-mail seeking comment.

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