

Zhenia and Tania: The Novel Transformed

Vat tak, stoletiiia podriad,
 Vse vliubleny my nevpopad,
 i stranstvuiut, ne sovpadaia,
 dva serdtsa, sirykh dve lad'i,
 iamb nenasytnyi uslazhdaia
 velikoi gorech'iu liubvi.

[So it is for centuries on end, we forever miss our mark in love, and two hearts wander without meeting, like two lonely barks, sweetening the insatiable iambus with the great bitterness of love. (Bella Akhmadullina)]

There is a way of looking at a novel, in particular at the realistic novel, which assumes that the text we read describes directly only a part of the vast sum total of imagined events that it implies. Indeed, in that that sequence of imagined events dovetails into the real world, and in that even the tiniest action could be described in infinite detail, the 'all-telling' novel would be infinitely long; it would be a total description of reality, both the real and the imagined parts, in its chronological infinity. This premise serves to remind us that the selection of events to be described in a novelistic text is highly restricted and conventional, and that there are hierarchies of other events - real and imagined, expressed or understood - lying beyond the reach of the narrative. A similiar convention is the frame around a painting, which more or less arbitrarily limits the matter depicted while suggesting a world beyond. To apply this assumption to *Onegin*: we know that two days after Tat'iana's name-day (14 January 18??), Onegin pulls the trigger and his bullet kills Lenskii. This event is described 'first-hand' in the narrative,

although a close scrutiny of the text would indicate that the narrator is highly selective in the detail which he chooses to mention. At a more remote level, but still relevant and still unambiguous, is the fact that Tat'iana is married to Prince N at the point at which we observe her in Chapter Eight. Even more remote are sets of facts that may or may not be understood. Thus, we are told that Onegin was born (to quote a banal example), but are we also to assume (as seems to be implied by the narrator's use of the past tense) that Onegin is dead at the time of the actual narration? The answer is unknowable. Outside the frame the characters have no existence. It is impossible to know if Onegin is dead, because his death takes place in the oblivion beyond the pale of the recorded events.

The premise sketched here is basic to the novel that is embedded in *Onegin*. The way a narrative actually treats the set of real and imagined events that it comprises determines what kind of novel will result. The treatment given by Malcolm Lowry, say, to the events in his novel *Under the Volcano* is very different from that given to the events in Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* (although in the latter novel, too, the manipulation of the narrative is far from simple). It is, however, too simplistic to say that the greater the degree of manipulation of the narrative the greater the tendency to destroy the illusion of reality, to break the contract between the author and the narratee that sanctifies the suspension of disbelief. The human sensibility has been trained (by previous reading and conditioning - perhaps by the very structure of the human intelligence) to allow for all manner of distortions. The eye can understand and believe in the existence of an object whether it is seen with the naked eye, through a stained-glass window, on a black-and-white or coloured television screen, or in a stylized painting, although all these media have a greater or lesser degree of conventionality. Finding the exact point at which credibility is either maintained or destroyed (i.e., is in a fine balance) is a task that many artists have perceived to be crucial. The contradictory critical interpretations of *Onegin* - as parody or realistically perceived novel - indicate that Pushkin pitched his text at precisely such a point of balance between illusion and parody. Thus, although there are good reasons for the formalist critics to see in *Onegin* a Sternian 'anti-novel,' a parody of novelistic conventions, the novel or 'romance' exists within *Onegin* as a web of episodes and relationships that have a specific content and meaning and deserve to be examined in their own right. Such an analysis of *Onegin* as a novel that creates an illusion of reality, that is 'realistic,' though an enterprise that is distortive of the text as a whole,

can in some ways be instructive. The following attempt to pursue this line of inquiry - though hypothetical and ultimately obliged to fail is intended to illuminate the specific nature of the novelistic structure that is contained within *Onegin*.

It is typical of *Onegin* that the 'novel' - i.e., the sum total of the imagined events centred on Onegin and Tat'iana, Lenskii and Ol'ga is subjected to a large number of transformations, of selections and distortions, before it becomes text. One egregious example of this tendency that is worth analysing is the visit to the Larins by Lenskii and Onegin at the beginning of Chapter Three, when Onegin and Tat'iana meet each other for the first time. We do not receive from the narrator a direct account of this episode, but rather see it reflected in the subsequent accounts of it, by Lenskii, Onegin, and Tat'iana. This is an elegant stratagem of Pushkin's, since the episode described subjectively by the participants in the event is ambiguous in a way that a direct account by an omniscient narrator could not be. As they return home after the visit, Onegin asks Lenskii which girl is Tat'iana. The question indicates either how little importance he attaches to the meeting and the young lady's identity, or (if the question is disingenuous, i.e., he does not want to reveal his interest) how much. The comment that he prefers her to Ol'ga (or would, if he were a poet) suggests that he saw more than he admits, and that his inquiry was indeed a far from casual one. It is instructive to compare the description by Lenskii of Tat'iana's outward appearance - 'the one who, melancholy and silent like Svetlana, entered and sat down by the window' (Three: V: 2-4) - with her own account in the letter to Onegin (where it is, on the contrary, Onegin who enters): 'Hardly had you come in, when in a trice I recognized you, became all weak, flushed, and in my thoughts said: That's him!' (Three: Letter: 44-6). Thus, Tat'iana's description of the event is diametrically opposed to Lenskii's. Later the narrator has Onegin recall 'both pallid hue and mournful appearance' (Four: XI: 6), but one wonders whether this is not a dim echo of Lenskii's remark in the recesses of Onegin's mind. Pursuing this 'realistic-psychological' chain of interpretation, we may remark that Onegin's confession that, if he had a desire to marry, he would choose Tat'iana suggests that he had observed her closely during the visit. There is a last echo of that initial meeting in Tat'iana's monologue in Eight, where she recalls 'those haunts where I saw you for the first time, Onegin' (Eight: XLVI: 10-11). The contradictions and vaguenesses with which the episode is reflected in the narrative are instructive. Far from constructing a realistic and precise psychologically convincing description of the event, the author's effort

is directed at showing how the event is reflected in the sentiments of the different participants. ¹ This is so far the case that at least one critic with expectations of verisimilitude has railed against the 'love at first sight' assumption in the episode. In terms of the realistic novel he would be right - but that would be another story.

The oblique description, by the different characters, of one of the most important episodes in the romance of Evgenii and Tat'iana is but One example of the transformations which that romance undergoes as Pushkin develops his text. Another is the common narrative device of the inversion. Thus, the poem begins in medias res with Onegin's thoughts as he speeds post-haste to his uncle's sick-bed. We then step back in time for the rest of One to review Onegin's education, a typical day in his life in the capital, and his friendship with Pushkin. Chronologically speaking, the chapter returns to its beginning as the two friends depart for their different destinations. We have to do here with a relatively conventional narrative inversion. Compared with this inversion is that which takes place as a result of the omission of the original Chapter Eight, which is placed at the end as the Fragments from Onegin's Journey. Here we have to do with an unconventional fictional device - the casual expression of the author's negligent attitude towards the events of the novel, offered as a sort of encore, an additional titbit of information for the curious, the 'Onegin fans/ or a simple recognition of the fact that parts of the Journey had already been published.

In at least one instance in the narrative there is an event of considerable importance that is totally undescribed: Tat'iana's marriage. Although this is adumbrated, in Tat'iana's forebodings about the trip to Moscow to the 'bride market' and also, it has been argued, in the first part of her dream, where the bear can be taken as the fearful husband of the arranged marriage before whom she flees, the event of the marriage itself is passed over entirely. We see Tat'iana make her conquest of 'that fat general' at the Moscow ball in Chapter Seven, and then we see her at the rout after Onegin's return to Petersburg in Eight. The laconicism of Pushkin's treatment of the event contrasts with the detailed realism with which Lev Tolstoi, say, describes the marriage of Levin and Kitty in *Anna Karenina*. That kind of detail is beyond the direct concern of the kind of novel Pushkin is writing, and the silence with which he treats the emotional aspect of Tat'iana's marriage is more effective in its delicacy than any detailed digging into her psychological state would be. If we accept the notion that the putative addressees of the poem are intimates of the narrator and there

fore frequenters of Moscow and Petersburg society, then we may assume that they would be familiar with the 'external' social event of the wedding, which could therefore be skipped. The narrative is, by contrast, concerned with the intimate life of the heroine and hero, their sentiments and private agonies - events about which such a socially informed narratee would not know and at which he could not guess, given the aplomb with which Tatiana comports herself in society, but to which the narrator has privileged access.

If we imagine the 'romance' of Onegin and Tatiana occurring over a space of time, and that time, which the protagonists 'experience,' unrolling at a measured speed, then by contrast the text of the poem that relates this romance is highly selective and frequently highly compressive in its approach to the events of the romance. The narrative can be seen to be organized into three basic types of time unit: the general description of a period of time; the 'typical day'; and the specific day (which may be supposed to correspond to a specific date in history). Pushkin uses the second type very sparingly - on a total of only three occasions: the famous description of the typical day of Onegin in Petersburg in One (XV-XXXVI); the description of Onegin's day in the country in Four (only two stanzas long, XXXVI-XXXIX) with a modification (for the coming of winter, XLIV); and the description of Pushkin's typical day in Odessa (from 'Time was, the sunrise canon ...' - Onegin's Journey: XXIV: 1 in Nabokov's notation - to 'oo. only the Black Sea sounds' - XXIX: 14). The text is mainly constructed of generalized periods of time, in which the days are a blur, interspersed with descriptions of 'specific days.' Since the time element is manipulated with great subtlety, the reader must be very aware in order to retain his precise bearings in the chronological landscape.

By his use of the three units in question the author is able to speed up or brake the narrative, so that novelistic time is occasionally reduced to slow motion - e.g., the night during which Tatiana composes her letter to Onegin - and at other times so accelerated that a considerable length of time is squeezed into a few lines - e.g., the stanzas in Eight (XXXIV-XXXIX) in which Onegin shuts himself up in his cabinet to read. The 'typical day' device is a different way of covering a more or less large period of time without, however, losing the focus on detail. Strictly speaking, one should add to the three 'chronological building blocks' a fourth which is typical of *Onegin*: the blank or gap in the narration such as the marriage of Tatiana already discussed. The latter device is really an invasion into the narrated time of the oblivion that surrounds the events in any novel 'beyond the frame.' To put it in

cinematographic terms, it is as if we were watching a very erratic projector which speeds up and slows down a film with pieces missing and others spliced in the wrong order and yet other sections with simple numbers on them.

In the manipulation of chronological time, as in the selection of novelistic events for treatment, there is an underlying principle. The selection is partly that of the 'novel of sentiment,' which focuses, slowmotion, on such specifics as the *tete-a-tete* with Onegin in the garden and its subsequent sequel in Tat'iana's Petersburg house. The other principle that appears to be operative is the 'sociological vignette' the typical day of Onegin in the city, or of Pushkin in Odessa, which serves to fix the character of two of the most important and contrasted *drama tis personae*.

The internal chronological structure of the novel is rendered more complex by the existence (and superimposition upon the novelistic line! of two other time scales: the authorial time, i.e., the point where the poet is putting pen to paper (to which he draws attention by asides - 'But the North is harmful for me' - and footnotes - 'Written in Odessa'; and the reader's time, which was originally slow (as the novel was published, chapter by chapter) but became speeded up when the work was published as a separate monograph. The reader's time scale is 'created' by the frequent apostrophizing of the reader by the poet, and by the introduction of the character of the 'reader' (Chapter Six: XLII).

In the penultimate stanza of Chapter Eight, Pushkin, bidding his characters farewell, writes:

Promchalos' mnogo, mnogo dnei
S tekh por, kak iunaia Tat'iana
I s nei Onegin v smutnom sne
lavilisia vpervye mne -
I dal' svobodnogo romana
la skvoz' magicheskii kristal
Eshche ne iasno razlichal.

[Many many days have passed since youthful Tat'iana and with her Onegin first appeared to me in a vague dream - and I perceived, as yet unclearly, the distant perspective of a free novel through my magic crystal. (Eight: L: 8-14)]

There is considerable evidence, in the draft of the novel and in the text itself, that Pushkin developed his plot (*fabula*) while writing the work,

and that the final result differs in a number of details from the concept with which he started out. Thus, the plan seems to have called for Onegin, finding himself in the country, to fall in love with a simple Russian girl. The references to Tat'iana's destruction at various points in the text suggest that she was to die (e.g., Three: XV: 1-5 and Six: III: 11-12). It is unknown what fate the writer had in store for Onegin. His late remark, reported by Iuzefovich, to the effect that Onegin was either to die in the Caucasus or become a Oecembrist must be viewed with suspicion since the work was well advanced before the Oecembrist revolt took place. The ending of 'The Gypsies' (*Tsygany*) and *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* (*Kavkazskii plennik*) may serve as indication of what was probably intended: that Onegin would be reduced to a state of mindless mortification by the destruction of the girl. The use of the past tense for the work, and the fact that 'Pushkin' feels free to write about the intimate life of his 'friend,' do indeed suggest that Onegin is dead. The process of development this unclearly perceived' situation was to go through was complex. Among other matters, the important change was that the girl split into two figures: Ol'ga and Tat'iana. Onegin fails to fall in love with the latter at first sight. Also, the figure of Lenskii undergoes considerable development, from a positively evaluated figure to a parodistic one. There is another 'contradiction' that remains in the final text, about whether Lenskii was to marry Ol'ga. Evidently this development was a relatively late addition. (Nabokov notes, for example, the contradiction that Lenskii is to get married some two to three days after Tat'iana's name-day party.)²

The shift of scene for the long poem; from the exotic setting of the southern poems to the Russian countryside and capitals, is one clear reason for the restructuring of the plot. Tat'iana's ultimate fate, to endure a marriage of convenience, is much more probable than that she should be destroyed for her love. Ol'ga's reaction to the death of her swain is even more (and ironically) realistic (in the non-literary sense). That Pushkin was not compelled to remove all the ambiguities wrought by his changes to the plot is evidence, not of any carelessness, but of the operative 'principle of contradiction':

Protivorechii ochen' mnogo,
No ikh ispravit' ne khochu

*[There are very many contradictions, but I don't feel like
correcting them (One: LX: 6-7)]*

Despite the past tense of the observation at the end of Chapter Eight, all is not clear with the novel even after its completion, and a number of problematical areas exist (which will be discussed). The action of the plot may be summarized as follows. (The events are chosen with a certain amount of arbitrariness.)

THE NOVELISTIC 'EVENTS' OR PLOT

We meet Onegin as a young man in his mid-twenties. He has wasted some six years in riotous living in Petersburg - principally in eating, drinking, seducing the wives of others, and duelling. In the course of his life in grand society, Onegin has lost his enthusiasm, has become bored, disenchanted, and cynical. It is in this state that he meets the narrator/poet. His father dies leaving nothing but debts, and then Onegin's uncle dies while the nephew is on the way to the estate leaving him a rich man. Onegin decides to stay on the newly inherited estate. He exchanges the burdensome corvee of the peasants for a light quitrent, thereby making enemies of his conservative neighbours, but he acquires a friend, Vladimir Lenskii, a poet newly returned from Göttingen. With the latter he visits the Larins - the widowed mother and the daughters Ol'ga, betrothed to Lenskii, and Tat'iana. Tat'iana falls in love with Onegin and writes him a letter. He visits the Larins and patronizingly rejects her advances, pleading his inability to be a loving husband. The autumn passes. In January, on Tat'iana's name-day, there is a party to which Lenskii persuades Onegin to go, suggesting that it will be a quiet affair. It turns out to be too crowded and raucous for Onegin's taste: peeved, he pays court to Ol'ga and when Lenskii discovers that she has promised Onegin the last mazurka, Lenskii storms off to his house. In a huff he writes a note demanding satisfaction of Onegin. Although a visit to Ol'ga the next day convinces Lenskii that his fears about her fidelity are unfounded, Lenskii goes to his duel with Onegin in the morning and is killed by him. Shortly after, Onegin leaves and journeys around Russia (and perhaps abroad). Ol'ga marries a young hussar and Tat'iana is left alone on the estate with her mother. She visits the grave of Lenskii regularly and one day comes by chance to Onegin's house, where she asks permission to go in, and reads the novels in his study. From this she gains a better understanding of her hero. Her mother, anxious about her future, takes her to Moscow the following winter to find her a husband. There she is married to a prince (apparently a fat general who spies her at a ball). Onegin returns a couple of years later to Petersburg and falls in love with the transformed

Tat'iana - now Princess N - whom he meets there. He besieges her with letters, to no avail. He then closets himself off all winter with books. At the approach of spring he visits Tat'iana once more. She reproaches him for his desire to destroy her, informs him that she loves him still, but that she will remain faithful to her husband, who at that point enters and interrupts the conversation.

Such a brief (and highly selective) retelling of the chain of novelistic events, although based on the evidence in the text, is still speculative in at least one particular: is it the 'fat general' whom Tat'iana marries, or someone else? The little 'leaps of faith' necessary to reconstruct the novelistic events are also very much in evidence in the chronology that is usually applied to the sequence of the events. This chronology is summarized by Shaw as follows:

He [Onegin] was born about 1796, ended his education and entered St. Petersburg society in 1812; met Pushkin in 1819-20, and both went their separate ways in early summer 1820, when Onegin was about 24. He met Lenskii and the Larins, including Tat'iana, in summer 1820; duelled with Lenskii (two days after St. Tat'iana's Day) in January 1821, in early summer 1821 at about 25 started in his travels, where he arrived at Bakhchisarai three years after Pushkin, and hence in 1823, from where he went to Odessa and was to see Pushkin there in 1823-24; he was in St. Petersburg for the season of 1824-25, where he met and fell in love with the now married Tat'iana, and had his meeting with her in April 1825. (1980, 41-2)

The 'leaps of faith' necessary to create such a chronology are numerous. Thus, one relies on the introduction to the first chapter (later eliminated when the novel was published in its entirety) for the information that we see Onegin in 1819. From this it follows that the meetings between Onegin and Pushkin took place in early May, before the poet's departure for the south - May 1820, which does not exactly fit with 'How frequently in the summer time ...' (One: XLVII). At least two critics (Gustafson and Marchenko-Narokov) have expressed dissatisfaction with the accepted chronology, Gustafson pointing out that the remark in footnote 17, 'We dare to declare that in our novel the time is calculated according to the calendar,' could well be read as ironic (1962, 18). An emigre critic, Marchenko-Narokov proposes a much more spread-out calendar, according to which the final scene takes

place in 1828 (1967). He bases his criticism on questions of verisimilitude - i.e. the amount of time it would take Onegin to transfer his uncle's property to his own name, etc. Such concerns (as we have seen with Tat'iana's sudden love for Onegin) are hardly those of Pushkin. It is true, however, that the last chapter, especially, is overlaid with a tone suggestive of the years after Pushkin's return from exile (1826/30), when he brought his muse to the balls and routs of the capitals. In a sense, perhaps, the chapter exists in two time zones - the 'plot' one and the one in which it was written. Such an ambiguity could be seen as another example of the principle of paradox that runs through the novel.

The problem of the plot of *Onegin* is not yet exhausted, however. The role and relationship of the narrator to the plot remains to be discussed. Thus, the narrator tells us that he possesses a number of documents, which he cites in the text. These are Tat'iana's letters to Onegin, Lenskii's verse on the eve of the duel, and Onegin's letters to Tat'iana (only one of which is quoted). The image presented is that of the 'editor' of the epistolary novel who is publishing a correspondence that has fallen into his hands. The implication of the narrator in the events is increased by his admiration for Tat'iana - as if she were a person of his acquaintance. The 'plot' framework behind this narrator can only be imagined. Pushkin is a friend of Onegin. When the latter dies (in some unknown fashion), Pushkin finds the letter from Tat'iana among his papers. He is touched, and turns to Tat'iana for more information. She gives him Lenskii's poetry and (copies of?) Onegin's letters to her, and describes the details of the romance. This would be a possible interpretation of the facts. The epigraph 'Petri de vanite ...' could well be interpreted as being taken from a 'letter' from Tat'iana to Pushkin, in which she describes the events in the novel and gives her own opinion of Onegin's character.³

If one can perceive the outlines of such a narrator-centred 'subplot,' derived from the tradition of the epistolary novel, then it is equally clear that the totality of the novel structure goes beyond this: there are details in the narration which an 'editor,' relying on documents and on the account from Tat'iana, could not know - e.g., the details of the conversation between Onegin and Lenskii in Four. The 'editor' model for the narrator is thus combined with the 'ubiquitous' and omniscient narrator later to become the conventional narrative mode in the realistic novel. The narration in *Onegin* is ambiguous: it oscillates between the two modes.

The action may be reduced from the outline sketched above to a

simpler pattern of two 'triangles,' each with different circumstances and a somewhat different outcome. The first 'triangle' involves Lenskii, Onegin, and Ol'ga. The duel occurs because Onegin pays court to Ol'ga and deliberately provokes Lenskii. The duel, and Lenskii's death, are the logical conclusion of the triangle. Ol'ga's willingness to respond to Onegin's advances is ironically echoed when, after Lenskii's death, she marries a mustachioed hussar (in somewhat indecent haste). This first 'triangle' links in with the second: Onegin, Tat'iana, and Prince N. If Onegin had initially fallen in love with Tat'iana, and their relationship had been consummated, neither triangle would ever have existed. The marriage of Tat'iana to the Prince creates the conditions for the second triangle to become operative. The emotional relationship of Tat'iana and Onegin is rendered poignant by the fact that neither before nor after does Tat'iana or Onegin achieve fulfilment. Tat'iana's famous declaration of fidelity to her husband - 'but I've been given to another: and I shall be eternally faithful to him' - is only one of two obstacles in the way of the consummation of the Onegin-Tat'iana relationship. The other obstacle is the death of Lenskii. The latter, being on the verge of marriage to Ol'ga, is morally and virtually, if not technically, Tat'iana's brother (-in-law). Indeed he declares in his poem written on the eve of the duel, 'Ia suprug' - 'I am your spouse.' The result is to create a 'Romeo and Juliet' situation - Tat'iana, morally, cannot contemplate a relationship with Onegin because he is also the destroyer of Lenskii. Thus, beneath the 'fidelity' theme, the 'Romeo and Juliet' theme looms large. The crucial statement of this problem is in Six:

Kogda b on znal, kakaia rana
 Moiei Tat'iany serdtse zhgla!
 Kogda by vedala Tat'iana,
 Kogda by znat' ona mogla,
 Chto zavtra Lenskii i Evgenii
 Zasporniat o mogil'noi seni;
 Akh, mozhet byt', ee liubov'
 Druzei soedinila b vnov'!
 No etoi strasti i sluchaino
 Eshche nikto ne otkryval.
 Onegin obo vsem molchal;
 Tat'iana iznyvala taino;
 Odna by niania znat' mogla,
 Da nedogadliva byla.

*[Had he but known what wound burned the heart of my Tat'iana!
Had Tat'iana but been aware, had she known that tomorrow
Lenskii and Evgenii would compete for the shelter of the grave;
ob, perhaps her love could have united the friends once more! But
no one had yet discovered this passion even by chance. Onegin
was silent about everything; Tat'iana pined in secret; only her
nurse could have known, but she was slow to catch on. (Six:
XVIII: 1-14)]*

The stanza is, however, in such an ironic tone as to place in doubt the seriousness of the function of the 'Romeo and Juliet' situation that is here as a potential - with the conventional 'happy ending' conjured up, only to be rejected. The 'divided family / happy outcome' theme is thus reduced in importance and treated as a necessary device in the novel, and therefore subject to parody.

The sketches that have been presented of plot and chronology suggest - and herein lies a fundamental ambiguity - a completeness that does not exist. In plans of ruined cathedrals it is customary to sketch in the lines of broken arches, to show with dots the contours of roofs, towers, etc. In *Onegin*, the 'arches' never existed, the 'roofline' is pure fantasy. Rather than a ruined cathedral, a better analogy for *Onegin* would be a 'gothic folly' - a romantic ruin whose arches and roofs never existed, but are the suggested figment of the landscape artist's fantasy. Although Pushkin did have some classic premises in beginning his novel - hero and heroine, at least - the model given at the beginning of this chapter is the opposite of the truth: instead of working from 'romance' to 'text' he worked - improvised - the text that gives an illusion of substance to the romance. The 'plot' or 'romance' sketch is, in fact, never clearly perceived in the magic crystal, even in the last stages of the work, and there remain as many questions unresolved as resolved. More important, the answers, like the roof of a bijou gothic ruin, do not exist. The 'assumed reality' offstage is, in fact, oblivion. This fact prevents the conclusions reached so far from having any more than a limited significance. The 'realistic model' simply does not adequately cover *Onegin* because it makes assumptions about the 'romance' that are not operative in the text. Ultimately, though it may present vignettes of Russian life and portraits of Russian characters, *Onegin* does not strive to meld fiction with reality, despite the fact of the 'friendship' of Onegin and Pushkin, which may be construed rather as a conceit, a cunning literary joke, than as an attempt to efface the borders between the fiction and a wider reality.

A major question (and one that is clearly incapable of resolution) is that of the 'ending' of the novel: is it complete, or is it broken off *ex abrupto*? Can a continuation be imagined?⁴ The fact that Pushkin toyed with continuations suggests that although he might have been persuaded by his friends - and money considerations - that the novel was unfinished, in real aesthetic terms it proved impossible to continue. This critic's money, for what it is worth, is on the side of 'completeness.' LM. Semenko has pointed out that the ending - where the hero is left dumbfounded and discomfited - has its parallels in numerous other of Pushkin's works (1957, 141). Such a fact permits one to believe that the novel had come, in Pushkin's terms, to its 'organic' end, although his contemporaries, who expected a novel to end with the hero's marriage or death, were not necessarily receptive to this. It is to the 'inconclusiveness' of Onegin's fate (in terms of the convention of the novel) that we may attribute the encouragement given Pushkin by friends to continue the work: 'You tell me: he is alive and not married. Thus the novel is not finished - this is treasure' (*PSS*, III, I, 396). Ia. 1. Levkovich notes: "The advice of "friends" (or more precisely of those to whom the envoy was addressed) corresponds, not to the plans of Pushkin himself ... but to the then existing conventions of novelistic endings: the happy one, in which the author settled the fate of hero and heroine by marrying them, and the unhappy one, in which the hero perishes' (1974, 266). The 'zero presence' of marriage or death for Onegin in the narrative is itself significant. It signals to the reader that he has to do with an unconventional novel. The device of 'incompleteness' is thus part of the tendency to mystification which is essential to the treatment of the narrative. The reader is, as it were, invited to imagine his own version of Onegin's fate. The ending is thus another version of the device of the 'omitted stanza/ which may, as Tynianov put it, have' any content.'

It is typical for *Onegin* that the answer to the question posed - in this case the subsequent fate of Onegin - lies not in some anecdotal remark by Pushkin to a contemporary, not in any arcane interpretation of the text, its variants and unpublished drafts, but in an understanding of the genre of the work itself. Since the work permits a variety of interpretations, then all must be granted equal validity - or invalidity: the ambiguity is the message. Critics have also pointed out the independence of the actions of the characters from their author - Pushkin's reported surprise that Tat'iana should suddenly get married. Belief in an 'initial plan' which Pushkin was frustrated from carrying out by censorial or other consideration borders on the intentional fallacy and

contradicts the notion of the independence of work of art from its author's will.

A like question concerns the problem of tragedy and comedy. Some assert that *Onegin* is a comedy (e.g., Hoisington) while others emphasize the 'tragedy' of Chapter Eight (*tragizm*). Since the terms 'comedy' and 'tragedy' are borrowed from drama, it is worth comparing the 'plot,' the 'fabula,' with the traditional dramatic situation. We know from the literature (e.g., Northrop Frye) that the traditional comic situation is composed of a simple triangle. Thus, a young couple fall in love. The fulfilment of their love is hindered by circumstances. In its most traditional form, the hindrance is an older man who is a rival for the physical possession of the girl. He may be the girl's father or an aged suitor, or even an ancient, impotent husband. In comedy the hindrance is overcome, not without moments in which a tragic outcome appears inevitable, the young lovers are united at the end, the differences are reconciled, and there is a 'celebration' or 'feast.' In tragedy (e.g., *Romeo and Juliet*), the circumstances prove stronger. The young couple is first united for a brief moment of love and happiness, but then outside circumstances (in *Romeo and Juliet* the death of Juliet's cousin at Romeo's hands, in *Faust* Part One the death of Valentin at Faust's hands) prove too strong and the couple are destroyed.

An example of the 'comic' situation in Pushkin is *Ruslan and Liudmila*. Here, after many adventures, Ruslan is reunited with Liudmila, who had been snatched from their marriage-bed by the wizard Chernom or. In *Onegin* the comic situation is modified in ways which are significant. The two lovers - Evgenii and Tat'iana - are separated at first by the character of Evgenii - his 'chondria' (*khandra*), his inability to respond to Tat'iana's advances. It is only later that 'external' (as opposed to 'psychological') obstructions become operative. These are, firstly, the death of Lenskii (as discussed above) and, secondly, the arranged marriage to a man who is older than Tat'iana and, apparently, a little older than Evgenii. The opposition love: arranged marriage is, as Richard Gregg has shown in his study of Tat'iana's dream (1970), an important one. It is discussed with reference to Tat'iana's mother and also the nurse. These obstacles are, however, not in themselves decisive. The ultimate obstacle is Tat'iana's refusal to indulge in an affair which would compromise her husband and of which she is morally incapable. Thus, the external obstacles, though present, have a strongly emphasized psychological content.

The comparison with drama shows that in *Onegin* the cast of characters is not united at the end, there is no feast. The menacing step of

Tat'iana's husband is the sign that outside circumstances, the world, but also morality, have triumphed in the final, crucial encounter.⁶ But yet, we cannot say that the denouement corresponds to that found traditionally in tragedies. The lovers are not united, their love is not requited only to have them torn apart. It remains, at best, a wistful, unfulfilled potential- 'happiness was so possible, so close,' says Tat'iana to Onegin. Although Belinskii was indignant that Tat'iana should not have yielded to Onegin's advances and engaged in an affair with him, her reproaches to him indicate clearly the course such a relationship would have taken:

Chto zh nyne
 Menia presleduet vy?
 Zachem u vas ia na primete?
 Ne potomu l', chto v vysshem svete
 Teper' iavliat'sia ia dolzhna;
 Chto ia bogata i znatna,
 Chto muzh v srazhen'iax izuvechen,
 Chto nas za to laskaet dvor?
 Ne potomu l', chto moi pozor
 Teper' by vsemi byl zamechen,
 I mog by v obshchestve primest'
 Vam soblaznitel'nuiu chest'?

[Why do you pursue me now~ Why do you have your sights on me~ Is it not because I must now appear in high society; because I am rich and of the highest rank; because my husband was maimed in battles; because as a result we are wellreceived at court Is it not because my shame would now be seen by all, and could bring you a tempting fame in society~ (Eight: XLIV: 3-14)]

It would, despite the best wishes of the participants, have assumed the usual course of an affair in the *grand monde*, culminating, possibly, in the death of her husband in a duel. It is a commonplace to point out that there are, in Tat'iana's dilemma in Chapter Eight, the seeds of the plot of *Anna Karenina*, the beautiful woman, married without love, who says yes to her seducer. One might add that Lermontov, in his *Maskarad*, offers another alternative to the dilemma: supposing Onegin had married Tat'iana; would their marriage have been a happy one, or would it have been torn apart on the rocks of passion and

jealousy? By its potential for such various lines of development, the plot of *Onegin* reveals its richness.

The emotional experience delivered to the reader of *Onegin* is neither the fulfilment of desires found in the comedy nor the wrenching, cathartic loss found in tragedy. If the tone of the piece as a whole is ironic, then the tone of the final scenes of the romance is rither nostalgic, ironical, slightly ritualistic in the way Tat'iana metes out her punishment to Onegin, as he had done to her in his monologue. Nostalgia, wistfulness, pathos underlie a work in which the message is sad, not tragic, and the treatment ironic, not comic. In the following chapter I shall examine this question in more detail in discussing the fate of Tat'iana, and in my conclusions I shall look at the problem of the tone of the work.

Questions of tragedy and comedy have to do with the difficult problem of the interpretation of the events in Chapter Eight. The laconicism and Oelphic nature of the text have given rise to a variety of interpretations. Some critics (believing that the ending is muffled because discretion before the censor made Pushkin unable to express his true meaning) have made use of cancelled drafts and of the existence of the fragments of the so-called Chapter Ten to 'reconstruct' a Oecembrist future for Onegin. According to this argument, Onegin's 'reformation' is symbolized in his love for Tat'iana and his becoming (after the finale) a Oecembrist. There is little in the final text that would support such a view. It should be axiomatic that any interpretation proposed of the novelistic events of Chapter Eight must be based upon the actual text, not on that *Onegin* which Pushkin might or might not have written and published under other circumstances. The attempt to make Onegin into a Oecembrist is, however, a tacit admission of the fact that he is very far from the idealistic Oecembrist youth, a fact for which Ryleev and Bestuzhev reproached Pushkin. When he, in addition, insisted that Onegin, the spleen-stricken parasite, was not a satirical portrait either, they must have been further mystified. The 'Onegin as Oecembrist' reading serves only to show the unsatisfactoriness of any interpretation which goes beyond the existing text.

The contradictory interpretations of the finale - whether of Gukovskii (whose 'Oecembrist' theory is sketched above), or of Nabokov (who saw in the finale a drama of misunderstanding), or (most egregious of all) of Belinskii, may be resumed in the following contradictory positions:

1. Onegin is reformed / is not reformed
2. Onegin loves / does not love Tat'iana

3. Tat'iana understands / does not understand Onegin

4. The rejection of Onegin is caused:

a) by Tat'iana's submission to social convention

b) by Tat'iana's failure to recognize Onegin's love

c) by Tat'iana's moral sense

The question remains: is it possible to construct a valid interpretation of the finale, one which would take account of the text only and which would be preferable to any other? In general, contemporary researchers on *Onegin* have tended to avoid coming to a conclusion or expressing that conclusion. Since the interpretation of the finale has, since Belinskii, tended to have an ideological content, it is not surprising that many have preferred to leave the topic undiscussed. The following argument is offered, not in the hope that it will end all the controversy, but because the question must be addressed.

If Onegin is a different character in Eight, then it is because there has been a shift in the manner of his depiction. It is this shift in the approach to Onegin that leads Bayley to write: 'Onegin's silence and his absence tell us much more about him than his words do - it is typical of his precariously balanced creation that his actions reveal him clearly while his speech or writing ... blur his image' (1971,250). I should say parenthetically that Bayley's remark illustrates the difficulty that we encounter in reading *Onegin* as a realistic novel. It is this problem which leads Tynianov to write:

The largest semantic unit of the prose novel is the character a unification under one external sign of heterogeneous dynamic elements; the external sign acquires in verse a different shading from that in prose. Hence, the character of a verse novel is not the character of the same novel transferred to prose. When we characterize it as the largest semantic unit, we cannot forget the peculiar deformation it has undergone when integrated into the verse. *Onegin* was just such a verse novel, and all the characters of this novel were subjected to such a deformation. (1975 in 1977, 56)

This observation of Tynianov's about the deformation of the sign we denote as 'character' in the verse novel coincides with Jakobson's remark on the 'polysemy' of the characters in *Onegin* (1937b, 54-5). In the early chapters the description is largely what Jakobson called 'metonymic': that is to say, Onegin's character was described by externals - the objects in his study, the books he read, and also his actions. His

words and his thoughts are used to a much lesser degree to convey his character. This fact is attributable to the 'sociological portrait' of Onegin which we receive in One and the methods which it implies. In Eight we receive more glimpses of Onegin's internal world. This is done by a shift towards the method used to describe Tat'iana, which had from the beginning involved the description of her conscious and even her subconscious (through the dream). We may say that in Eight, for the first time, the character 'Onegin' has a content.

This content may be expressed by two elements: love for Tat'iana - always there in potential, since his first encounter with her - and remorse for Lenskii's death, which is also 'pre-programmed' in Onegin's original justification for accepting the challenge. The reciprocal nature of these two elements is evident in a crucial stanza:

I postepenno v usyplen'e
 I chuvstv i dum vpadaet on,
 A pered nim Vooobrazhen'e
 Svoi pestryi mechet faraon.
 To vidit on: na talom snege
 Kak-budto spiashchii na nochlege,
 Nedvizhim iunosha lezhit,
 I slyshit golos: chto zh? ubit.
 To vidit on vragov zabvennykh,
 Klevetnikov, i trusov zlykh,
 I roi izmennits molodykh,
 I krug tovarishchei prezrennykh,
 To sel'skii dom - i u okna
 Sidit *ona* ... i vse ona!

[And gradually he falls into a trance of feelings and thoughts, and imagination deals its multi-coloured faro before his eyes. Now he sees: a youth lies motionless on the melting snow as if sleeping at a bivouac, and he hears a voice: 'WeW - he's dead.' Now he sees forgotten enemies, slanderers, and malicious cowards, and a swarm of young traitresses; now - a country house, and by the window she is sitting - always she! (Eight: XXXVII: 1-14)]

Tania is not only or not simply the source of the change in Onegin she is his *fatum*, the tangible expression of the weight of his conscience, his nemesis. The irony is that love - which, we learn in One, he has

always been willing to feign in order to seduce - now has become real. What he formerly did mechanically he now does with conviction. Tat'iana is the instrument of his punishment, and the deep irony of her reproaches to him, quoted above, is evident. She knows that Onegin loves her, but she knows that such a love could never find fulfilment, that they are both trapped in the web of attitudes and positions imposed by society, which would reduce an affair to the usual pattern of intrigue and gossip. In a sense, Tat'iana's words have a double motivation – as the heroine of the romance she is speaking to the hero, but also as a punisher she is avenging the humiliation of other women by Onegin, and Lenskii's death. The psychological level is coordinated with a deeper plot structure in which she is the instrument of fate.

Are we to see in Tat'iana's rejection of a liaison with Onegin an expression of her acquiescence in the rules of society? Belinskii believes so, and would have her rather reject the 'double standard' and make a stand for romantic love: 'Eternal fidelity! - To *whom* and in *what*? Faithfulness to relationships which constitute a profanation of feelings and feminine purity, because relationships not sanctified by love are highly immoral.' In fact, to have a liaison would be fashionable in the society in which Tat'iana lives. (It was, after all, a society in which the emperor's mistress had a recognized social function.) The antagonism of Pushkin to that society is expressed in his heroine's rejection of Onegin's love, since an affair would have shown her conformity to social fashion (even if in reality faithfulness was more the rule than the exception). Tat'iana rejects both society's and Belinskii's rules: she is 'faithful' to her husband, but she 'loves' Onegin. That love is encapsulated, internalized as an unrealized and impossible dream, a potential which she cherishes as she does her memories of the fields and woods of her childhood. If Tat'iana acquiesces in anything, then it is in 'fate' - that fate which brought them together in the garden (Eight: XLII: 12) but which for her is now decided (Eight: XLVII: 2-3) by her marriage. It was that same fate which Onegin tempted by his rejection of Tat'iana and his provocation of Lenskii. It is that same fate which his newly awakened love for Tat'iana has become.

The morality of Tat'iana is of a special kind, since it is expressed precisely in her acquiescence in fate. It is here that we see the difference between the mature Tat'iana - 'Princess N' - and the earlier Tania. The writing of the letter to Onegin is a 'tempting of fate,' an act of boldness which brings Tat'iana not fulfilment (as she might have expected from her reading of Western novels) but chastisement. In particular, she is taught a lesson which it is proper to learn in youth, but

which Onegin learns only from her: that the vision of romantic love in which two souls are united, found in the Western tradition dating back to the Renaissance, is a chimera. Whether one accepts the programmatic role of *Onegin* in setting the Russian literary tradition, or whether one sees the ending of *Onegin* as simply one of the first expressions of this fact, it is clear that the great works of nineteenth-century Russian literature almost without exception involve (those that treat the problem) a rejection of romantic love. In Pushkin's time the example of Griboedov's *Woe from Wit* is obvious. The epigraph from Bella Akhmadullina at the head of this chapter is another expression of this truth - that fate and love are at odds and that it is always fate that wins.

The discussion above serves, at the very least, to indicate that the 'novel' proper does have an important existence within the large work. However stylized and even parodistic the characters may seem at certain moments, their actions add up to a set of significant events that demand examination. It is a feature of *Onegin* that the novel is at one moment stylized and parodistic, and that it may then swerve towards seriousness. Bearing in mind at every point Tynianov's observation on the deformation of the novel and of the sign 'character,' I will next examine the main characters of *Onegin* and try to establish their meaning.