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A Plot of Her Own

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Tatiana

[Tatiana], as is well known, besides being Onegin's ill-starred partner and the coldblooded wife of the general, was Pushkin's personal Muse. . . . I even think that's the reason she didn't start anything up with Onegin and remained true to her unloved husband, so she'd have more free time to read and reread Pushkin and to languish over him.

—Abram Tertz [Andrei Sinyavsky], *Strolls with Pushkin*

"Prostite mne: ia tak liubliu Tat'ianu miluiu moiu." (Forgive me: I so love my precious Tatiana.)

—The narrator, *Eugene Onegin*, chap. 4, XXIV

THE HEROINE OF Pushkin's *Evgenii Onegin* (*Eugene Onegin*) bears the most famous, deceptively complex female name in Russian literature. Paradoxes abound in her image, which is in varying degrees derivative, abject, impulsive, renunciatory, passive, majestically disciplined and inexplicably faithful. Starting with the narrator who tells her story and ending with many generations of critics, almost everyone who touches this image falls in love with it—or with its unrealized potential. It could be argued that Tatiana and her exquisitely "withheld" personal fate functioned as the single, most richly inspirational source for Russian literary heroines well into the present century.

This essay grew out of my bewilderment over the Tatiana cult. What has made this sentimental collage of female attributes—naive, stubborn, largely silent—so resilient and irresistible? Tatiana's energies and virtues have been enormously inflated, by detractors as well as devotees. In one of the earliest portraits, Belinsky, smitten by Tatiana but resisting the fate that Pushkin provided for her, lamented that she could not break free into her own autonomous life; Dostoevsky, pursuing the other extreme in his Pushkin Speech of 1880, elevated that fate to the level of hagiography by crediting Tatiana with every possible civic and metaphysical virtue, eventually investing her marital fidelity with the cosmic dimensions of Ivan Karamazov's challenge to an unjust universe.¹ And then there is the troublesome denigration

of Evgeny that usually attends the exaltation of Tatiana. He is made "superfluous" not only to his own life and times but also to the novel that bears his name; his honest and honorable actions vis-à-vis the rural maiden who thrust herself inopportunely upon him are read as mental cruelty, frivolity, even depravity.² (Here, Tchaikovsky's wonderfully nuanced 1879 reworking of the novel into opera—"lyrical scenes" that probably should have been titled *Tatiana*—must figure as a crucial stage in the maturation of the cult.) To be sure, there are eminent Pushkin scholars (Gukovsky, Bondi, Slonimsky, and Makogonenko in the Soviet period) who have attempted a rehabilitation of Evgeny. This move is too often linked, however, with an extratextual, politically motivated fantasy cobbled together from the fragmentary chapter 10: Evgeny was "becoming a Decembrist," and thus he deserved Tatiana's (and the reader's) sympathy.³

Perhaps more serious than these facts of reception and transposition is the disjointed and confounding image of Tatiana within the text itself. There are the obvious incompatibilities: for example, that Tatiana is assembled from imported sentimentalist scraps and yet, on the strength of one folklore-laden nightmare and a love of winter, represents the "Russian soul"; or that the moments of Tatiana's most profound transformation are concealed from us by the garrulous and possessive narrator. But there are also more radical discontinuities. Foremost among them is the hectoring, sententious and holier-than-thou tone that Tatiana adopts in her final rebuke to Evgeny in chapter 8: a lecture, as I shall argue below, that Tatiana in all likelihood could never have delivered to Onegin in the form Pushkin transcribes it.⁴ In this essay I suggest an alternative reading of Tatiana's role in the novel, one that acknowledges her extraordinary vigor and potency but makes it more aesthetic than moral, and—here's the blasphemous, countercultural rub—that sees this potency as largely Evgeny's achievement.

FALLING IN LOVE WITH TATIANA: FOUR HYPOTHESES

All three creators in the novel (Pushkin, the narrator, and Evgeny in his capacity as title role) sooner or later come to love Tatiana, each for his own reasons. Although the courtships of these respective suitors are carried out on different planes and often overlap, the following motivations for eros can be distinguished. First there is the "forbidden fruit" argument, largely associated, I would argue, with Evgeny's sphere. The narrator does not doubt its power, over the hero and over people in general, as he tells us in the famous lines from chapter 8, XXVII:

Chto vam dano, to ne vlechet,
Vas neprestanno zmii zovet

K sebe, k tainstvennomu drevu;
Zapretnyi plod vam podavai,
A bez togo vam rai ne rai.

(What's given to you does not entice,
The serpent calls you incessantly
To himself, to the mysterious tree;
The forbidden fruit must be offered you,
Without it, paradise does not seem paradise.)

We must remember who is offering this wisdom. Being deeply in love with Tatiana himself, the narrator has his own reasons for discounting the possibility of anything like genuine growth or spiritual commitment on the part of his rival Onegin—whose sudden passion for Tatiana he would prefer to fob off as a perverse psychological universal. But even so, we must admit that the forbiddenness of the Tatiana–Onegin bond always lent it enormous erotic energy. He likes her now because she is off limits; in the provinces she had been in the palm of his hand, and so, in Byronic fashion, he had yawned and turned away. The portrait of Onegin back from his travels (8, XII–XIII) suggests that right up until the end of the novel, the pattern of his life—transitory stimulation and restlessness followed by renewed anesthetization—has not altered. Only illicit love will effect that change. Interestingly, both parties share this economy: Onegin's unavailability had earlier fueled Tatiana's passion as well. As she put it in her fateful letter, she might have been satisfied with casual social contact but Onegin, being "neliudim" (unsociable), could be reached only in this covert, confessional, maximally risk-laden, epistolary way. The letter prematurely formalizes the terms, celebrates her helplessness and heats up the terrain.

The dynamics of Tatiana's life, it could be argued, remain in this covert zone. Richard Gregg has done a persuasive reading of Tatiana's dream along these lines, interpreting its "phallic shapes," "priapic creatures" and shuddering, violent denouement as punishment self-imposed by Tatiana for her illicit desire: "It becomes clear," he writes, "why Ol'ga first breaks in on the would-be lovers; for her shallow, conventional, and well-advertised love differs from Tat'yana's deep, clandestine passion for the 'demonic' . . . Onegin."⁵ Both nanny and mother had been married off without love and the sister was en route to being married off without obstacle: neither of these options are, for the likes of Onegin or Tatiana, "paradise." "Pogibnesh', milaia," the narrator intones, "no prezhd'e / Ty v oslepitel'noi nadezhde / Blazhenstvo temnoe zovesh' . . ." (You shall perish, my dear, but first in blinding hope you summon forth dark bliss) (3, XV). The prophecy is only a half-truth. That Tatiana does not perish, as do the ill-fated sentimental heroines Julie, Clarissa, and Delphine upon whom she modeled her life, is an issue to which we

will return. For now, suffice it to note that throughout the novel, eros between Tatiana and Evgeny is propelled forward by the clandestine and forbidden.

There is a second argument for falling in love with Tatiana, this time associated with Pushkin as author. The 1820s, the decade of *Evgenii Onegin*, inclined Pushkin increasingly toward prose, toward national history, toward genealogy and family—and aggravated his anxieties over social status and rank. Compulsively attractive here for the mature Pushkin is the image of the married Tatiana as *kniaginia* (princess), and the host of chilling and elevating epithets she gains in this context: Pokoina. Vol'na. Ravnodushna. Smela. Nepristupnaia boginia roskoshnoi, tsarstvennoi Nevy (Calm. Unconstrained. Indifferent. Bold. The inaccessible goddess of the luxuriant, regal Neva) (8, XXII–XXVII). It has been argued that placing Tatiana in *very* high society—so high that coquetry, a primary medium for the bachelor Pushkin, had no place at all ("ego ne terpit vysshii svet" [highest society does not tolerate it] 8, XXXI)—was an act of wish fulfillment on Pushkin's part. Negotiating in 1829 to become a bridegroom himself, Pushkin desired to believe what was certainly contrary to his own high success at seducing other men's wives: that female constancy in marriage was possible.⁶ And then there was the poet's own social ambition. Douglas Clayton, one of Pushkin's best close readers, has suggested that the married Tatiana's graceful persona and accomplished hostessing skills were a surrogate for her creator's personal fantasies. "Pushkin, the marginalized, the invalidated, the heretic . . . was metamorphosed into the heroine—not the hero—of his poem," he writes. "Her acceptance at court, her brilliance, her tenderness, passion, and conviction—all these were the qualities Pushkin sought for himself."⁷

Even without the poet's envy of his own heroine's fate, however, Tatiana as princess is a powerful external success. By the novel's end she has mastered what salon society of the early nineteenth century valued most of all: the ability to adapt oneself effortlessly to any appropriate role in the interest of social harmony. It is in this sense that William Mills Todd considers Tatiana's "cultural maturation" complete once she has become the hostess of a Petersburg salon—which was, he reminds us, "the highest form of creativity open to a woman at this time," and one that enabled her to impose "what her age considered an aesthetic order upon reality."⁸

Aesthetic considerations lead us to a third argument for falling in love with Tatiana, perhaps the most profound, this time identified with the narrator's persona. Unlike his friend Onegin, the narrator is a poet. But unlike the poet Pushkin, whose stylized image he represents, the narrator can be garrulous, inefficient, sentimental. As befits a "novelist" (even a novelist writing in verse), the narrator might be understood as embodying some aspects of Pushkin at the turn of the decade, a poet on the brink of turning to prose, since the novel, as we know from Pushkin's famous quip to Bestuzhev,

requires above all *boltovnia* (chatter). The unity of this narrator's voice throughout the nine years of *Onegin's* genesis is problematic.⁹ On one point, however, the narrator is unflinchingly constant, and that is his love of Tatiana. From her initial introduction onward, she is revered as something untranslatable, as a quality that cannot be completely transmitted, as that which inspires us but that eludes precise description. The narrator refers to this elusive presence as his Muse. (We first hear of this Muse—who grants a voice to the poet only after the storm of love has passed—at the end of chapter 1. At the beginning of chapter 8 she is personified, identified with a chronological sequence of Pushkin's literary heroines, and finally is "presented" to Petersburg society in a gesture coterminous with Tatiana's coming-of-age in the salon.) How does the narrator present Tatiana as both beloved subject and Muse?

We first meet Tatiana in chapter 2. One of the more remarkable aspects of her opening portrait, surely, is how little of it there is. In her initial description, negatives abound: "Ni krasotoi sestroi svoei, / Ni svezhest'iu ee rumianoi / Ne privlekla b ona ochei" (She would not attract anyone's eye with her sister's beauty or rosy freshness) (2, XXV). Unlike the heroines of the sentimental novels upon whom she models herself, and unlike Olga, Lensky, and Onegin in Pushkin's novel, Tatiana is endowed by the narrator with no precise physical attributes: no colors, clothes, supporting equipment, musical or domestic activities (we *assume* she is dark because her sister is blonde). From early childhood on, Tatiana's primary characteristic has been a detachment from her surroundings. She had not snuggled up to father or mother; she had not frolicked with the other children; she had not played with dolls or shown interest in news or fashion. She has deep feelings; but in contrast to the heroines of her favorite books, she is not in the habit of using these feelings to manipulate the behavior of others. She does not swoon or faint, weep in public, pray noisily, or interact commodiously with the world.¹⁰ Tatiana, we might say, attaches to the inside and not to the outside of things.

This "insiderness" and inaccessibility continue to characterize Tatiana even at her most exposed moments, and for this we must thank her jealous mentor and most passionate protector: the narrator. He filters out large parts of her life, keeps them for himself, and gives them to us only in translation. Tatiana's love letter to Onegin is originally in French but we only see its cooled-down Russian version (whereas Onegin's letter, by contrast, is immediately in the public domain—for who cares, here it is, "toch'-v-toch'" [word for word]). After Tatiana moves from country to city and becomes a princess, we sense she is a marvel. But somehow the narrator cannot find Russian words to describe her: she is "comme il faut," "not *vulgar*" (8, XIV, XV), and these foreign words convey not so much a physical image as a mode of behavior, a sense of everpresent appropriateness, of not doing anything awkwardly or wrong. Like the veil draped over the face of a harem favorite, they conceal from casual passers-by the essential positive thing. For this the narrator

disingenuously apologizes: "Ne znaiu, kak perevesti . . . Ne mogu" (I don't how how to translate it . . . I can't).

Indeed, he must not translate her. Tatiana sits by the window, waits, watches, and perceives; the narrator only rarely makes us privy to her thoughts. I would argue that he cannot do so, for Tatiana is poetic inspiration—which, according to Pushkin's own inspired definition, is neither an ecstatic outpouring of feeling nor a fixed accomplishment but something more intimate, private, disciplined, and creative: a cognitive receptivity of the mind to potentials. Or as the poet drily put it: inspiration is a "disposition of the soul to the most lively reception of impressions and thus to a rapid grasp of concepts that facilitate explaining them."¹¹ Tatiana takes in, understands, and orders impressions, but (except for the single very large instance of her passionate letter) *does not spend*. And thus the fourth hypothesis: that as readers we love Tatiana because she represents the energy (and knowledge) captured in a certain sort of poetry.

TATIANA AS SYNAESTHESIS

"It is the essential privilege of beauty," Santayana writes, "to so synthesize and bring to a focus the various impulses of the self, so to suspend them to a single image, that a great peace falls upon that perturbed kingdom."¹² The Tatiana of chapter 8 has just such an effect on the boisterous tempo and restless variety of *Evgenii Onegin*—if not on its aroused and bewildered hero—and it is her unexpectedly abrupt departure that brings the novel to an end. How might we understand Tatiana's spiritual economy? Admittedly the heroine of a novel, she is also and crucially a heroine *in verse*; and as such she is more, I suggest, than the mere sum of her personality and plot. She is also an aesthetics.

The Romantic period knew various Dionysian theories of poetry: as emotive release, as madness, as divine spontaneity. But there were countervailing views as well, which understood poetry either as that residuum following the moment of rapture (Wordsworth's celebrated formula, a "spontaneous overflow of feelings recollected in tranquillity," shared by Pushkin's narrator in *Onegin*) or, more conservatively, as something akin to passion under constraint, to a "pattern of resolved stresses." With his strong neoclassical inclinations, Pushkin certainly would have been attracted to such a "poetics of tension." In more recent times, the thinker who has given most elegant expression to this aesthetic is the English analytical critic and poet I. A. Richards.

In Richards's view there are two fundamentally different types of poems, based on the two ways in which impulses may be organized: by inclusion (synaesthesia) or by exclusion.¹³ The most powerful and stable poems—the

ones least vulnerable to disruption though irony—belong to the former, “synaesthetic” category; that is, they sustain a maximally large number of opposed, heterogeneous impulses in meticulous balance. Associations then form between “stable poises,” which enable and constitute memory.¹⁴ Such verbal art is profoundly arousing, but in a special, aesthetically “disinterested,” almost architectural way. We begin to see “all around” things, in larger and wiser context, for “the less any one particular interest is indispensable, the more detached our attitude becomes. . . . One thing only perhaps is certain; what happens is the exact opposite to a deadlock, for compared to the experience of great poetry every other state of mind is one of bafflement” (Richards, *Principles*, 252).

It could be argued that Tatiana functions at the end of the novel as a tension-filled, exquisitely balanced, stable, harrowingly lucid synaesthetic poem. Can such an analogy help us understand her ultimately dazzling effect on Onegin, the inveterate prosaicist who comes to read her most passionately? Several obvious factors mark her as a synaesthetic Muse: her autonomy and detachment from her immediate surroundings, her literariness, the tenacity of her memory, and the vivid inwardness of her imagination. (In an intriguing supplementary analogy from acoustics, Tatiana and the type of poetic tension she represents might be seen as a “standing wave,” a complex resolution of internal antagonisms occurring within a closed air column or along a plucked or vibrating string that only incidentally, and as part of its own inner task, radiates energy in the form of music to the outside world.)¹⁵ After the initial “pluck” or impact of Evgeny, Tatiana’s tensions in matters of love are essentially self-generated, independent of further outside event. This self-absorption and stasis is crucial to her image. Much work has been done, for example, on the specific textual links between Tatiana and the sentimental heroines she adores: Rousseau’s Julie, Richardson’s Clarissa.¹⁶ But we should note that Pushkin’s love-smitten heroine employs these borrowed motifs in her letter quite without cause. As one chronicler of Tatiana’s fate has sensibly remarked, Rousseau’s Julie appeals to St. Preux’s honor in trying to fend off his amorous advances, but “Tat’jana is not in need of defense from Onegin’s passions.”¹⁷ Onegin has hardly given her any real-life grounds for considering him, even potentially, a “kovarnyi iskusitel’” (treacherous tempter).¹⁸ If anyone tempts in this novel, it is Tatiana herself: as she well knows, she is the one who oversteps the bounds and presents premature options (guardian angel, seducer) to this near stranger.¹⁹ Such an understanding of Tatiana’s self-generated, already wholly formed love, for which she takes full and anguished responsibility, lends support to John Garrard’s thesis that in the famous triad of Tatiana’s literary prototypes—“Clarissa, Julia, Delphine” (3, X)—the “Yuliia” in question is not Rousseau’s sentimental and lachrymose Julie but rather the “Donna Julia” of canto 1 of Byron’s *Don Juan*.²⁰ Donna Julia is an emotionally experienced woman, deeply marked

by her passionate and ill-fated love for the immature Juan, who, after the scandal is discovered and she has been immured in a convent, writes him a stunning letter of love and renunciation that the poor adolescent can hardly comprehend.

Let us pursue this Byronic subtext. “Man’s love is of his life a thing apart, / ‘Tis woman’s whole existence . . . / And so farewell—forgive me, love me—no, / That word is idle now, but let it go” (canto 1, 194–95)—these famous lines from Donna Julia’s letter to Don Juan do indeed suggest the same intoxicating mix of active passion, resignation, surrender, memory of the past and reconciliation with the present that so resonates in Tatiana’s final noble scene with Onegin.²¹ But viewed from within the economy of a synaesthetic poem, one that balances opposing tensions but that does not spend, this is renunciation only in a special sense. It must not be understood wholly as sacrifice or loss. Tatiana herself does not indulge in explanation, as Byron does for his Donna Julia and as Tatiana’s sentimentalist predecessors most assuredly would have done. She does not motivate or justify her action beyond her one efficient statement to Evgeny, and the frame surrounding her final monologue is stripped of almost all narrative commentary. She simply departs. And just as we must not read Tatiana backward to those over-determined eighteenth-century heroines, so must we resist reading her forward. It is a mistake, I submit, to see in Tatiana a realistic heroine out of Turgenev or Tolstoy, a woman with a strictly biographical fate and fully psychologized significance.

Some highly unorthodox implications will be eased out of this idea at the end of this essay; but now to return to the mature Tatiana as Muse. I suggest that she be appreciated not as tragic heroine or renunciatory object but as a special sort of dynamic poetic principle, authoritative because of its lucidity, its ability to maintain all its parts intact under pressure, and its willingness not to spend impulsively merely to resolve the external, overtly manifest plot. This reading shares some terrain with the intriguing hypothesis put forth by the great Soviet developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky, whose chapter 10 of his youthful treatise *The Psychology of Art* contains a reading of *Evgenii Onegin*.²² Because we are predisposed to assume static protagonists in this tightly spinning verse tale, Vygotsky argues, Pushkin easily confounds us with his misleading symmetries. All the loves, love letters, and parallel confrontations that so neatly mirror one another distract us from the possibility that both hero and heroine have genuinely matured by the end of the novel. Vygotsky takes seriously the dozen or so questions that crowd into stanzas VII and VIII of chapter 8: “Is it really Onegin? Could it be him? Is he the same or has he changed? What’s he like now? Do you recognize him? Yes and no . . .” (ellipsis in original). These questions matter, Vygotsky intimates, because real inner change is never perfectly transcribable on the outside. In the first half of the novel, so taken up with descriptions of Onegin’s cluttered,

thing-packed life, the narrator does indeed give the illusion of biographical transcribability—but that is because on both sides, love begins as an artficial construct. Onegin is defined as “the sort of person who cannot be the victim of a tragic love,” Tatiana as the maiden who falls in love with a fabrication of her own devising and thus must perish. But then, Vygotsky argues, “Pushkin develops the story against the grain of the material.” He introduces real drama—which, unlike the expected, fixed outcomes of sentimentalism or tragedy, is always open. According to Vygotsky, the greatest art always prepares us for this sort of catharsis. What we see in great dramatic art is only one provisional resolution; and the more lucid and lighthearted this resolution is, the more it bespeaks a plurality of other possible resolutions swarming underneath. Vygotsky claims that Pushkin’s poetry always contains at least two contradictory feelings; when these opposing impulses collide, we experience aesthetic delight.²³

THE ENDING: PERHAPS IT DIDN’T HAPPEN?

The final portion of this essay is undertaken in Vygotsky’s developmental spirit. Throughout *Evgenii Onegin*, the narrator sings the praises of the perfectly calibrated and predictable life: “Blazhen, kto smolodu byl molod / Blazhen, kto vovremia sozrel” (Blessed is he who is young in his youth / Blessed is he who matures at the right time) (8, X). The advice is apt, for the plot of the novel is one massive demonstration of the unblissful effects of ill-timed growth and missed opportunity. But juxtaposed to this value is a corollary that celebrates open, uncertain process: the magic crystal and the “free novel” only dimly discerned in it. These two values are best focused in the conflict between Onegin’s letter to Tatiana and her excruciatingly delayed response, which brings him to her feet.

Tatiana in that final encounter is perfect control and passionate constraint. Whatever she means, she will not spend that meaning in the present tense of the novel; when she leaves, she carries that energy poised within her. In contrast, surely one of the more discrediting aspects of Onegin’s lovesick letter is that he now spends extravagantly. He has collapsed entirely into the present, which must hold the promise of her presence: “Ia utrom dolzhen byt’ uveren / Chto s vami dnem uvizhus’ ia” (In the morning I must be assured that I will see you in the afternoon). Evgeny now imagines his life desperately closed down. As if recalling the narrator’s warning—“No zhalok tot, kto vse predvidit” (Pitiable is he who foresees everything) (4, LI)—Onegin opens his letter to Tatiana on a hopeless note: “Predvizhu vse” (I foresee everything) (8, XXXII). We recall how he had facilely predicted disaster for marriage in his initial remonstrance with Tatiana over her letter; now he sees the grim side of just such an approach to life, so unavailable for surprise or

renewal. It is not that Onegin is dishonest. Quite the contrary: as several scholars have noted and as I remarked above, in his own letter to Tatiana, Onegin is more conscientious at recalling their shared past than is Tatiana in her reconstruction of events during their final accounting. Onegin is honest enough; his problem is that he has lost all control over time, all sense of time’s richness and unpredictability, and he is thus unable to displace or contain himself. At just this point the narrator pulls out abruptly, without having sealed the plot with a marriage or a death (as Pushkin’s friends complained), with Tatiana fully contained and Onegin wholly vulnerable. Such elegant reversals and symmetries have encouraged some astute Pushkinists to see in *Onegin* a variant of the Echo and Narcissus myth.²⁴ But if process-narratives and Pushkin’s own capriciously parodic practice urge us to anything, it would be to distrust the absolute illusion of the mirror. Is there any way that this poetically symmetrical ending might be opened up into the hopeful, linear type of narrative, kaleidoscopically complicated and strewn with potentials, that the “magic crystal” of this novel appears to value so highly?

In response to that question, let us pursue an alternative reading of chapter 8. Taking our cue from its opening digression (also billed as a belated introduction), this final chapter will be about the Muse: how the poet-narrator has glimpsed her image—radiant, volatile, caressing, *savage*—at crucial moments in his life. Apprehensively, the narrator now brings his Muse for the first time “na svetskii raut” (into high society) (8, VI). In her ultimate embodiment, however, she is no cause for apprehension: respectful of hierarchy and order, she has mastered the chill decorum of the salon and works flawlessly within it.²⁵ The Muse is Tatiana, and this is her final enabling transfiguration.

And Onegin? He has always been more aggressively stubborn and contrary, yawning where he should applaud, foreseeing everything, opposing himself to poets. Having suffered this extraordinary, inexplicable onset of love, he is at first totally without mechanisms for processing its effects. But the sequence of his reawakening is worth noting. Whereas before he had reflected his exquisite image in various mirrors, reacted trivially to events, attended little or not at all to memory, and distracted himself at life’s various feasts, now his past begins to align itself in answerable patterns and haunt him. His attempts to confess this inner shift to Tatiana are rebuffed. As a man who had always preferred the fashionable closed forms of disillusionment and despair, how convenient it would be to act out the romantic hero who can spend recklessly, throw himself at his beloved’s mercy and be done with it; then he might return to that familiar state where, once again, events begin boisterously, end tediously, and life holds no secrets because always “khandra zhdala ego na strazhe” (spleen lay in wait for him) (2, LIV). But if Tatiana as provincial maiden was vulnerable to such Byronic posturing, Tatiana as mature, creative Muse is absolutely indifferent to this tempera-

ment. She now contains her energy like a standing wave, composed and resonant, and is no longer needful of outside provocation. Onegin seeks signs of confusion, compassion, some trace of tears on her face, but detects nothing: "Ikh net, ikh net!" (There aren't any, aren't any!) (8, XXXIII). Eerily, Onegin begins to "tune himself" to Tatiana, to duplicate her trajectory in the novel. He withdraws, grows pale, begins to read obsessively. But he cannot keep her at bay; in her realm—a realm that absorbs and reworks rather than reflects—memory is born; Evgeny's past begins to intrude, he is forced to come to terms with the trivial and violent acts of his youth; and as backdrop to this birth of a responsible biography, between the lines of his reading, he sees a country house, "I u okna / Sidit ona . . . i vse ona!" (And at the window she sits . . . always she!) (8, XXXVII).

Against the grain of most readings of the final chapter, I suggest that at this point in the novel all real interaction between the hero and heroine ends. To be sure, Evgeny "ne sdelalsia poetom, / Ne umer, ne soshel s uma" (did not become a poet, did not die, did not go out of his mind) (8, XXXIX). But the winter was not an easy one. Unable to settle accounts with the past or project a future because of the unforgiving needs of his present, driven to despair by Tatiana's nonresponsiveness and stimulated by a season of indiscriminate reading, Onegin commits the only act that can bring about a permanent present tense in his life: he *fantasizes* his final visit. The strangeness of that sudden visitation has long been noted by critics.²⁶ The speed with which Evgeny moves through the city toward his beloved, the uncanny absence of any domestics at the door or in the halls of the Prince's house, the extraordinary ease with which Evgeny gains access to Tatiana's boudoir—all this has been interpreted variously as dreamlike activity, fairy-tale logic, or the narrator's irony. Indeed, hints of dream space prefigure Evgeny's infatuation in chapter 8, immediately after his reacquaintance with Tatiana: "That girl . . . or is it a dream?" (XX; ellipsis in original); and later, Evgeny's "sleep [son] is disturbed by fantasies [*mechtoi*] now melancholy, now charming" (XXI).²⁷ But as we approach the final decisive tête-à-tête, we come upon many more fantastical and fantasizing details that signify a more substantial phase change, not only in the hero but in the larger narration as well.

The first three dozen stanzas in chapter 8, and especially the elegiac, quasi-autobiographical digression on the Muse that opens the final chapter, is almost entirely free of the narrator's ironic and undercutting banter. Now that tone is back, jostling Onegin, "moi neispravlennyi chudak" (my unreformed eccentric) and making asides to the reader at his expense: "Kuda . . . / Stremit Onegin? Vy zarane / Uzh ugadali" (You've already guessed / where Onegin is rushing) (8, XXXIX–XL). At an ominously rapid pace, the narrative begins to resemble *erlebte Rede* or inner speech: "He was hurrying to her, to his own Tatiana" (k svoei Tat'iane)—since when is she "his own"? Only in the reality of his own deep longing. Unseen by anyone, he slips into her private

rooms; it is, after all, a mental journey he has now been *rehearsing* for months. But two conditions must obtain before the creative *inner fantasy* can begin to unfold in earnest. First, Onegin must reassure himself that Tatiana cares for him, that she spends the same obsessive time over his image that he has spent over hers, that she weeps (albeit in private) and that there are traces of "confusion, compassion and tears" on her face. Second, he must be persuaded that time is reversible.

The second condition is held in suspension: Is she in fact the "prezhniaia Tania" (former Tania) of earlier years, and can that image be recovered? Until the very end of the scene, the reader is not allowed to know. The first condition, however, is easy to imagine and is immediately supplied. It is the stock-in-trade device of the beloved woman accidentally discovered, alone, "neubrana, bledna" (not yet made up, pale), shedding tears over passionate letters sent her by her repentant lover. (Pushkin will use this scene to healthy comic effect in "Baryshnia-krest'ianka" [The Lady-Peasant], the last of the *Belkin Tales*.) Tatiana does not cast him away but neither does she urge him on; she is as impassive as a shade. In this intense and static scene, what does Evgeny seek? He is still no poet; he is not being endowed with a poetic Muse. But Tatiana is available to him, I suggest, as inner conscience, and it is this voice that is internalized in him and matures in her presence.

Interpretations of Tatiana as Onegin's "fatum," as "the tangible expression of the weight of his conscience," are not new in the literature on this final scene.²⁸ But such readings assume that the Tatiana of this scene is real; it is only Evgeny's conscience and the quality of his love that might be fraudulent. I argue the opposite case here: that precisely because Evgeny's love and suffering are real, because there has been this genuine, inexplicable change in him brought about by—who knows?—the passage of time, or love, Tatiana does not need to be physically present; she can be conjured up, which is, after all, the proper ontological state for an ethical Muse. Nowhere in his drafts or variants for chapter 8 does Pushkin suggest that such was his intention. But we do know that Pushkin worried over the ending of his novel and experimented with various means for deepening the reader's knowledge of the hero, including a travel diary and a salon album, both ultimately abandoned. As Leslie O'Bell chronicles the novel's composition: "It was the *razv-jazka* or resolution that came hard. . . . The Journey and the Album, like the sequence in Onegin's Library, were both devices for the self-revelation of the hero."²⁹ I argue here that Tatiana's crowning lecture to Onegin can be read in precisely this way, as a "self-revelation of the hero."

Astute readers have long expressed dissatisfaction with this final encounter. Vladimir Nabokov, arguing against the mass of "passionately patriotic eulogies of Tatiana's virtue," insists that her altruistic rejection of Onegin is simply a cliché of French, English, and German romantic novels and, what is more, that "her answer to Onegin does not at all ring with such

dignified finality as commentators have supposed it to do.”³⁰ More radically, T. E. Little urges us to take the entire love relation between Tatiana and Onegin as ironic from the start: Tatiana’s silence might well be due neither to moral strength nor clandestine pining but simply to indifference or disgust, and the ending scenario, where “sentimental heroine meets a reconstructed Byronic hero,” is simply “a typical Pushkinian jest” in which Tatiana mercilessly teases her victim.³¹ Richard Gregg, turning to the form and content of Tatiana’s final monologue, finds in it a dozen inaccuracies, or, more kindly, subjectively emotional opinions on Tatiana’s part that unfairly slander Evgeny.³² Such verdicts are justly motivated by a sense that something is awry in this final scene. But to my mind they unjustly trivialize both parties—and especially the hero.

Gregg is certainly correct that Tatiana’s memory is faulty and her tone with Evgeny gratingly abrupt. I would go further: her tone is almost male, as if this painful but necessary denouement had to begin with Evgeny addressing a portion of his own self. In my scenario, of course, he is. (Tatiana refers to him throughout as “Onegin,” the way men do to one another, the way Evgeny did with Lensky). In fact, much of what she says to him makes better sense if understood self-referentially, as confession. Tatiana rejects Onegin—just as his inner self, now more sensitively attuned and responsible to its own past, knows that she must. If Tatiana now remembers “only severity” (*odnu surovost’*) in Onegin’s reaction to her letter and reproaches him for his “cold glance” and “sermon,” we know that this misrepresents his actual tone and tenderness on that day. Under present conditions, however, Onegin quite forgivably desires to punish himself for having let something pass him by that is now so utterly indispensable to him. Onegin also knows in his heart (and thus Tatiana makes the point to him explicitly and repeatedly) that at crucial moments in their unsynchronized courtship he had indeed acted honorably, given what he was and what he knew about himself at the time.

Tatiana’s final speech is peculiar in other ways. Measured against the one anguished and hopelessly loving letter of Evgeny’s that we are shown in the text, Tatiana’s response is capricious, harsh, and explicit in ways unseemly for a woman of her tact and station. Although Evgeny does indeed have erotic designs on her person, Tatiana gives him very little quarter (that is, for a woman in love, as she claims she is); she insinuates that he loves her now primarily because she is rich, noble, close to the court, married to a battle-scarred older man of princely rank, and that this love could only serve to bring shame upon her and “scandalously alluring fame” (*soblaznitel’naia chest’*) to him. Again, where such aggressive candor might seem inappropriate from the tactful, superbly disciplined Tatiana (even if temporarily reverted to her more innocent and untrained rural self), Evgeny, freshly burdened with a conscience about his past, could easily have had such shameful suspicions about *himself*, and might wish to exacerbate them in a punitive reflex

of self-castigation. One of the final monologue’s most often-quoted lines—“i schast’e bylo tak vozmozhno, tak blizko” (and happiness was so possible, so close) (8, XLVII)—is, logically speaking, only something that Evgeny could say; in that now-distant time, lest we forget, it was only for him, who held all the male rights to initiative in these matters, that “happiness was close and possible.” From the very first line of her desperate love letter, Tatiana had been always in a terrible state of risk and premature intimacy. In Tatiana’s final speech, however, love is not the primary value. The recurring themes are those male virtues so precious to Pushkin himself: *upriamstvo* (stubbornness), *gordost’* (pride), *chest’* (honor).

When Tatiana abruptly rises and leaves the room, Evgeny is “kak budto gromom porazhen” (as if struck by thunder). Usual readings of this denouement admit of irony, or (in more earnest interpretations) of Evgeny’s simple shock at her moral excellence, her self-control, and the concomitant painful ridiculousness of his own position. In the present fantasized context, however, the thunderbolt is one of realization and inner growth. No wonder Evgeny is impressed at her speech. It belongs to him, to his own better self, to his conscience (which is the Muse now speaking from within, available for inspiration and inner moral orientation). Evgeny is still no poet, in the sense that Lensky and the narrator are poets. But the ideal inner companion that Tatiana had become for him could in fact serve many purposes.

And here we might speculate on the end of *Onegin* in the context of Pushkin’s own creative biography. By 1829 Pushkin himself was beginning to investigate other, more prosaically grounded muses. These included the muse of prose, of history, perhaps of his own imminent marriage. What all these new conditions have in common—and here we should recall the second condition that Onegin longed for in his fantasy with Tatiana, the one that was not granted him—is the realization that time is irreversible. The hero of reversible time had been the chameleonlike “salon pretender” of the mid-1820s, epitomized by the flexible, carefree Dmitry *Samozvanets*, a man whose many masks were all equally authentic and for whom a search for a “real self” would have been utterly inappropriate. By the turn of the decade this “reversible” pretender is about to be replaced in Pushkin’s creative imagination by the somber, infinitely more serious one-way pretendership of Pugachev, for whom risks are high and historical responsibility is real.

Evgenii Onegin presages this shift. When Tatiana walks out, Evgeny is left with an irreversibly needful self that feels the weight of events in time. When the General’s clanking spurs are heard, both Onegin and the reader look up with that sinking, anguished feeling that comes upon us when we are caught “in the act”; that is, in the middle of a terribly necessary, deeply private, still partly illicit conversation with a beloved and loving voice whose intimations of truth about ourselves we have only begun to summon the courage to confront.

Whither Tatiana? Contrary to the teachings of Belinsky (with whom the critical history of *Evgenii Onegin* began, and under whose brooding person much of it remains), and contrary to the childhood passion of the precocious Marina Tsvetaeva, so taken with that “unlove scene on the bench,”³³ we cannot worry about Tatiana’s fate. Muses do not have fates in that sense. Even to put that question to the text is a modal impropriety. *Evgenii Onegin* is neither a sentimental eighteenth-century novel nor a realistic novel of the Tolstoyan or Dostoevskian sort.³⁴ Rather it belongs, as one critic aptly placed it, in a group of two together with *Dead Souls*: a one-time-only novelistic experiment in form and genre by a genius in a transitional period.³⁵ For as the Formalist critics repeatedly remind us, this is a novel in verse, and the verse component constantly deforms both the shape of the work and the personalities that mature within the work.³⁶

Here we might heed the advice of one of America’s most seasoned Pushkin scholars, Thomas Shaw, who warns: Do not overemphasize the prosiness of Pushkin’s novel. Although the hero does not become an actual producer of poems, “actually, the entire novel suggests the importance of being poetic. Perhaps the basic underlying question of the novel is not simply the stages of development, but how a poet (or the poetic in man) can develop to maturity and remain, or once more become, poetic.”³⁷ With these priorities, the eponymous hero still remains the hero. Tatiana is best appreciated as a *verse presence* in the work. She is there to enable what Shaw calls Evgeny’s “mature re-enchantment,” an inner process that, once having begun, releases him from the need to be narrated from without. In this reading, *Evgenii Onegin* is a finished work, over when it is over and complete as it stands. With its mixed sense of gratitude, nostalgia, and absolute irreversibility, the final leave-taking of the poet-narrator resembles Tatiana’s abrupt departure several stanzas earlier, which had brought Evgeny to his senses. The truncated end is thus another well-constructed illusion, designed to launch the now matured and newly sobered hero across an unimagined threshold where we cannot follow him. In the final stanzas, Pushkin dismisses his readers with the same congenial, leisurely open-endedness that he invests in Onegin’s unknown future. And it is Tatiana’s very poeticity, I have argued, that enabled this emergence of a genuinely *novelistic* hero. May we all part on such self-respecting terms with our creations.

Jane T. Costlow

“Oh-là-là” and “No-no-no”: Odintsova as Woman Alone in *Fathers and Children*

Turgenev Women discuss events,
know about actors,
look for oil,
talk about medicine,
perform on the stage . . .
Turgenev Women in the morning mist,
Turgenev Women right beside you . . .¹

“TURGENEV WOMEN,” the contemporary song suggests, look for oil and go to sea, descend into subways and peel potatoes—asking us to believe that the superachieving, inexhaustible (and exhausted) women of late- and post-Soviet Russia are the spiritual and literal daughters of Ivan Turgenev’s heroines. Can there truly be a connection? Surely ironic, rather than direct, to imagine Natalya, Liza, and Elena, among others, as Heroines of Labor (or Heroines of Love)? To pose the question as Vasily Shumov does is to ask, in a slightly offbeat way, what the legacy of Turgenev is for Russia; what connection there is between classical Russian culture and contemporary daily life (*byt*); and for our own purposes—as American and not Russian readers—how we can “read” these novels of more than a century ago, from a culture not our own. For in reading nineteenth-century novels we ourselves head out to sea a bit, or set off in search of black gold: compelled (or repelled) by figures who are both familiar and distant to us, convinced that there are ways in which their lives and identities, despite historical distance and difference, nonetheless reflect for us some of our own dilemmas. Who are these Turgenev women, and how can we read them? How can we let them read us?

The central heroines in each of Turgenev’s first three novels—Natalya in *Rudin*, Liza in *A Nest of Gentle Folk*, and Elena in *On the Eve*—are young women of great conviction and courage, qualities that at the novels’ beginnings seem to exist only *in potentio*, but are elicited and actualized by the