

On chapter One: L -LX The Significance of the Water Mill

Motoko Yoshikawa

In this section Nabokov discusses the structure of *Eugene Onegin*, especially drawing attention to its features as a novel.

He looks at the following line: "and with this I began my novel" (One:LII:11) and points out that, here, the story goes back to the beginning where Onegin is informed of his uncle's critical condition, and the "circle" of fifty two stanzas is completed. The "daily rounds" of Onegin's life forms the smaller concentric circle within the bigger one. Nabokov points out that the propelling force of these circles are the digressive spirit, and quotes Sterne: ". . . my work is digressive... and it is progressive, too. . . . Digressions, incontestably, are the sun-shine--they are the life, the soul of reading." Given the special attention of Nabokov on this subject, the variant of this line, "Ivan said: Here we are!" is worthy of attention. It is merely the coachman announcing the arrival at his uncle's manor, and are seemingly irrelevant to the final version. However, the coachman's call "here we are!" seems to have given, by accident, the idea of "here" in terms of storytelling. Here, the reader is reminded of the narrator's presence. Such an intersection of two dimensions is very Nabokovian, and is often found in his own works as well.

The most impressive commentary in this section is the detailed analysis of the water route that runs throughout the country estate. First, Nabokov calls attention to the difference in Pushkin's depiction of summer and winter. Pushkin's scenery always contains brooks and streams meandering through bosquets and making sounds as the water flow, but such Edenic pictures come not from the actual observation of nature but from the literary landscape imported from 16-18th century Western European poetry. For

example, the "brook meandering through a meadow" that surrounds Lenski's tomb in Chapter 7, has an echo of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1532) from which Pushkin has translated some octaves into Russian. On the other hand, Pushkin's winter is a Russian one with frozen brooks, but with far greater art than those of his predecessors and contemporaries. Nabokov thus picks up even the smallest mention of water to reproduce the map of waterways and tries to show how they connect the three estates: Onegin's, Larin's and Lenski's. And conclude that they all pertain to one point: The mill near the site where Lenski and Onegin's duel takes place. The discovery of such water vein enables us to see the mill as symbolic to the whole of *Eugene Onegin*; the flow of the meandering brooks represents the digressive spirit of the narrative, and the mill the intersection of those digressive circles.

Water is Nabokov's favorite leitmotif, and a close comparison with his complex use of it in his own works, such as *Ada* and *Bend Sinister* to name a few, will no doubt lead to interesting discoveries.