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PUSHKIN’S THE TALES OF THE LATE IVAN PETROVICH BELKIN AND THE LITTLE TRAGEDIES: THEMATIC UNITY IN TWO KEYS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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*****

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines two literary cycles in Pushkin’s oeuvre in their intratextual interaction. The cycles are: *The Little Tragedies* and *The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin*, both written during Pushkin’s famous “Boldino autumn” of 1830 in very different genres (tragedies – short stories of the anecdotal type). Comparisons between the two cycles are rare in literary criticism and limited to casual observations. This dissertation establishes that neither cycle can be fully understood without the other. Each cycle is united by an overarching idea, but this idea is ultimately the same in both works, albeit presented in two different keys – minor in drama and major in prose. *The Tragedies* deal mainly with the “Cain” type of personality, engaged in futile rebellion against Fate leading to self-destruction. *The Tales* feature mainly “Abel” type living in intuitive harmony with the laws of life. Each cycle contains both types of personality, often in situations of conflict, or contrast, with each other. In addition, the two cycles themselves are in relation of similarity and contrast, mirroring each other in intricate *mise-en-abyme* effects.
The dissertation demonstrates a multiplicity of echoes, refractions, referencing between the two cycles, never observed before. Employing the principles of transposition studies (established by Caryl Emerson), intratextual comparison and cyclization theory, this dissertation casts an entirely new light on the meaning of the purportedly trifling *Belkin Tales* and adds new interpretative aspects to *The Tragedies*. It ties together the valuable separate insights of older Pushkinists, such as Gershenzon, and modern ones, such as Bethea, Schmid, and Golstein, into a new vision of Pushkin’s creativity during the Boldino autumn, linking texts previously rarely considered relevant to each other.
DEDICATION

To C. A. M.
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INTRODUCTION

THE TALES OF THE LATE IVAN PETROVICH BELKIN:
PUBLICAND AND RECEPTION

In the view of scholars of Russian literature, the year 1831 was marked by an event of great significance: a cycle of five short stories under the title of *The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin* appeared. The "editor" of the cycle was designated by the initials "A. P." Critics and readers of Pushkin's time took little interest in these stories, perceiving them as banal. Their general view was that *The Tales* contained conventional plots, standard romantic heroes and typical situations involving passionate love, hate, revenge, duel, elopements, mistaken identities and similar well-known literary components. All these, for the most part, disappointed Pushkin's readers at the time of *The Tales*’ publication. Some found them to be a just passable entertainment, while others thought even less of them.¹ Aleksandr Pushkin's already declining popularity sank even deeper, since it was he who was the author of the cycle, hiding behind the initials of "A. P." At the last moment and hoping to increase the number of
the sold copies, Pushkin asked his publisher Pletnev to quietly send a hint to the
central public about the real author of *The Tales*, but even this did not save the book's
and the author's reputation; Pushkin found himself attacked by old friends and
fellow-writers alike.²

Today, it is almost impossible to imagine Pushkin not being regarded highly
by his fellow countrymen. Yet, in the second half of the nineteenth century,
Pushkin's reputation had to be defended by a propagator of national values, the
critic Apollon Grigoriev who appreciated the aesthetic aspect of Pushkin's prose
and saw in *The Tales* the glorification of a man returning to the Russian soil.
Although Grigoriev's ideas were largely invalidated as time went on, his main
contribution to Pushkin criticism lies in his identification of an important
Pushkinian dichotomy; he pointing out that the Russian poet offers two clear
cut, radically opposite types of personalities in this prosaic work: the active and
the passive.³ Grigoriev's was the first expression of a positive attitude toward
*The Tales*, whose importance otherwise went unrecognised even by Vissarion
Belinsky, the critic who was known for his ability to recognise masterpieces at
first reading. Indeed, even several years after the cycle's publication, Belinsky
could not make anything of these tales and called them "trifles."⁴

Despite the negative critical attention received by *The Tales* through the end
of the nineteenth century, their reputation as a work of literature grew and they
enjoyed more and more popularity among the reading public, becoming an essential part of any anthology of Russian literature.\(^5\) Now they are read by Russian school children and taught to foreign students of Russian as early as during the first year of their language and culture studies. Undergraduate students of Russian literature in the United States often begin their readings in Russian with *The Tales*. No collection of *The Tales* ever fails to mention the significance of this work as providing the foundation for the development of Russian prose. It is commonly observed that *The Tales* both sum up many Russian literary achievements of the eighteenth century and provide the groundwork for the subsequent development of the Russian short story.

In the twentieth century, critics, taking note of the growing attention of the reading public to *The Tales*, increasingly gave them more positive evaluations. Mirsky considered them well-constructed pieces of prose; yet, following in Belinsky's footsteps, defined them once again as "trifles."\(^6\) Gershenzon advanced the notion that Pushkin's work was more complex than the author had cared to reveal and, following Grigoriev, stated that Pushkin had encoded the two sides of his personality in these texts.\(^7\) Many contemporary critics find *The Tales* the most challenging and controversial texts in the whole of Pushkin's oeuvre. However, even contemporary scholars lack a clear vision of the significance of *The Tales*. Pointing to the uniqueness of Pushkin's prose -- its
conciseness, precision, rigid plot structure (сюжетность) and the delight of its naked simplicity (прелесть накой простоты) -- they nevertheless fail to explain why The Tales actually never had much of an impact on subsequent prose, although the critics say otherwise. Neither Gogol, the ornamentalist, nor the amorphous Tolstoy with his marked lack of plot (бессюжетност), or Dostoevsky with his convoluted syntax and detailed psychological analysis followed the Pushkinian path.

Deciphering the Meaning of The Tales as a Focal Point of the Present Study.

The main critical problem of The Tales stems from their apparent lack of meaning. While existing scholarship as a rule centers on the formal side of Pushkin's prose, i.e. how it is written, the most fundamental of all critical questions, i.e. What is the work about? -- has been posed rarely and has yet to be answered satisfactorily. It is usually stated that the ideological, philosophical or even simply thematic unity of the five Belkin Tales has not been discovered or substantially demonstrated, and "efforts to discover some organising principle uniting the pieces have not proved convincing." After all, the most authoritative reference compilations (while agreeing on the formal issue of Belkin Tales where "the pieces are ironical treatments of romantic types,
situations and styles") have to admit that the thematic aspect of this experimental cycle still remains largely unexplained. But Pushkin himself wherever possible stated that his goal as a prose writer was to put forward an idea (мысль), that prose required "thoughts, thoughts, and more thoughts." In his critical article "On Prose" («О прозе»), for example, Pushkin states:

«Точность и краткость — вот первые достоинства прозы. Она требует мыслей и мыслей — без них блестящие выражения ни к чему не служат. Стих дело другое». Did the author fail to fulfil his own basic requirements then? or has his central idea been overlooked by Pushkinists? This dissertation intends to demonstrate that Pushkin did fulfil his own requirement and that Pushkinists have overlooked something. In my view, the quest for мысль enters other genres with which he worked concurrently in Boldino in 1830, a period that marks the peak of Pushkin's career both qualitatively and quantitatively.10

Interpretations of The Tales often include two mutually exclusive premises sometimes propagated by one and the same scholar:

Premise number one: The Tales were written by Pushkin -- a philosopher of genius and one of the greatest thinkers of his time at the peak of his creativity, who wrote philosophical works concentrating on мысль (“ideas”), after such masterpieces as Boris Godunov had been completed and Eugene Onegin was
nearing its completion; (Dostoevsky, Apollon Grigoriev, Mirsky, Tomashevsky, Vinogradov, Davydov, Bethea, Kodjak, Rassadin, Gregg, Todd, Debreczeny.)

Premise number two: Pushkin wrote his Tales "for fun," to "amuse himself" crafting simple and naive "trifles" in order to "play with devices" and "entertain his audience." (Belinsky, Mirsky, Tomashevsky, Vinogradov, Terras, Debreczeny, Todd, Mersereau.)

The present researcher disagrees with the second premise, since it is a well-known fact that Pushkin's audience was disappointed with the writer's experiments in prose fiction and refused to be entertained by them. It is also useful to remember that Pushkin cared very little, if at all, about entertaining the public, especially at this late stage in his life and career. Many works written by him in the 1830s remained unfinished, unpublished or published only partially. For example, the cycle of The Little Tragedies written in Boldino concurrently with The Tales never saw light under one cover ("The Stone Guest" was never published in Pushkin's lifetime and "The Covetous Knight" came out under the signature of "R"). As to the cycle of The Tales, they saw the light anonymously under an ambiguous pseudonym -- "A. P." and remained the least understood work in Pushkin's entire oeuvre.

The goal of the present study is to answer the question posed by the "Belkin riddle": what is the central idea of The Tales? what provides the thematic unity
and makes them a cycle? and why were they written at all? Was it really for the alleged "development of Russian prose?" Without denying that Pushkin wanted to further the development of Russian prose, I am convinced that he, like any other author, wished to convey his own cherished concept.

Contrary to much traditional opinion, the stance adopted in the present dissertation is that The Tales have a distinct idea, which examines the relationship between man and his Fate. This idea, it is furthermore postulated, provides the basic unity for the cycle of The Tales and links them with the cycle of The Little Tragedies. In my view, these two cycles cannot be persuasively discussed or explained unless brought to bear upon each other, unless they are compared and contrasted. The two works explore the same metaphysical concept and examine it in two variations: man's struggle against Fate in The Tragedies and man who is attuned to divine Providence in The Tales. I furthermore explore the importance of this concept for the understanding of the entire body of Pushkin's works.

The Urgency of the Present Research.

Haven't there been enough Pushkin studies lately? My answer obviously is no. I would even argue that there is an urgent need to turn to the very problems I am examining. Pushkin remains one of the most ambiguous authors in
Russian literature, and literary scholarship has done little to dispel the mystery. Hopefully, the pending bicentennial commemorations in 1999 will contribute much to the needed clarity. The problem, however, is that in Russia, Pushkin, the national poet, cannot be studied objectively. Pushkinian scholarship is flooded by so called "patriotic," "moral," "religious," and "nationalist" approaches. In the West, there are many valuable studies but these tend to concentrate on Pushkin's art, especially his prose, as "creative play." Without denying the validity of any of these investigations, I maintain that the ideological level of the Belkin Tales has been virtually neglected or purposefully distorted. There are exceptions of course. Andrej Kodjak treated The Tales as Pushkin's coded response to the Decembrist uprising with Belkin as its chronicler. The brilliant Russian scholar Stanislav Rassadin touched on the problem of The Tales in his book with a detailed analysis of yet another Pushkin cycle -- The Little Tragedies, written in 1830 in Boldino concurrently with The Tales. Rassadin states that the author analysed four historical stages of the development of modern civilisation in the four dramas of the cycle. Interesting as these studies are, they pursue too limited a perspective. Above all, these scholars discuss only one of the two cycles without attempting to link them together. The present researcher is persuaded, however, that there cannot
be a valid deciphering of either cycle unless they are studied in relation to each other.

**The Most Common Approach To The Tales In Modern Scholarship And Its Shortcomings.**

Until now, the most common critical approach to *The Tales* has been essentially formal concentrating on the discussion of the cycle's narrative structures with its intricate set of fictitious narrators. This structure is indeed complex. In his introduction to the collection, the publisher A. P. offers to the reading public five stories by a certain Ivan Petrovich Belkin, an impoverished landowner and amateur writer who has neither a solid education, nor significant social standing. By the time of the publication, Belkin is already dead. In a letter to the publisher (included in the preface), a former acquaintance of Belkin's mentions that his late friend did not write, in the sense of "invent," but merely recorded and compiled the stories and anecdotes of *The Tales.* These had been told to him at different times by various people of little significance, namely the Titular Councilor A. G. N., the shop-keeper B. V., the young lady K. I. T., and the low ranking military officer I. L. P. The publisher's (A. P.'s) introduction is followed by the five stories which appear in the following order:

Concentration on the intricate set of narrators in *The Tales* has become the most common subject of studies devoted to the cycle. Critics usually point out that this device adds originality and novelty to Pushkin's experimental prose works. The narrative texture of *The Tales* is seen as diverse since it comes from various sources; the narrators, after all, are of both sexes and greatly differ in occupation and class origins. Therefore, the reader is tricked into the feeling that he is dealing with several discrete people rather than with one authorial voice. First of all, this manipulation creates the illusion of a believable account even if the plots themselves feature highly implausible twists and turns. Moreover, the introduction of a fictitious narrator as a private figure (частное лицо) establishes a sense of intimacy and promotes the mode of friendly communication. Focusing on the first person narrative and personal accounts ("factual material") intensifies the impression of "reality" and masks the artificiality of "literariness." The verity of the stories or various incongruities within them are thus glossed over, since the author achieves the impression of authenticity. Needless to say, Pushkin's contemporaries were not "tricked" into believing in the "reality" and "authenticity" of the five anecdotes, as we have
already demonstrated in the beginning of this introduction. This author is convinced that he never meant to.

Through the device of multiple framing Pushkin certainly expanded and added sophistication to the traditional frame of the short story structure. Pushkin-the-author (we should rather say the "implied author") is hiding behind the mask of the publisher A. P. who offers to the reading public stories written by a certain Ivan Petrovich Belkin, who in his turn is concealed by several other narrators, who had told him these tales. Thus the author Belkin is placed between the implied author and the fictitious narrators and in this position, his role is not easily discerned. What is his role? This question will be answered in the last Chapter of this dissertation.

What remains unclear in analysis of this kind, however, is why Pushkin decided to utilize this prose device, deliberately creating numerous ambiguities. Indeed, these ambiguities abound, i. e. at times, the reader even comes across various remarks and intrusions into the narrative stream within the text, which clearly must be labelled as authorial. For example,

Просвещенный читатель ведает, что Шекспир и Вальтер Скотт оба представили своих гробокопателей людьми веселыми и шутильными, дабы сей противоположностью сильнее поразить наше воображение. Из уважения к истине мы не можем следовать их примеру и принуждены признать, что
Who says this? The shopkeeper B. V.? or maybe Belkin, who was educated by a village priest? The answer is clear. These remarks belong to the implied author, since none of the narrators have the intelligence or education to make remarks of this type.

There is another conspicuous intrusion of the implied author which concludes the cycle. Its function is equally ambiguous: «Читатели избавят меня от излишней обязанности описывать развязку» (6-115). This device (or baring of the device) emphasizes the presence of the implied author, yet stylistically it is very difficult to distinguish his narrative style from that of Belkin. Whose opinions and literary practices do we encounter? Are these the words of the narrator, a provincial girl who loves romance and tells only romantic stories? Or those of the timid Mr. Belkin? Or is it the publisher who does not always keep his promises (he claims in the introduction that the letter of Belkin's friend is printed in full and without changes but later on edits out the most intriguing piece about Belkin's relationship with women.)

It is important to emphasise here that the editor A. P., despite his initials, is not strictly speaking Alexander Pushkin, but a parody on a professional literary
entrepreneur. Indeed, the editor tries to pass off amateurish and naive anecdotes as worthwhile pieces of literature representing national belle-lettres (отечественная словесность). To prove his point, he refers to a letter written by Belkin's acquaintance as a sufficient and reliable document, but the correspondent, a senile man and provincial estate-owner, obviously knows nothing about literature, cannot keep his chronology in order and constantly deviates from his subject.

Pushkin carefully concealed his personality behind the various naive modes of narration presented by his fictitious characters. Why? The formal critical approach argues that this device expands the narrative perspective and adds to the diversity within the cycle. I do not find this argument convincing. Although each narrator has a different approach to his subject, their styles of expression do not dramatically differ from each other, or from that of the publisher. In fact, in the entire cycle of The Tales, we do not encounter much skaz. "The Stationmanster" features the low-class speech characteristics in Samson Vyrin's account of his daughter's elopement. Samson starts telling the story, but after a few sentences, the narrator A. G. N. takes over and the neutral style of speech resumes. Another example is found in "The Lady Peasant." Here a peasant girl Nastia tells her mistress Lisa about a village party. Then Liza practices some of these colloquialisms in a conversation with Aleksei. All these examples occupy
no more than one page in the entire body of text in *The Tales*. Thus the assumption that Pushkin's achievement in *The Tales* lies in foreshadowing skaz do not have much ground. Even in "The Coffinmaker" dealing only with a lower class strata, we do not encounter any particular low-class speech characteristics either on the part of the characters or the storyteller, a shop assistant B. V., who, as has already been mentioned, seems strangely well versed in literature and passes occasional remarks on Shakespeare's and Walter Scott's literary creations. The narrator reveals a peculiar black sense of humour («мертвый без гроба не живет» (6-83)), but at the same time, treats coffins and catafalques not as symbols of death but simply as trade paraphernalia, or "goods." This incongruity between the comic and the tragic, between low-class observations and glimpses of intellectual sophistication add to the confusion of our perceptions; certainly we cannot derive from these tales any clear cut perspective of social categories or their representatives.

Nor has it been explained why the narrative structures of the five tales are not homogeneous. "The Coffinmaker," "The Blizzard," and "The Lady Peasant" are third person narratives, while "The Shot" and "The Stationmaster" are written in a more elaborate fashion. "The Shot" is a first person narrative presented in the form of a recollection by a military officer, A. G. N. However,
after setting the stage and introducing the central hero, Sil’vio, A. G. N. lets his hero tell his own story. After Sil’vio's departure, A. G. N. takes over again in order to tell of one more hero: Sil’vio's rival. This narrative shift introduces yet another first-person account before it gives way to the concluding remarks of the original narrator. Thus the events in the story are presented from the point of view of three different characters whose accounts are put together by Belkin. Moreover, each of the three characters tells the story of his past, i.e. a time when he was younger and had a different perception of life, as well as of himself. This device of shifting narrative modes and shifting points of view creates additional contradictions and frustrates the reader’s expectation. Just as the reader’s expectations begin to build up, the narrator terminates the plot development and undercuts the desired outcome. Sil’vio tolerates the insult during the card game and does not challenge his opponent to an expected duel; then when Sil’vio leaves to seek out his old enemy in order to take his revenge, the narrator loses contact with him. When he finally hears about Sil’vio, he finds out that the revenge turned out to be very different from everyone's expectations; even Sil’vio's death in the end does not add any clarification to his illogical behaviour. Why should the reader's expectations need to be constantly frustrated? After many retardations in the plot, we encounter an unpredictable
outcome, but fail to find any answers to the mysteries of the story and the protagonist's motives. Why?

The extensive discussions of the narrative structure of "The Stationmaster" also raise many questions about the story's message. Here we again encounter a first person narrator; he is a Titular Councillor and supposedly a middle-aged sentimental man who talks about his past experiences. His account tends to be the most emotional of all, even appealing to the reader's conscience, especially in the part where the narrator describes the miserable life of stationmasters. The story is not only told by him but is partially narrated by the old stationmaster. The principle narrator, A. G. N., occasionally indulges in mild implied didacticism through a lengthy description of the pictures in the Stationmaster's house. These depict the parable of the Prodigal Son, and create a "reverse pattern of fulfilled expectations," since the outcome of the story is just the opposite of the parable: the prodigal daughter finds happiness, and her devoted father dies of grief. But what is the message conveyed by such a variation on the Biblical parable? Why need it be told and why are the most important questions about the characters' motivations and Dunia's marital status still omitted from in the account and never conveyed to the patient reader?

It is all too obvious that the discussions of the formal aspects of The Tales, however interesting in themselves, can offer but limited conclusions: first of all,
Pushkin was working on the development of prose fiction and therefore wanted to elaborate its narrative structure; secondly, these narrations parody early nineteenth century prose writing, where each piece satirises a particular literary genre such as the romantic version of a classical novella ("The Shot"), a gothic tale ("The Coffinmaker"), a sentimental story of a country maiden and a nobleman ("The Lady Peasant" and "The Blizzard"). Victor Terras defines this approach as "parodic deconstruction" of the existing system of genres. However, the analysis of the parodistic genre structure does not provide any clues to why Pushkin chose to experiment in this particular way and to why he chose this particular set of devices.

Another approach to these works needs to be dismissed, namely that the choice of narrators can be explained by the popular assumption that their low social status would make their stories interesting to a certain lower class readership. I take strong exception to this theory. Although at first glance it could seem that the stories about the coffinmaker and the stationmaster would be very appealing to city dwellers of lower rank (such as Dostoevsky's Makar Devushkin), that "The Shot" reflects the tastes of military people, and stories of mistaken identities reveal the point of view of a romantic provincial girl, the pursuit of this idea leads to a dead end, since the incredible plots make all social identifications impossible. Above all, the reader has to keep in mind that
Pushkin was not a writer who believed that literature should deal with civic issues and social problems. Thus his fictitious narrators should not be considered representatives of social types and their words should not be examined for a social message.

Naturally, some interesting and very persuasive explanations for the use of the multiple narrator frame in the cycle have been given. For example, Paul Debreczeny states:

In the fiction that Pushkin is known to have read before 1827, the convention was that the author emerge as a distinct personality. The public is apt to be curious about the sources from whence the author draws his stories, doubtless that it may know how far to put faith in them.  

Pushkin's motivation, according to this critic, is to conceal his real personality from the public eye. Both in his poetry and his prose, Pushkin explicitly expressed his resistance to becoming a public figure.  

But what is it precisely that Pushkin-the-public figure and Pushkin-the-implied-author set out to conceal in *The Tales*? and why is the author of the fictitious narrative hiding inside so many concentric circles of narrative barriers?
Some Peculiarities Of Pushkin's Use Of Narrative Devices.

As we can see, the formal approach often used in the discussion of the function of the intricate set of narrators in *The Tales* assumes that Pushkin's primary interest was formal, on the scale of "playing" with the devices of prose. Therefore the critics arrive at the somewhat illogical conclusion that the author, who set out to deliberately write unrealistic stories with bizarre twists of plot, toyed with the device of the fictitious narrator to make the discourse more "fresh" (deautomatized) and hence "realistic." If this was the only task Pushkin set for himself, he most definitely failed to accomplish it: the *siuzhets* of *The Tales* remain as unrealistic when resolved (or unresolved) as they were in the course of their development. Another argument, that the device allowed him to "tease" those of his readers who wanted to read "useful" didactic literature dedicated to some social cause, seems valid at first but is just as specious. This would fit well with Pushkin's image of the poet in those verses, where it is stated that the poet is free to choose the subject for his songs and the mob (чёрнь) has no right to control his inspiration by, in this case, demanding moral lessons. However insignificant the poet's theme might seem to the crowd, the
poet should remain free to pursue it: «и не спросись ни у кого, как Дездемона, выбирает кумир для сердца своего» (6-250). Or:

Не для житейского волненья,
Не для корысти, не для битвы,
Мы рождены для вдохновенья,
Для звуков сладких и молитв. (3-86)

We must remember that Pushkin's choice of subject was never really whimsical, accidental or insignificant to him as an author, although it might seem insignificant to the mob (чернь). Indeed, some of his highly unusual works, such as long narrative poems Count Nulin or A Little House in Kolomna, or the fairy tale The Golden Cockerel are presented by the author to the public as a "tease":

«Воображайте, воля ваша!
Я не намерен вам помочь». (Count Nulin) (4-170)
«... Больше ничего
Не выжмешь из рассказа моего». (A Little House in Kolomna) (4-234)

But behind every teasing and unbelievable tale, Pushkin hides a profound message or even a "lesson," as he states it in his last fairy tale The Golden Cockerel:

«Сказка ложь, да в ней намек!
Добрым молодцам урок.» (4-358)
Needless to say, the “lesson” transcends utilitarian messages. The reason for the above discussion of the formal aspects of framing and the multiple narration technique at some length was to point out that formal scholarly approaches have driven the study of the *Belkin Tales* to a dead end. The formalist premise that the author plays with artistic devices in order to de-automatize reader perception is not all that goes on in Pushkin’s creative laboratory. For example, Tolstoy’s method of using a detail does indeed facilitate the vividness of our perception. This device “opens doors” to Tolstoy’s message. If he states that Andrei Bolkonsky’s hands (as well as his father’s) were small and white, he wants us to notice it; and we might encounter this device no less than six or eight times on one page of the text. Tolstoy-the-story-teller takes his reader "by the hand" and leads him to his artistic workshop: here, here, -- he says, -- look at this man's delicate aristocratic hands; this is his liability; such a man will never overcome his rational mentality and meticulous approach to life; his hands are too small and delicate to handle its rough reins. By insisting on his devices, Tolstoy builds thresh-holds and opens doors through which he leads us freely and comfortably, like little children, to his sermons and admonitions; and indeed, we perceive his creative intentions. Pushkin does not allow this to happen. His frames function more like an eighteenth-century suite of rooms with narrow doorways. The author shuts and
locks them one after another, as he is leaving us to wonder where we are going.

He seems to do everything possible to prevent his reader from deciphering the innumerable riddles encoded within the complex multilevel text. The more carefully the reader analyses the text, the more he wonders at how carefully Pushkin hides various incongruities which remained unnoticed at first glance.

In the same way the device of multiple narrators does not clarify but obscures the authorial message. The intricate narrative frame does not reveal but conceal the surprising fact that none of them really understands the meaning of the event which s/he narrates. Sure enough, the surprise ending (сюжетное ударение в конце) is supposed to unravel the mystery presented in the beginning, but in reality only a false impression of resolution is left. For example, one of the narrators in "The Shot" (the count) never asks himself why Sil’vio chose such a strange form of revenge; another narrator in the same story (A. G. N.) never wonders at Sil’vio’s everlasting dissatisfaction with life which led him to die while participating in a foreign revolutionary venture. The narrator of "The Stationmaster" never attempts to discover whether Dunia got married. The strange behaviour of Vladimir ("The Blizzard") who, after all his efforts and the happy resolution to all his problems, all of a sudden refuses to marry his beloved seems to attract little interest. These are just some aspects which are neglected in the formal analyses of *The Tales*. Moreover, the
compiler of the stories, Belkin, does not even attempt to explain away those dark issues, that were left to hang there by the purportedly simpleminded storytellers. Nor does the editor A. P. even point to these missing links. And the implied author remains silent.

While the story-tellers fail to realize the inner meaning of the events they are narrating to others, most Belkin Tales formalist scholars failed to ask what really unites them, what makes them a cycle. The narrators get too involved in the discussion of numerous details, and the formal critic is fascinated with the multiplicity of the narrators. Thus we tend to continue to read, analyse and explain The Tales as separate stories (истории) and do not see the unifying theme which makes them one story (история). This outcome was ironically, if not even sarcastically, predicted by Pushkin himself who supplied the collection with an epigraph from Fonvizin's The Minor. In this epigraph, the simpletons do not understand the term history (история) and interpret it as anecdotes (истории).

The Approach Of The Present Work

The key to understanding The Tales is to be found in the fact that they form a cycle united by an idea. My methodological approach to deciphering The Tales is intratextual in essence. It is based on the premise expounded above
that the Belkin cycle cannot be explained without being compared to yet another cycle written by Pushkin at the very same time, namely *The Little Tragedies*. In my view, the concurrently produced cycles are united by an idea and, furthermore, clearly treat the same "idea," or issue, -- one that very much occupied the writer's mind at the time of their creation. *The Tales* and *The Tragedies* are variations on the same theme which is transposed from the genre of the drama to the genre of the prose tale and presented in two different keys.

To be sure, the differences between the cycles are numerous and stark. To name just a few: 1) one is composed of four dramas while the other is formed by five short stories with an introduction (which by some scholars is considered the sixth tale\(^9\)); 2) one is written in verse -- the other in prose; 3) the dramatic form of the tragedies makes them maximally "objective" -- the intricate set of narrators utilized in *The Tales* is decidedly "subjective"; 4) the settings in the dramas are Western -- in prose tales they are rural Russia; 5) the dramatic works are set in the past -- the prose stories feature virtually contemporary times. However, all these differences should not discourage us from the attempt to compare the two bodies of texts. One of Pushkin's traits is his tendency to treat one and the same subject from entirely different points of view and in different genres.
Pushkin's Thematic Dualism

To understand how Pushkin returns to the same siuzhets, we must understand the "thematic dualism" in Pushkin's works. This principle of duality, complementarity or transposition into various diametrically opposite keys is characteristic not only of Pushkin's fiction: it is at the core of his model of the world in general. Literary critics and historians still cross swords on the issue of Pushkin's patriotism or lack thereof; some see him as a political conservative and deny his radical statements and vice versa, and the same applies to his religious conviction. Finding the "truth" about Pushkin is not an easy task, since he used to express diametrically opposite ideas often at the same time and in a very similar context. Even his references to people close to him combine admiration and scorn (Anna Kern — «гений чистой красоты» (2-238) and «вавилонская блудница» (10-160) offers a telling example).

Pushkin's thematic dualism is found in a number of works forming pairs and complementing each other on various formal and ideological levels — the novel The Captain's Daughter and The History of the Pugachev Uprising; the poem Ezerskii and the long narrative poem The Bronze Horseman; The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin and The History of the Village of Goriukhino, to list...
just a few. This dualism extends to conducting a dialogue with his predecessors. As Caryl Emerson amply demonstrated in her brilliant interpretation of Pushkin's drama *Boris Godunov*, the theme of Tsar Boris emerged in response to Karamzin's *History of the Russian State*.\(^{21}\) Pushkin often adopted already existing and well developed narratives: historical accounts, legends, fables, anecdotes, and myths. Such "ready-made" *siuzhets* include the Pugachev material (already researched by Derzhavin), the Mozart and Salieri story (widely discussed in the newspapers of the time), the Don Juan legend (utilized by Tirso de Molina, Moliere, Lorrenzo da Ponte, Byron, and others), and the historical "anecdote" about the rape of Lucrecia (adopted by Shakespeare for his tragedy and ironically treated by Pushkin in his *Count Nulin*). Pushkin's transposition techniques may owe something to Shakespeare himself who likewise made comedies out of tragedies and vice versa (for example *Romeo and Juliet* and *Much Ado about Nothing*).

This leads one to conclude that the vision of a single truth, so basic for Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, is not applicable to Pushkin's poetic universe. His philosophy and aesthetics are not so much contradictory as all-inclusive, like life itself. Pushkin sees it as his task to bring together opposites and to convey the "meaning" through the seemingly "meaningless."
The present researcher therefore intends to compare the meaningless *Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin* with the somewhat better studied and, granted, more psychologically profound *Little Tragedies*. The comparison will examine similarities in plots and establish thematic links between the two cycles written in such different genres. As in Caryl Emerson's study of transpositions, so here there will be a tracing of invariant motifs, archetypal patterns and their contextual functions. This exercise in comparing and contrasting is to demonstrate the "idea" that unites each cycle and both of them – the idea that Fate crushes those who challenge it, but favours those who entrust themselves to it. Fate is Nemesis to rebels but Providence to those who accept "everything as a blessing" (Lenskii’s farewell poem in *Eugene Onegin*).
CHAPTER 1.

TEXTUAL PARALLELS BETWEEN THE TWO CYCLES

My vision of the interconnectedness of the two cycles does not claim to be entirely new. Naturally, critics have perceived some parallels between the two cycles. It has been noted that, for example, Sil’vio in "The Shot" and Salieri in "Mozart and Salieri" are similar characters.\(^\text{22}\) However, such analogies have been based on comparison rather than on contrasting, and they have not been drawn for other pairs of texts in the cycles. In this chapter, I intend to delineate some close parallels, first between "The Stationmaster" and "The Stone Guest" and then between "The Shot" and "Mozart and Salieri," in order to emphasize distinctions. Other less close parallels between the other three stories and two dramas will be addressed at the end of the chapter. The immediate task of this chapter is to show how a drama's tragic plot and the characters become subverted and ironically debased in its companion story in The Tales. While the tragedy emphasizes the elevated and serious nature of the theme and deals with
absolutes and universals, the anecdotal tale presents its ironic, prosaic, relativistic and ambiguous variations.

**Donna Dunia: "The Stationmaster" and "The Stone Guest" as Texts in Two Keys. Plot Analysis of the Perennial Legend of Don Juan.**

Let us begin with the story of Dunia and her father in "The Stationmaster" and see how it acquires its full meaning only when seen in the context of the Don Juan legend in general, and "The Stone Guest" in particular. Inversely, the little tragedy "The Stone Guest" acquires its full meaning against the context of "The Stationmaster." This juxtaposition will demonstrate the idea that unifies and contrasts both texts: i.e. that tragedy befalls those who take themselves too seriously and inflate their own importance. The parallel texts of "The Stone Guest" and "The Stationmaster," both offer us examples of protagonists whose lack of flexibility and receptivity to new perspectives -- the inevitable corollary of self-importance -- undoes them. Tragedies are avoided when right and wrong, truth and illusion, happiness and misfortune are perceived as relative, rather than absolute, concepts. Since relativity arises through deviations from absolutes, a conventional and straightforward plot (such as that of the Don Juan legend) may serve as a good point of departure for an artist who seeks to question established truisms. By playing and testing the old drama on a
different stage against the backdrop of contemporary banality and naivete, new truths may emerge. Since the Don Juan tale had served as a traditional sermon on the deadly sin of carnality for centuries, Pushkin's disrespectful muse would have found it appealing to see the character of Don Juan, this traditionally clear-cut type of the wicked seducer, in a new contemporary light.23

The Structural Parallels Between "The Stone Guest" and "The Stationmaster"

Let us turn to the structural plot-parallels between the tragedy and the story to fully demonstrate the points just made. In "The Stone Guest," Pushkin introduces a significant change into the standard plot of the legend: in Pushkin's work, Donna Anna's avenger is not her father, but her late husband in the form of the stone statue. However, in "The Stationmaster," Pushkin returns to the original plot and restores the traditional figure of the grief-stricken father (Samson Vyrin) whose daughter Dunia elopes with the Hussar Minskii. It should be mentioned that in the literary and cultural context of 19th-century Russia, a Hussar was instantly perceived as a Don Juan, a womanizer and a libertine whose daring military exploits were matched only by his adventurous love escapades and dashing good looks.
Minskii appears first at Samson’s house at first in disguise, as it were. He is so warmly wrapped up that his Hussar status is not immediately apparent. Then he takes off his overcoat: «Сняв шапку, отпугав шаль и сдернув шинель, проезжий оказался молодым и стройным гусаром с черными усиками» (6-92). Compare this to Don Juan’s opening words in “The Stone Guest”: «Дождемся ночи здесь— скоро я полечу по улицам знакомым, усы плащом закрыв, а брови шляпой.» (5-316). In short, the entrance of the two personages is united by the motif of disguise. Deceptive disguise is after all a \textit{sine qua non} in any tale of seduction.

It is also instructive to examine how the two men meet their respective beloveds. Minskii meets Dunia at a time and a place where he least expects to find love: he shows up at the coach station late in the evening and demands horses to continue his speedy journey to the capital, St. Petersburg. Likewise, Don Juan does not expect to meet any attractive woman at a monastery where he intends to hide until nightfall on his way to the capital, Madrid. Both visitors arrive in a harried and short-tempered mood. Minskii’s whip (нагаюка) flies as freely and fast as the Don’s rapier (уназа). Nevertheless, both protagonists are instantaneously ready to shed their irritability for the pastime of conquest.
Seeing Donna Anna, Don Juan immediately takes advantage of this chance opportunity for another amorous adventure: «Случай, Дона Анна, случай увлек меня» (5-224). Minskii could easily have repeated this to Dunia. Thus both Don Juans alter their frames of mind, swiftly targeting their goals and speedily pursuing them by deceitful methods of seduction. Minskii simulates illness to buy time to spend with Dunia. Don Juan hides at the monastery in the guise of a humble and pious hermit to have the opportunity to approach Donna Anna and see her every day when she comes to lament her late husband. Pushkin’s Don Juan (unlike all his historical predecessors) is a poet and the spoken word is his paramount seductive technique. Donna Anna is not immune to his persuasions. Minskii is not a poet, of course, but Dunia finds his conversation equally witty and captivating. «Он был чрезвычайно весел, без умолку шутил, насвистывал песни, разговаривал с проезжими» (6-93). Moreover, Dunia is not the only one to be charmed, the Hussar’s amiability, generosity and eloquence (he is even persuasive in German) ensure everyone’s trust: Dunia’s, her father’s, the doctor’s, even the travelers’.

Both irresistible libertines furthermore seduce their victims at a time and a place when their "abductions" are most blasphemous. Donna Anna is tempted
when she prays at the monastery and later, at her husband’s house where her feelings, although still mixed, sway increasingly in Don Juan’s favor:

Бедная вдова,
Все помню я свою потерю. Слезы
С улыбкою меняю, как апрель. (5-342)

Minskii promises to give Dunia a ride to church for a Sunday prayer but, instead, drives her all the way to St. Petersburg. The girl’s feelings are also mixed, but her decision to follow Minskii proves to be stronger: «плакала, хотя, казалось, ехала по своей охоте» (6-94).

The Relativity of the Established Truisms

As emerges from the above, there is enough evidence to state that Minskii and Don Juan fulfill parallel functions in their respective texts. At the same time, in Pushkin's universe, things are not always what they seem to be at first or even at second or third glance. In the tragedy, the statue of the Commander, Donna Anna’s late husband is gigantic while in reality the man was so short that he would not have been able to reach the nose of his own stone image, even if he stood on the tips of his toes:

Каким он здесь представлен исполином!
Какие плечи! что за Геркулес!
А сам покойник мал был и щедушен.
Compare this observation with the opening paragraph of the short story. It states that stationmasters are cursed by all their clients and feared as the most cruel and dictatorial representatives of humanity («Кто не почитает их извергами человеческого рода?» (6-88)). At a closer look, however, they prove to be the miserable victims of their customers’ cruel whims, in other words, they are not giants but dwarfs. The narrator A. G. N., who just has told us about the tyranny of stationmasters suddenly turns around and addresses his readers’ conscience, casting them in the role of tyrants: «Что такое станционныйсмотритель? Сущий мученик четырнадцатого класса, огражденный своим чином токмо от побоев, и то не всегда (осылаюсь на совесть моих читателей)» (6-88). Therefore, concludes the narrator, this category of people has been grossly misrepresented: «Сословие станционныхсмотрителей представлено общему мнению в самом ложном виде» (6-88). What do we learn from this? That we should disregard accepted beliefs and truisms (such as rank subordinates to rank -- чин чина почитай) and search for the “truth” (such as for instance mind honors mind -- ум ума почитай)? This assumption, although correct as far as it goes, seems to be
too simplistic even for the culturally limited narrator of the story, titular councilor A. G. N., who cautions us against falling into the trap of preconceptions. Perhaps a better answer would be the following: the implied author behind the narrator suggests that our limited cognitive abilities cannot embrace either the full complexity of the world or even such a primitive corner of it as Vyrin’s mail coach station. Certainly, our own position in this world does not enable us to observe reality in all its dimensions. In other words, whether one is a giant or a dwarf depends on the observer’s point of view at a given point in time.

A similar point could be made for "The Shot," where the psychologically not very perspicacious narrator greatly exaggerates Sil’vio’s demonism. While to this unsophisticated officer, he is "superman," the reader perceives Sil’vio's "smallness," but we will return to this story later.

The Reversal of the Parallel Role Distribution

Pushkin demonstrates the relativity of truth and its dependence on circumstance through introducing characters in clearly defined roles, which he gradually undermines as the story unfolds. As soon as we have decided that the characters in the tale are mere variations of those in the tragedy, namely that
Minskii is a typical Don Juan and that Dunia is his victim, just like Donna Anna, their roles are reversed. Similarly, as soon as we have decided that Samson Vyrin is a betrayed father, we discover a new and more sinister aspect in his love for his daughter, namely that of incest. To begin with the latter case, Samson's passion and despair clearly exceed parental feelings while Dunia's “betrayal” of her father comes to resemble marital infidelity. This circumstance has been noted by Wolf Schmid in his comparing and contrasting of “The Stationmaster” and Karamzin’s “Poor Liza.” Schmid states that Samson’s and Dunia’s life before her elopement with Minskii suspiciously resembles wedlock. This is emphasized by the fact that the middle-aged («лет пятидесяти») but still vigorous («свежий и бодрый» (90)) Vyrin lives with no other woman than Dunia and that the only and thus apparently shared bed in their household is mentioned in this very short story no less than four times. Vyrin’s stubborn and unreasonable disbelief in, or rejection of, his daughter's newly found happiness thus would seem to stem from this ambiguous situation. We may add here that this is precisely the reason why Samson, like a jealous husband, prefers to see Dunia dead rather than in Minskii’s arms. Note the peculiar expression chosen by Pushkin in the story: Samson “wishes Dunia the
This wish of Vyrin's evokes the social conventions that require Donna Anna to spend the rest of her life near the grave of her husband, the Commander. Donna Anna intends to fulfill this obligation, because she believes that her husband would have done the same for her:

Диего, перестаньте: я грешу,  
Вас слушая, — мне вас любить нельзя,  
Вдова должна и гробу быть верна,  
Когда бы знали вы, как Дон Альвар  
Меня любил! о, Дон Альвар уж верно  
Не приняв бы к себе влюбленной дамы,  
Когда б он овдовел. — Он был бы верен  
Супружеской любви. (5-343)

The jealous sense of possession from beyond the grave is extended to the realm of the living when the stone statue of the Commander comes for revenge. Both "husbands" (the dead Don Al'var, and Vyrin drinking himself to death) are unable to reconcile themselves with their beloveds' newfound happiness; they want nothing less than their women's eternal fidelity in return for their own. We may add that Minskii indirectly demonstrates his knowledge of Vyrin's sentiment. In the crucial encounter scene in the capital, the young man's remark to Samson is ambiguous: «Зачем тебе её? Она меня любит;
она отвыкла от прежнего своего состояния. Ни ты, ни она — вы не забудете того, что случилось» (6-95); they seem more appropriately addressed to a rival who lost his suit than to a father-in-law. Thus Minskii seems to be subconsciously aware of the love-triangle situation in which he finds himself. Dunia's strange unwillingness to settle matters between her beloved father and beloved lover also contributes to the ambiguity of the situation. We should note that she reappears in the story only when her former bed mate is securely settled in the grave.

While the husband-protagonist of the drama is ironically transformed into the father-figure of the story, the roles of the other characters undergo similar subversive shifts. "Seduced" Dunia, for example, does not really project the impression of an easily deceived naive country girl: on the contrary, she acts like a supreme *femme fatale*, a female Don Juan. On the scale of a provincial mail coach station, her seductive powers are unlimited. This flirtatious fourteen-year-old is no less brave or eloquent than the Spanish grandee and poet of the tragedy: «Маленькая кокетка отвечала безо всякой робости, как девушка, видевшая свет» (6-90). Samson's boasting («Кто же и не знал ее?» (6-92)) ironically equates Dunia's fame in her Russian rural corner of the world to Don Juan's notoriety in Madrid where he is known to the whole city,
even to the king himself: «Поверите ли, сударь, курьеры, фельдъегеря с нею по получасу заговаривались» (6-92). Above all, it is she and not Samson who is the central protagonist, at least in the sense of being the plot-moving character in the story. 27 Her appearance and action manipulate and influence all the other characters. While Minskii himself is a rake and seducer he immediately falls victim to her charm.

Thus while Dunia becomes the Don Juan of the story, Minskii is subtly transformed into Donna Anna. His submission to Dunia’s will has been noted by Schmid, who points out that the girl’s full control over him is metaphorically encoded in her playing with his hair as in the story of the Biblical Samson. Although hair as a symbol of masculine power is transplanted by Pushkin from Samson’s skull to the hussar’s head,28 Dunia is not only a bewitching Delilah; Minskii’s black locks (черные кудри) could also be seen as an attribute of a woman’s beauty and as originating from Donna Anna’s coiffeur. This is what the Don Juan of "The Stone Guest" says to his beloved: «Вы черные власы на мрамор бледный рассыпьте» (5-333) and later:

Когда сюда на этот гордый гроб
Пойдете кудри наклонять и плакать» (5-335).
Thus Anna's черные власы and кудри become Minskii's черные кудри in the tale. In addition we may note Dunia's "Hussariness" since she is literally riding on the arm of Minskii's chair while playing with his curls. Rising above him tall in her "English saddle" (i.e. the armchair), this girl clearly holds the bridles of power. She is the rider to Minskii's "horse." This Pushkinian Delilah thus not only dominates both Samson Vyrin and the rakish hussar Minskii but also transforms Minskii into a Donna Anna while herself assuming the role of Don Juan. To sum up: the Commander of the tragedy is ironically transformed into the stationmaster of the story, Dunia becomes Don Juan, and Minskii's role is reduced to (almost) that of Donna Anna.

The Derivative Nature of The Tales as Opposed to The Tragedies.

The above comparison between the plot constructions of "The Stationmaster" and "The Stone Guest" clearly reveals the derivative nature of the tale in the relation to the drama and proposes the possibility that the poetic plot was conceived before the prosaic one. As has been demonstrated, in the prose, Pushkin subverts his own tragic plots, changes their structural organization, and toys with the devices introduced in the dramatic works. In my view, the entire cycle of The Tragedies provides the basis for The Tales: the plays clearly occupy the primary place while the prose stories emerge from
them as secondary or collateral texts. This statement may seem anachronistic, since chronologically *The Tragedies* were written in Boldino after *The Tales.* Naturally I do not dispute the established chronology of writing. What I do argue, however, is that Pushkin conceived of his *Tragedies* long before the Boldino autumn of 1830. Already in 1825, in Mikhailovskoe, he outlined the basic themes and even the titles of his later dramatic pieces, among which he listed the stories of Don Juan, Mozart and Salieri, and the Covetous Knight.

According to Pushkin's contemporaries and his own accounts, he often needed to form an idea completely before he could actually write it down. His work on *The History of Peter the Great* offers a telling example. The idea originated in 1827; seven years later, Pushkin began the research, which took two years, and in 1836 he was still not ready to put it on paper. When asked about his progress in writing *The History*, Pushkin used to say: "Я до сих пор ничего еще не написал, занимался единственным собиранием материалов: хочу составить себе идею обо всем труде, потом напишу историю Петра в год или в течение полугода." Vladimir Dal"s account of his conversations with Pushkin about the poet's creative process conveys the same impression. Dal' states that Pushkin was obsessed by an idea for years before he was able to formulate it in an a work of art in a matter of days: "Он носился
Like The History of Peter the Great, Pushkin's Tragedies occupied his imagination for six years and maybe even longer than that. No similar accounts have reached us about preliminary plans for The Tales. In fact, Pushkin first mentioned The Tales in a letter to his publisher upon their completion. Since Pushkin was in the habit of discussing his works-in-progress in correspondence and private discussions with friends, the absence of any accounts pertaining to the conception of The Tales indicates that he had not been contemplating their creation as a separate project. Written in Boldino in a matter of weeks, The Tales echo The Tragedies, parodying, varying and retelling them in a different key. Their transpose the plots of The Tragedies and ironically debase the seriousness of the original conflict.

The Principle of Ironic Debasement

It is this hidden complexity beneath the surface simplicity that, in my view, has made The Tales the subject of so much critical and scholarly analysis and caused critics to cross swords for more than one hundred and fifty years.
Allegedly simple and naive anecdotes "intended primarily as entertainment," they still challenge those who sense that there is a point to the entertainment.\textsuperscript{36} As we have just seen, Pushkin indulges in an ironic debasement of "The Stone Guest" in "The Stationmaster." The tragic perennial legend now reappears as a mere anecdote, told by a Titular Councilor and recorded as a true story by a certain Belkin, a writer of questionable talent. Madrid is transformed into an unnamed corner of rural Russia. The demonic seducer is reduced to a young Hussar (even Don Juan's $ycu$ become the hussar's $усику$), who is lured by a fourteen-year-old country girl. The Don and Donna merge into provincial Dunia. The deceased husband-avenger Commander Don Al'var is now cast in the role of a father who is foolishly infatuated with his own teen-age daughter. The fact that Vyrin is a warrior (old soldier) decorated with three medals both links and parodically sets him apart from his prototype, the Commander (note that the ribbons from which Samson's medals are suspended are faded -- полинялые ленты).

Don Al'var was not really "chosen" (выбран) by Donna Anna; he acquires the young girl as his wife in return for his mansion and the wealth he showers upon her. In comparison with what he himself could have offered her, the jealous Don Juan defines Al'var's possessions as meaningless (lacking in substance -- пустые):
The tale degrades the empty treasure to its most prosaic literal meaning, turning it into Vyrin's poor household with its banal pictures, garish curtains, potted plants, samovar and the infamous bed. Vyrin, it should be noted, does not feel humble about his possessions and is proud of his ability to provide and protect his "beloved" until death will part them: «Уж я ли не любил моей Дуня, а ль не лелеял... уж ей ли не было житье?» (6-92). Indeed, concepts of wealth and poverty, power and impotence are relative in Pushkin's double keyed world.

The ironic lowering of the original tragic-romantic plot is realized through the extensive use of prosaic details and descriptions of everyday life. Pushkin's interest in byt is therefore not only dictated by his desire to depict Russian life and national characters realistically, but above all for parodistic reasons to present similar events from different angles.³⁷ If we do not accept this premise, we are faced with a paradox: Pushkin breaks his self-imposed rules on laconic prose writing by introducing numerous unnecessary and nonfunctional details which feature as byt in "The Stationmaster." However, the author's usage of detail is meaningful when seen from a thematic perspective, as we have just
demonstrated with examples from “The Stationmaster.” The changing
tonalities, the switch from the legendary to the prosaic, carry a message,
revealed in the very shift of key.

The juxtaposition of "The Stone Guest" and "The Stationmaster" also
undermines another widespread critical theory -- that of Pushkin's deep
sympathy with Samson Vyrin as a representative of the "insulted and injured"
and of his laying the foundation for the Natural school of Russian prose.\textsuperscript{38}
Vyrin's story is no doubt sad, but is not the Commander's demise at least equally
sad to a "sympathetic" reader? Dunia cries bitterly at the grave of her father
and her tears are probably no less sincere than Donna Anna's over her deceased
husband. Don Juan passionately believes that he is reborn by his new passion
for Donna Anna but must face tragedy at this very moment. Misfortune knows
no social barriers and happiness is available to all classes. Minskii's lasting
attachment to Dunia includes possibly marriage; his apologies to her father and
his profound contemplation of the situation (глубокая задумчивость)
qualitatively differ from Karamzin's classic story of social pity "Poor Liza."
Dunia is not Liza and Minskii is not Erast; instead they are the refracted
hypostases of Don Juan and his Anna.
The Principle of Shifting Angle in the Observation of Narrated Events

As we have seen, the evaluation of a situation in the Pushkinian universe depends primarily on the angle from which the author and the reader observe narrated events. The best-known illustration of shifting angles determining the interpretation of events in Pushkin's oeuvre is that of Peter the Great and Evgenii in his "The Bronze Horseman" where the author's "sympathy" rests with that character through whose eyes he observes reality at a given moment.39 In our case, the author of "The Stone Guest" empathizes with the feelings of Don Juan, whereas the Commander remains in the shadow of his grave and the reader's consciousness. In "The Stationmaster," he turns his magnifying glass on Vyrin's inner world while Minskii is left off stage most of the time and almost never given an opportunity by the author to account for his actions or feelings. It is no wonder, then, that the narrator A. G. N. is able to account for Samson Vyrin's state which fits his story, but fails to find out and convey Dunia's ultimate fate: yes, he tells us that she is rich and has three children. But is she married? Probably, but the loyal (to Vyrin) and conventional narrator prefers not to mention this fact.

At this point it is intriguing to imagine what we would know about Don Juan's demise if it were one of Belkin's tales, not a tragedy, called "The Stone
Guest" and if this tale (featuring Don Juan's love for Donna Anna) were narrated by an outside observer, let us say Laura. Laura's last meeting with Don Juan takes place on the eve of his demise. Donna Anna's name is not mentioned. Laura discerns no signs of the Don's alleged rebirth: on the contrary, she spends a passionate night in his arms after he kills her other suitor, Don Carlos. Laura, the witness, could later have heard of Don Juan's disappearance, but would she have known who caused his death, if it was death? Perhaps not. Therefore, Laura's account of the Don's demise most likely would have distorted the events and misled the reader even more than A. G. N.'s story of Dunia. Thus Pushkin denies narratorial omniscience, presenting narrative perspective as the determinant of fictional truth. What formalist investigators of Pushkin's oeuvre call the play with narrative perspectives proves to be an ideological stance and a statement of the author's credo. This credo, to state it once more, is an affirmation of our eternal cognitive limitations. The truth can never be fully known, only presented in parts and in different keys. Pushkin's plot ambiguity (недосказанность) ultimately asserts that nothing can ever be fully known. Happy are those therefore who do not look beyond the surface phenomena of life, asking questions that cannot be answered. Tragedies are created by those who do, thus demonstrating that they take themselves and life too seriously, at least too seriously for their own good.

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Parallels between Laura and the narrator of "The Stationmaster" could be continued further. Like other pairs of characters, these two are also caught in the author's "expanding web of ironic correspondences."40 A. G. N.'s sentimental account of Dunia, his lingering memories of her charms and her kiss, and his passionate desire to revive the past could be compared to Laura’s lasting love for Don Juan in the play. Both these minor protagonists offer strikingly parallel descriptions of the weather in their respective contexts. Here is Laura’s famous depiction of the Madrid summer night:

Приди — открой балкон. Как небо тихо;
Недвижим теплый воздух, ночь лимоном
И лаврhom пахнет, яркая луна
Блестит на синеве густой и темной —
И сторожа кричат протяжно: «Ясно!»
А далеко, на севере — в Париже —
Быть может, небо тучами покрыто,
Холодный дождь идет и ветер дует. (5-327)

This vision of a “northern” Paris is transferred to rural Russia in "The Stationmaster," where the narrator speaks of the weather in the following terms:

«Это случилось осенью. Серенькие тучи покрывали небо; холодный ветер дул с пожатых полей» (6-97). Like the weather, serene here and severe there, so Pushkin's variations on the theme of changing fortune, good or bad luck, accomplishment or defeat, form mutually complementary rather than
mutually exclusive oppositions. These oppositions are created out of the very same material, but the author tests his idea in two starkly different contexts, playing it out in two keys: the first elevated, noble and tragic (minor) and the second simple and naive, even comic at times (major).

The Principle of Shakespearian Transposition and Pushkinian Self-Parody

The thematic links between the two cycles *The Tales* and *The Tragedies* (written in such different genres) prove to be those typical "strange correspondences" (странные сближения) which make Pushkin a paradoxical and profound thinker.41 As Andrew Wachtel states in his recent work on Pushkin's historicism, "intergeneric dialogue [is] characteristic of his work in general... He always had a tendency to encode the same material in two forms, one elevated and serious, the other ironic and comic, more or less simultaneously."42 It is thus not unusual for Pushkin to treat one and the same subject from entirely different points of view in any sphere of his creativity. In this method of transposing the theme, he follows Shakespeare, who likewise made comedies out of tragedies and vice versa.

Shakespeare's impact on Pushkin (author of the Shakespearean drama *Boris Godunov*) is well known. This impact included transposition techniques.
While working in Boldino on the two cycles discussed above, Pushkin at the same time also wrote "A Note on Count Nulin" (Заметка о «Графе Пулине»). This short text (only half a page long) is a matter of exceptional interest for us in our attempt to decode the meaning of The Tales and The Tragedies, as well as to find some new keys to Pushkin's work in general. In this note, Pushkin opens the door to his equally misunderstood earlier narrative poem Count Nulin (1825), which had scandalized the critics and the public by its inappropriate frivolity and apparent lack of meaning or thought. In his response (evidently to himself, since he never made an effort to publish it) Pushkin explains that the meaning of his poem Count Nulin lies in contemplating the development of modern civilization, democracy, and dictatorship in the light of the historical anecdote adapted by Shakespeare in his tragedy The Rape of Lucrecia. He points out that the historically insignificant episode nevertheless had regrettably momentous consequences. Pushkin admits that he was tempted to parody history and Shakespeare's tragedy by reworking the famous siuzhet and planting it on Russian soil somewhere in the Novorzhavsky district. "What if it had occurred to Lucrecia to slap Tarquinius on the face? ... then the world and world history would have been entirely different." \[43 \] «Бывают странные обличения» -- Pushkin summarizes this
exceptionally rare auto-commentary on his parodic variation on Shakespeare's tragic plot.

What I am suggesting, then, is that in our case Pushkin links "The Stationmaster" and "The Stone Guest" by exactly the same method of sympathetic parody. The central event of "The Stationmaster" and the denouement/climax of "The Stone Guest" are related to each other in the same way as Lucrecia's rape and the slap in the face which Nulin receives from Natal'ia Pavlovna. Let us demonstrate this parallel.

In the tragedy, the stone statue appears in the doorway of Donna Anna's room; the woman screams and faints. Don Juan first rushes to her, then challenges the lethal handshake of the mysterious intruder, who drags him to Hell. Here, the demise of Don Juan is as inevitable and unavoidable as in the Shakespearean large-scale historical cataclysm caused by an avalanche of fateful and impending events begun by the rape of Lucrecia.

In the short story, the parallel episode begins similarly: Samson Vyrin goes to Dunia's house in St. Petersburg. The house is deserted; no one stops him from entering. Like the stone guest, Samson Vyrin enters in silence. Dunia screams, faints and falls on the floor/carpet (note the use of various details such as in this instance - the carpet - ironically undermines the seriousness of the
event). In the denouement of the tale, the author restores the original (conventional) role distribution to allow for successful plot resolution and avoid the grotesque alien to Pushkinian subtlety. The sight of Minskii fainting like a damsel and Dunia strong-arming the unwanted visitor, pushing him down the staircase, would be ludicrous. Instead Dunia now acts helplessly and Minskii steps into the role of her chevalier Don Juan. Minskii rushes forward to pick her up, and only then does he notice the wretched intruder Samson Vyrin. He drops Dunia and approaches the guest. Like Don Juan, Minskii is trembling, but unlike the Don, -- he is trembling with rage. In the tragedy, the Don challenges his guest by a proud greeting: «Я звал тебя и рад, что вижу» (5-350). In the story, Minskii rudely orders the avenger out: «Пойдем вон!» (6-96).

In the drama, Don Juan is scared; he owes more than one debt to the Commander -- not only did he take away his wife, he also happened to pierce the man with his rapier. In the story, it is Minskii who calls his enemy a killer and suggests that the miserable old man is planning to stab him: «Что ты за мной крадешься, как разбойник? или хочешь меня зарезать?» (6-96).

A very dramatic motif in the tragedy is the Commander’s lethal hand. The statue orders his rival: «Дай руку. — Вот она...» Then the Don challenges the
handshake which he cannot endure and pleads for mercy but cannot escape his fate:

_- о, тяжело
Пожалте камешкой его десницы!
Оставь меня, пусти -- пусти мне руку... (5-350).

In the final duel between the hussar Minskii and the old warrior Samson Vyrin, it is the young hussar whose hand turns out to be stronger. The author uses the same device which he had already incorporated in Count Nulin. There Natal'ia Pavlovna’s hand (note the diminutive ручка) simply and freely flies into Nulin’s face and the tragedy is avoided. Likewise, Minskii’s feat does not require any exceptionally heroic (and least of all, lethal) effort to drive out the rival and intruder: «Сильною рукюю схватив стариака за ворот, [он] вытолкнул его на лестницу». For Vyrin there is nothing left to do but to drop the matter altogether and depart («подумал и махнул рукою» (6-96)). We should also note that already in the morning of the very same day Vyrin had been kicked out by Minskii’s Leporello: «Лакей сказал ему сурово, что барин никого не принимает, грубо вытеснил его из передней и хлопнул двери ему под нос. Смотритель постоял, постоял -- да и пошел» (6-95).

Even the motif of the Commander’s invitation is parodied in the story of Donna Dunia: Vyrin succeeds in entering Dunia’s luxurious apartment only because he
lies that his "master" (!) Minskii sent him there on an errand. Vyrin-the-stone-guest does not present any threat to anyone. Stricken by grief, he continues to move about, but his existence is zombie-like and he is already on the way to his grave. His last name could stem from either "върень" -- sorcerer or "върь" -- abyss, maelstrom. Considered together, these might imply an underworld character who falls victim to the abysmal whirlpool by which he is devoured. Thus Vyrin's function as a "Guest" (an instrument of Nemesis) is inverted and directed against himself. The parody point by point denies the necessity for violent and tragic resolution, however romantic the aura of heroism. Inversely, however banal the happiness of ordinary people may seem, in Pushkin's stories it has its charm and merits.

This literary notion of the "double key" has its biographical analogy. Transposing the notion of the two variants of the same scenario to Pushkin's own situation during the Boldino autumn, we see that he contemplated two possible outcomes on the eve of his marriage -- one in a major key and one in a minor.
"The Shot" and "Mozart and Salieri" And Other Parallels.

We have already noted, at least preliminary, the similarities between "The Shot" and "Mozart and Salieri." Indeed, some of the parallels are very obvious, for example the names of the "villains" in the two texts. Both Sil’vio and Salieri are Italian names. Both protagonists are strangers in their respective environments. Salieri lives in Vienna, and Sil’vio, although a Russian, clearly resembles a foreigner in his regiment of Russian officers. Both men furthermore are masters of their craft. Salieri practices an elevated craft -- music. Sil’vio's craft belongs to a different "key" -- he is a master shot. Yet their approach to their crafts is similar. Both make it a daily routine, a fanatic exercise. Both lead a hermetic life so as to be able to practice more. And both meet rivals who outdo them and whom they envy for their talent, a quality they lack in spite of their constant practice. Both mask their envy -- Salieri by lofty philosophizing and moralizing that music is profaned by Mozart's flippancy, and Sil’vio by the upholding the meticulous details of his duelling code. Both champions of "justice" and "sticking to the rules" ultimately fail to achieve the results they aim for. Salieri kills his rival but does not compose a masterpiece, and Sil’vio never shoots his rival, but gets himself killed. Both characters'
"professional activities," upheld by so much discipline, remain barren -- as barren as their lonely lives.

Both are respected men. Sil’vio is generous to his friends. He keeps an open house, serves champagne and listens to the stories of his fellow officers. Yet here too, he follows a rigid code of behavior. Sil’vio never asks to have a book back that he had lent, nor does he ever return one. Salieri is supportive of fellow composers, as long as he feels they act according to his code of how a musician should compose. Both react intensely negatively to an antagonist who does not follow their codes, but does the unexpected. Sil’vio cannot endure the young Count's coming to the duelling barrier while eating cherries. Salieri cannot endure Mozart's lack of respect for art, as he sees it. Both are men of gravity who cannot endure "lightness"; both are rigid men who cannot tolerate "deviations." Both are prisoners of their own selves and both hate those who are free.

The parallels between them can be endlessly expanded. For example, both are ascetics and both are relatively poor. They have but one cherished possession: Sil’vio has his pistols, Salieri has musical instruments. Their positive antagonists are rich. The young carefree count is rich in both a material and spiritual sense. Immensely wealthy, he is also rich in friends and finds fulfillment in marriage. Mozart's wealth is his genius and he scatters it.
around as abundantly as the count lavishes his generosity on his friends. Bareness and barrenness are the hallmark of both Sil’vio and Salieri -- the count and Mozart live in "abundance" and create -- one a happy life, the other music of genius.

The two texts are not only linked by such direct parallels as those just enumerated. For example, Sil’vio has yet another "double" in the tragedy. He appears in the count's home very much like the black messenger of death appears to Mozart in his home. Incidentally, he always wears black. This second doubling emphasizes the most important linkage between the two texts: both deal with envy disguised as a search for justice, or, to put it in more complex terms, with the rebellion of a person who does not understand why some "should be in the shadow and others in the light" (to paraphrase Bertold Brecht). Both texts deal with self-deception -- one that does not lead to complacency, however, but is a constant source of torment.

The theme of self-deception is more pronounced in the tragedy, where Salieri's tortured reasoning on a high intellectual level indeed has all the trappings of a philosophical inquiry. In "The Shot," it is easier to see that Sil’vio is not a "great man" trying to solve a difficult existential problem, but simply a small man who can appear great only to the naive officers of his circle (fifteen years his junior) and the naive inexperienced man he has chosen for his
friend. Thus, the debased version of the tragedy that we have in the tale offers a clue to the essence of Salieri's quest for truth. In Sil'vio we see the small would-be-great man that Salieri is. The Count of the tale likewise illuminates the "divine" figure of Mozart. Not a genius, yet a "darling of heaven" in his own way, he is, as it were, Mozart the private man, the human side of Mozart.

Unlike the intratextual connections of "The Stone Guest" and "The Stationmaster," the ones just discussed herein are more direct. Here the function of "explaining" each other is more pronounced. There is no obvious parodying, just a "lowering" of the tragedy to the level of ordinary human relationships. This is perhaps the reason why "The Shot" opens the cycle of tales. Its link to the "little tragedy" of Salieri (it is indeed not a "great" one) is made relatively easy to discover, revealing the function of The Tales vis-a-vis The Tragedies. One more factor links all the texts discussed so far -- the autobiographical elements.

It has been pointed out that Pushkin inscribed a great deal of autobiographical material in his Boldino works. In the case of "The Shot," we know that the episode with the cherries is borrowed by the author from his own life. Indeed, Pushkin's bravado was well known and often mentioned by his friends and enemies. It was he who in his younger days maddenend his opponent by bringing a cap full of cherries to the duel. While the enemy was
aiming his pistol at him, the young poet was spitting cherry stones on the ground. This autobiographical episode, so memorable in the story, in some ways makes the young and brave count a literary model of the inscribed author, equating Pushkin with Mozart. At the same time there is also another equation. No one yet has linked Silʼvio's plot to avenge his offender, which he nourished for six years, with Pushkin's own and somewhat similar plan to carry out a personal revenge against Count Feodor Tolstoy-"the-American" which the poet entertained also for six years. The accounts of the incident that have reached us are scarce. Tolstoy's notoriety as a duellist (дөъянтив) and Pushkin's inability to forget whatever offense it was, Tolstoy had caused, was mentioned by more than one contemporary, who, however, did not provide the details of the quarrel. Interestingly enough, the two were eventually reconciled. The duel did not result in tragedy. Moreover, several years later they seemed to be on friendly enough terms; the former enemy served as patron to the poet in society circles. Especially so, when Pushkin set his mind upon matrimony and began to look for a prospective wife in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Thus Pushkin, the inscribed author, acted both as a Silʼvio-Salieri and as count-Mozart in his life. This duality of genre was based on a corresponding duality of personality.

The "double key" in its biographical analogies manifests itself also in the poet's personal situation during the Boldino autumn. During this time, on the
eve of marriage, he contemplated two possible scenarios -- one in a major key and one in a minor. His private letters, written to friends at the time, convey a distinct impression of ambiguity, of wavering between despair and hope or, in literary terms, tragedy and idyll. In some of them he celebrates his future in idyllic-prosaic terms (the promise of love and happiness), but in others he cries out in despair: «Черт меня догадал бредить о счастье, как будто бы я для этого создан». Human cognitive ability is limited in its attempts to read the future and find the only "right" solution. Pushkin realized this. He chose the fate of Minskii, but it turned into the tragedy of Don Juan.

As we have shown in this Chapter, the themes in *The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin* and *The Little Tragedies* are presented in two keys: the major key in the prose and the minor key in the drama. It is in the context of the two cycles analyzed in their unity, that we find again Pushkin's favorite artistic and philosophical statement of duality. Pushkin-the-implied-author sees existence itself as double-faced, or perhaps even endlessly varied. In his works, he subtly demonstrates that those who experience existence cannot embrace, understand or accept life in its totality. They never see more than one facet or hear more than one key.
CHAPTER II

THE CYCLE OF LITTLE TRAGEDIES AS VARIATIONS ON THE THEME OF FATE, HUBRIS AND BAD LUCK

As already stated in the Introduction, Pushkin's *The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin* and *The Little Tragedies* -- although enjoying the reputation of belonging to the best known works of Russian literature, marking a peak in their author's creative evolution,⁴⁶ -- yet remain not fully understood, in spite of the wealth of critical literature on the subject.⁴⁷ *The Little Tragedies* have fared somewhat better than *The Tales*. They, for example, have received more thematic attention.⁴⁸ In regard to *The Tragedies*, the critics do perceive both a message and unity that links the texts into a cycle in the overarching themes of sin, transgression and obsession. The truth of this conception needs further elaboration and revision, since it does not pay enough attention to the most crucial tragedy of the cycle: “The Feast During the Plague.” At this point it should be noted that this particular tragedy does indeed deal with transgression just like the other three, yet here transgression is presented in a distinctly
sympathetic light and the sins committed by the characters of "The Feast" differ qualitatively from the vices of greed, envy, and carnality presented elsewhere in the cycle.

We find other discrepancies in *The Tragedies* which undermine the apparent thematic unity of sin and transgression. In my view, *The Tragedies* as well as *The Tales* have not yet found their fully satisfactory interpretation, largely because scholars have been focussed on each work in isolation rather than perceiving the collection as a unity. For example, Ernest J. Simmons suggests that "these little dramas in each case concern a single theme, which is developed in a psychological manner." Such an approach tends to treat each drama separately: each has a theme of its own, each is based on a certain event, each deals with a particular sin. While establishing a specific theme for each tragedy is certainly useful, it is even more important to identify a unifying theme running through all four works, possibly in a progressive development, which binds them together and makes them function as a cycle.

In this chapter, I shall trace what I deem to be the invariant idea in its specific variations in all four dramas of *The Tragedies*. I strongly believe that the factor creating a cycle out of the four tragedies is to be found in its unifying idea and in the progressive development of this idea from one tragedy to the next. My point of departure in establishing the unity of this idea is as follows:
all tragedies begin with a contemplation of fate and end with death. This may seem a trivial observation, since death inflicted by fate is the inevitable outcome of any tragedy. Not every tragedy begins with a meditation of fate, however. But it is the theme of fate which is the key factor that makes Pushkin's four tragedies variations on the theme of Nemesis, presented as punishment for rebellion against divine (in)justice, or fate.

Archetypal Conflict.

The basic premise in each dramatic piece is that the universal order of things is unjust. Pushkin's tragic hero, in each case, protests against a world order that upsets his concept of justice and that he sees manifested in his own fate. A man of strong character and capacity for logical reasoning, he chooses an active approach to life. He therefore seeks to correct the "mistake" he perceives. The more he strives to restore "justice" however, the stronger is the opposing power of fate, and the more tragic is the outcome. The rebellion fails and his ultimate destruction becomes unavoidable. One of the few critics who has observed this thematic invariant in The Tragedies is Victor Terras, who states that "each of Pushkin's plays... contains a transition from defiance to
defeat." This is the perspective that will guide us in our analyses of *The Tragedies*, that follow.

"*The Covetous Knight*"

The very first scene of "The Covetous Knight" demonstrates such a moment of defiance. The rebellious Albert, who is profoundly disturbed by his poverty, voices his outrage at this injustice. A young man of noble birth, generous character, and physical strength, he is ashamed to appear in his shabby clothes at the court of the Duke where his equals wear "silk and velvet": «О бедность, бедность! Как унизает сердце нам она!» (5-287). Albert perceives his circumstances as particularly unjust because his father, the old Baron Philip, is a very wealthy man, who at the same time happens to be a miser. Albert does not understand why wealth should belong to a man who does not use it and has become the slave of his gold («Мой отец не слуг и не друзей в них [деньгах] видит, а господи и сам им служит... как алжирский раб, как пее цепной») (5-291). He describes his father as a madman who does not enjoy or deserve what he owns: «пьет воду, ест сухие корки, всю ночь не спит, все бегает да лает, а золото спокойно в сундуках лежит» (5-291). The old man, in his turn, thinks that his son is insane: «Мой наследник!
According to his reasoning, his son is "immoral" because he does not practice the ascetic life of his father. In his view, his son does not deserve to be his heir.

The old man therefore does not approve of the institution of inheritance; in his perception, it is as criminal as theft: "украл ключи у трупа моего, он [сын] сунул мне смею отопрет" (5-297). Thus father and son cannot be reconciled because they treat each other on the basis of their own logic and because they both believe that life must obey their logic. Both are seekers of justice, perceived by them in terms of merit and entitlement.

Albert's search for a solution to his poverty requires all his energy. An active man, he cannot remain idle. His manner of speech reveals a strong determination to succeed, as may be observed from his initial statement: «Бо с чем бы ты ни стало на турнире я веду» (5-286). Stylistically, this powerful expression is formulated in the conditional mood, with conditional structures occurring with increasing frequency: "а если бы я [шел], когда б не было стыдно" (5-286), "да ты б ему сказал" (5-288), "да если б у меня водились деньги, с тобою стал бы я возиться?" (5-289), "когда б я
This device points to the ultimate futility of Albert's plans. He is helpless to modify or control events. Fate opposes him like an overwhelming enigmatic force, capable of bringing him both good and evil. Albert plans to make it bring him "good." But however much he wishes for his father's death, he does not take any steps to ensure it. The ensuing duel is initiated by his father. In this duel, the Baron dies overpowered by emotional agitation. Nothing ends as planned. The antagonists, who rebel against fate and wish to control it, are controlled by it.

In Albert's perception, fate is personified by his father. For the old Baron fate is embodied in his son. Thus the open confrontation between the father and the son (the Baron's challenging Albert to a duel) becomes the ultimate and final manifestation of their readiness to struggle not just with each other, but against "universal injustice," even if it requires the murder of kin. In a yet not fully developed form, Pushkin here introduces the Cain-and-Abel motif that, as we shall later see, permeates the cycle of The Tragedies.

We see that in "The Covetous Knight," the antagonists have a firm belief in their "rights," supported by the conviction that they can control their destinies. As a result of these convictions, they become the instruments of each other's destruction, however. What in the beginning seems to be a strong possibility
for gain, ends up being gradually lost. The old Baron who thought he could rule the universe («править миром я могу» (5-295) becomes the slave of his greed; his last words («Где ключи? Ключи, ключи мои!» (5-304)) are not about the keys to his coffers but about the keys with which he did not succeed to open the gates to spiritual liberation. Albert, son of a wealthy father, who had the prospect of becoming rich and independent, loses his position at the court. Consequently, his wealth is of no use to him any longer. Impatience and rebellion have not restored justice but demonstrated fate's ironical perversity. His father's longed for death does not set Albert free, but imprisons him forever.

The Duke who attempted to pacify the feuding parties is appalled to face such terrible changes of times and hearts. «Ужасный век, ужасные сердца!» he exclaims after recalling happier days of friendship between his grandfather and Baron Philip when order, peace, and kindness seemed to prevail. His nostalgia for a golden age is misplaced in view of the fact that the Baron's and Albert's tragedy was enacted much earlier by Cain and Abel. While this does not mean that the golden age is a fictitious concept, it is however not necessarily found in the past. Indeed tragic misunderstandings, mask the possibility that it may be found not in the past but in neighboring space, for example, in the
idyllic world of Belkin's Tales. This idea will be further explored below (in Chapter III, which deals with The Tales as a cycle).

"Mozart And Salieri"

The first tragedy of the cycle, "The Covetous Knight," deals with a simple vice -- greed. It also ends with the most common form of death -- death from old age and natural causes. Although the old Baron accuses his son of parricide, technically, Albert is not guilty. He has precipitated his father's death but not killed him by physical means. The second drama of the cycle, "Mozart and Salieri," provides variations on these structural components. Here the vice, envy, is more complex than greed and death is inflicted by murder. The beginning of this tragedy echoes the beginning of "The Covetous Knight." It too offers a meditation on the injustice of the world order and fate, as experienced by Salieri. Salieri makes the following statement: «Нет правды на земле, но правды нет и выше» (5-306). Here we immediately approach the core of his tragedy. Who deserves fame: an irrational genius or a hard working dedicated craftsman?
These two types of artists are compared on several different levels beginning with Salieri's thoughts on the way their respective creative process manifests itself. The craftsman Salieri creates rationally:

Ремесло
Поставил я подвожием искусству;
Я сделался ремесленник: перстам
Придал послушную, сухую беглость
И верность уху. Звуки умертвив,
Музыку я разыкал, как труп. Поверил
Алгёбры гармонию. (5-306).

He workes diligently: «усильным, напряженным постоянством» (5-307). Mozart seems to make no significant effort: «Намедни ночью бессонница меня томила, и в голову пришли мне две, три мысли. Сегодня я их набросал» (5-309). In Salieri's reflections on the two types of creative personality, we find the beginnings of his rebellion against an unjust world order. Salieri believes that only effort leads to valid art. He cannot accept the notion of art created by grace. Grace, to him, is a form of injustice.

The morality of the two artists is also compared in the tragedy. The craftsman loves his craft, he is a devout ascetic. He toils and engages in prayerful vigil while the genius Mozart is a gregarious trifler and a carefree "lunatic" (at least in Salieri's view). His interior monologues reminds us of the self-serving monologues of the Baron and his son from "The Covetous Knight."
All three apply very similar reasoning. One may compare the already quoted:
«кто знает, сколько горьких воздержаний, обузданных страстей...» (5-297) with Salieri's:

Отверг я рано праздные забавы;
Науки, чуждые музыке, были
Постылы мне; упрямо и надменно
От них отрекся я...
Преодолел
я ранние невзгоды. (5-306)

All three bring sacrifices to their "god," in one case, the god of wealth, in the other, the god of art, or more precisely, the god of craft. Also their attitudes to their opponents have a great deal in common. The Miser thinks that his son does not deserve the money because he is a madman: «бедуин, расточитель молодой, развратников разгульных собеседников» (5-297). Salieri too thinks that Mozart does not deserve his genius because he is a "madman":

Где ж правота, когда священный дар,
Когда бессмертный гений — не в награду
Любви горячей, самоотверженя,
Труду, усердия, молений послан —
А озаряет голову безумца,
Гуляя праздного?... (5-307)

Despite all his effort and dedication to art, (or is it to work?) the craftsman attains only average results, while the genius reaches profundity, boldness, and
harmony. He is endowed with the most sacred gift and is called a "god" even by his opponent Salieri. Since celestial justice uses other than human criteria in imposing its order upon the world, Salieri rebels and restores "justice" by killing Mozart. A major difference between *The Tales* and *The Tragedies* is to be found in this: no one in *The Tragedies* is able to transcend the confines of his own logic upon which he bases his concept of justice while in *The Tales*, the implied author intimates the relativism of logic. In *The Tragedies*, the dramatic action unfolds without interference from an implied author, such as in *The Tales*.

We have stated that the theme of the injustice of fate remains at the core of the tragic conflict in both "The Covetous Knight" and "Mozart and Salieri." In "Mozart and Salieri" however, it is transposed from the lower realm of just distribution of material wealth into the realm of spiritual wealth -- the realm of the creative process. The very core of Salieri's inner conflict stems from his futile attempt to garner God's approval of his human virtues. Salieri in his rebellion approaches the Biblical archetype of Cain who likewise cannot understand why God does not reward the "worthy" (himself) but graces the unworthy (Abel, Mozart). In a sense, his tragedy is not so much a tragedy of envy or jealousy as a tragedy of metaphysics. In a similar vein, the greed of the Baron and the jealousy of his son inflamed their revolt against each other, but
the root cause stems from their "discovery" that life is cruel and unjust. If in
"The Covetous Knight" the antagonists see the personification of their unjust
fate in each other, Salieri's situation is more complex. He realizes all too well
that Mozart is the personification of the divine force in which he has always so
passionately believed, deeming it "good." Acting according to his own
perception of justice, the fair and just Salieri served God with devotion and
passion. He was even kind and generous to those whom he deemed worthy of
his generosity and kindness. Envy did not enter his mind and heart until the
arrival of Mozart's exceptional genius, which suddenly broke all the rules Salieri
lived by. Envy was the result of his "discovery" of the injustice of fate -- not of
his desire for personal glory. The Russian Pushkin scholar Mikhail Gershenzon
rightly characterizes Salieri's conflict with the universe as follows: «[это]
трагедия причинно-мышлящего разума, осужденного жить в мире, где
главные события совершаются беспричинно». He indicates that Salieri's
preoccupation with the philosophical aspects of the natural and divine order
leads to his moral and metaphysical bankruptcy: «Сальери думает поправить
ошибку Бога... [но при этом] он и самого себя, свой разум признает
Богом, т.е. Бога собственно отрицает; поэтому, убивая Моцарта, он тем
самым убивает в себе Бога». Gershenzon's perspicacious summary of
Salieri's moral and metaphysical dilemma points to the very core of the tragic conflict in the drama. The critic's brilliant insight casts light on the other three tragedies within the cycle. Each tragedy has at its core the conflict of a protagonist's rebellion against the fate allotted to him and ultimately against God, which explains why they are primarily tragedies of thought and not action. This motif decides the plot structure designed around an archetypal situation which may be defined by the mathematical term of the *invariable*, as it is applied to linguistics.

The linguistic concept of complementary distribution is also appropriate for the present discussion. A phoneme as such can exist only as an abstract unit. As soon as it finds itself in a certain environment, it finds there its specific realization as a concrete allophone. The virtually endless variety of allophones in its turn complements the phoneme. In these terms, the hero who rebels against his fate is comparable to the phoneme which finds its realizations in each specific plot as a concrete allophone: a concrete hero with concrete sins, passions, weaknesses, various intentions, peculiar problems, etc. Thus all four plots complement the central idea. Into each specific dramatic realization of the invariable the author introduces different *variables*, such as: different character flaws, various types of death, different "personifications" of fate, diverse settings, etc. The passions and vices which are attributed to the archetypal
protagonists (greed, envy, sensuality) also belong to the set of variables. It is however not the passion itself that is the primary force destroying the one who carries it. The sins play only a secondary role: their function within the structure is that of catalyst speeding each defiant hero's journey toward destruction. The primary cause is rebellion against the world order represented by God, Fate, and finally destructive Nemesis.

Each protagonist is a psychologically complex individual. Often we see contradictory passions and emotions struggling within him (greed and chivalry, love and envy, Eros and avarice). He can be as unattractive as Baron Philip or as nobly inspiring as Walsingham, the central character of the cycle's last tragedy, "The Feast During the Plague." He can be a murderer like Salieri or a victim of his last passionate love like Don Juan from the third tragedy ("The Stone Guest") -- but he is invariably destroyed by the fate against which he rebels, regardless of the distribution of vice and virtue. To return to the mathematical imagery introduced above, each phase of the conflict is calculated by Pushkin with such mathematical precision that the balance always remains stable, whatever new element may be introduced. Thus each one of the four dramas resembles a mathematical function of more than several variables which constantly has the same result -- zero (or in literary terms destruction.) One may assign any value to these variables, or change their number or volume, and
still get the same result. To state it once more, as the cycle progresses, the protagonist of each drama demonstrates increasingly noble features; yet he still meets an increasingly dire death. This fact emphasizes that it is rebellion and not character that is the central concern of Pushkin's *Little Tragedies*. In order to fully demonstrate this point, let us return to the clearly negative protagonists of the first two tragedies before discussing the largely positive protagonists of the last two.

Let us begin with the old Baron. It is obvious that he is a miser and an altogether repulsive man. His son Albert is infected by the same vice however. According to his own confession, his heroic battle at the tournament was inspired by greed:

Геройству что виною было? — скупость —
Да! заразиться здесь не трудно ею.
Под кровлею одной с моим отцом. (5-287)

This directly stated self-accusation is not wholly convincing, since Albert has a high self-esteem and in addition he blames his father for his sins. Still, he is profoundly disturbed by the Jew's suggestion that he poison the Baron: «Как! отравить отца! и смел ты сыну...» (5-293). In this situation the young man's noble anger is undermined by his previous indirect flirting with the idea of his father's death. He indeed fears that the old man might stay around for too long
a time «лет десять, двадцать, двадцать пять и тридцать он проживает» (5-290) or even outlive him «Ужель отец меня переживет?» (5-290).

Yet the old Baron's character is also more complex and controversial than it might appear to be at first glance. Although he is a miser (*skupoi*), he is still a knight (*rytsar*), and perhaps no less of a chevalier than his dashing son. Brown brilliantly demonstrates how the clash of these two similar personalities in the end proves this point (his observation deserves an extensive quotation.)

Albert remained quiet when his father accused him of the monstrous crime of parricide; but at the hint that he would stoop to the ignoble act of robbery his blood boils, he bursts into the room with the short and fateful words: "Baron, you lie!" At once the old man shows another side of his character; he is, after all, a knight, and the accusation of falsehood... can be wiped out only by blood. He is challenging his son to a duel to the death. How is it that the Baron dares to submit to the "judgment of God" when he has just uttered a flagrant lie in accusing his son of an attempt to rob him? Because he is inwardly convinced that his son's very inheriting of the treasured gold is robbery... It is in a last despairing effort to prevent this robbery that he turns knight from miser and is ready to meet his son on the field of honor.56

Brown's detailed analysis of the characters' inner motivations perfectly demonstrates that each of them is a complex individual who is obsessed by several conflicting passions, both low and elevated. As we have already noted, chivalry is typical of all three characters including Salieri. He serves his music as if it were a Damsel. The chivalrous qualities of Don Juan, lover and duelist,
are presented in the most romantic terms: «Скоро я полечу по улицам
знакомым, усы планом закрыл, в брови пляной» (5-316).

The capacity for passion, however, increases from one hero to the next. While Albert merely mentions a certain Clotilde who arose a certain interest in
him (he is not passionately in love with her), love itself does not occupy any
significant place in his life. His father the Baron lives by passion, in his case
this is love for gold. The old Baron's lust for money and its power appears
sadistically erotic:

Нас уверяют медики: есть люди,
В убежденье находящие приятность.
Когда я ключ в замок влагаю, то же
Я чувствую, что чувствовать должны
Они, вонзая в жертву нож: приятно
И страшно вместе. (5--296-297)

Salieri describes his passion for music in similar terms: «звучи умертвив,
музыку я разъяр, как труп» (5-306). Like Philip in his vaults, Salieri finds
pleasure in his confinement («в безмолвной келье... позабыв и сон и пищу»
(5-307)). Like a devoted lover, he abandons all the pleasures of life for the sake
of his passion. In Salieri's case, it is obsession with music, for which he kills his
more successful rival. Don Juan dies for love. In short, all these characters

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are presented in a human dimension of love and passion, a mixture of good and evil, rather than in terms of one sin.

We are now in the position to summarize the progression in the features which of the succeeding characters within the cycle. Lower qualities within each variation of a hero give way to more elevated ones in the next sequence. Albert and the Baron are the lowest. Salieri, however imperfect compared to Mozart, is still a creator of considerable stature. The third tragedy, "The Stone Guest" will introduce a more noble character: Don Juan, a poet and almost "Mozartian" genius.38

"The Stone Guest"

In this, the third, tragedy, we encounter a sympathetic character, whose vices are far outweighed by a wide range of positive qualities. Don Juan has a stature far above that of Salieri. Although Don Juan kills, he does so in open encounters with his enemies and would not dream of secretly poisoning his rivals. He is also superior to Salieri in creative talent. Salieri remains a mere craftsman, while Don Juan is presented by the author as a poet. In some ways, he even approximates Mozart. Like this divinely gifted genius, he possesses true generosity and appreciates life in all its manifestations. As a poet, he seems to trust inspiration rather than craft, once again, paralleling the genius by
grace, Mozart. There is only one feature which distinguishes him from Salieri's
antagonist: he rebels against fate, whereas Mozart, as one of the two exceptions
in the entire cycle, accepts whatever fate has in store for him. Let us
substantiate the claim that Pushkin's Don Juan is a largely positive figure, since
previous treatments of the archetypal seducer have emphasized his vice -- lust. Lust is the fifth of the seven deadly sins (covetousness is the second, and envy
is the fourth). Thus it would have been easy for Pushkin to make his Don Juan
into a villain. As most critics have perceived, however, his Don Juan transcends
lust. In him, eroticism is closely linked to creativity; as already stated, he is a
poet. Even his servant is aware of his master's truly artistic imagination («У
вас воображение в минуту дорисует остальное» (5-322)). As we know, Don Juan has composed a song for Laura, which she performs with great
success. Moreover, in this tragedy love is acknowledged to be more powerful
than music: «Одной любви музыка уступает» (5-324). In the art of love-
making, as we know beyond doubt, Pushkin's Don Juan is a true artist. Unlike
his cold-blooded literary predecessors, who reduced love to lust, Pushkin's Don
Juan is a lover every bit as much as a seducer.

His involvement and preoccupation with every woman seduced by him is
passionate and sincere; at least this is what we know from the three women
introduced in the tragedy (Inezà, Laura, and Donna Anna). "An object of his affection has his whole-hearted devotion," as one critic states. "The Stone Guest" thus greatly differs from previous treatments of the theme by not delivering a moral about the evils of lust and seduction. In "The Stone Guest," traditional lust has been replaced by eroticism, even love -- by a passion with metaphysical overtones. In comparison with the vices of the protagonists of the two previous tragedies, Don Juan's vice presents the "noblest" form of greed (or lust). While the Baron and Albert lusted for material possessions, the Don's greed is for emotional rather than more tangible experience. Furthermore, our hero is completely reborn when he meets Donna Anna, or at least he thinks so.

Вас полюбя, люблю я добродетель
И в первый раз смиренно перед ней
Дрожащие колена преклоняю. (5-347)

Although this sentiment may be a delusion, it bears testimony to the fact that Don Juan's quest for erotic experience has a distinctly spiritual register. Another noble feature of Don Juan's love is its lack of possessiveness. His quest for passion lacks the "ambition" of the Salierian desire to be the first and the last. He is not jealous of his rivals (Laura's lovers for instance); when he kills a rival, it is because he needs to "remove an obstacle." It is not a competitor he is killing, as Salieri does, driven by his sense of inferiority. As
already stated, Don Juan approximates Mozart without however achieving his total freedom from selfish desire. In the case of Donna Anna, his rival is quite abstract: it is the monument on the dead Commander's tomb, not the living husband.

О пусть умру сейчас у ваших ног,
Пусть бедный прах мой здесь же похоронят
Не тут – не близко – дале где-нибудь,
Там – у дверей – у самого порога.
Чтоб камня моего могли коснуться
Вы легкою ногой или одеждой,
Когда сюда, на этот гордый гроб
Пойдете кудри наклонять и плакать. (5-335)

In view of the positive characterization of Don Juan presented above, the question arises: where is Don Juan's fatal flaw to be found?

There is a long-standing controversy over the moral message of "The Stone Guest." In Mirsky's view, it is "one of the most impressive and ultimate expressions of Pushkin's fundamental idea of inherent Nemesis. The romantic conceit of the original legend becomes in Pushkin's hands the inevitable working of a moral law." Akhmatova in her Pushkin articles also perceives Don Juan's end as retribution for his sins, in spite of her marked sympathy for him. Brown, however, suggests that the hero is not guilty of any sin and that no retribution is involved; the stone guest is simply a symbol, "it is death,
nothing more or less. No man escapes 'the stone guest' in the end: but the Don faces him with the steadfast courage... with the same defiant courage as does Walsingham in 'The Feast During the Plague.' All these conflicting interpretations of the moral message in "The Stone Guest" or lack thereof bring us to the discussion of Don Juan's self-perception as opposed to motivation. Otherwise, it is far from clear why Pushkin's hero must be punished. Perhaps the tragedy does not deal with meting out justice and retribution and perhaps it ignores Don Juan's sins? I would argue, in keeping with my overall theory, that the issue at the core of the tragedy is not punishment for sins, but the protagonist's rebellion against fate. The Don's demise begins when he perceives fate as a force that arranges his life in a manner he cannot accept. After a life of pleasure, he wants a life of virtue and he protests the fact that he cannot have it. He wants the freedom to change the pattern of his life and he perceives as unjust the fact that fate denies him his desired change of paradigm. The theory formulated above holds true for the entire cycle of tragedies. Whatever new variables are introduced into the basic pattern, the invariant thematic conflict remains. Fate, higher powers, God deny the protagonist his demand for justice. The nobler the protagonist, the more justified his demand, the more implacable his fate seems to be. As already observed, the treatment of the theme is consistant and rigidly organized by the author. "Events happen not because one
precedes and occasions the other [not because one man is covetous, another one jealous -- L. Y.], but because pattern is made manifest. The reader is impressed not by the chaos of reality, but by its rigor and irreversibility."

The theme of fate and man's rebellion against it is restated in each successive tragedy on an ever more abstract and all-embracing levels, since Pushkin's main concern, contrary to much critical opinion, is philosophical and not psychological. We find that, in order to make his philosophical statement all the more clear, Pushkin allows those protagonists who are in the grip of baser passions to be treated more condescendingly by fate than those in possession of nobler emotions. The latter characters should have greater capacities for insight, yet they too remains blind, trapped as they are in their egotistic rationalism.

In his rebellion against fatal circumstances, Don Juan strikes the reader as a man who, both protests against his death at a moment when he believes he has found true happiness, yet is fascinated by it. His lastling affection for the dead Ineza, his love-making with Laura next to the body of the dead rival killed by him, his willingness to disclose his identity to Donna Anna, the widow of yet another man killed by him, and his nearly ecstatic anticipation of death when facing the statue, -- all these features characterize him as a man wondering how death may provide him with an ultimate revelation. Images of graveyards, tomb
stones, statues, and the consistent reminiscences of duels, deaths, and dead lovers are characteristic of the entire death-ridden microcosm of the tragedy. Does this mean that Don Juan is a suicidal character? Do we need to look for "Freudian" elements in the tragedy? In my view, Don Juan does not seek death itself but the confrontation with death as an act of defiance. Rebellious till the end, he is concerned with only one thing: to demonstrate his defiance. He does not believe that he will die, since he does not accept structures and patterns imposed upon his will. Feeling entitled to happiness, he is confident that he will remove this obstacle to his goal as he has all previous ones on his path to conquest.

To summarize: Pushkin, in his cycle of tragedies, places his protagonists in situations of increasing intensity. The motif of death (the ultimate manifestation of the workings of Fate) persists and grows ever more menacing from one dramatic work to another. The changes in tonality and scale produce a set of variations which develop to a crescendo. In "The Covetous Knight," the Baron dies an (almost) natural death and his son Albert survives, the personification of Fate for them is to be found in their own kin. Salieri kills, but is himself not threatened -- except by his doubts. Don Juan "sees" his death in an uncanny and inhuman form -- the stone statue. Of all the protagonists so far discussed, he is also the one who experiences the transition from life to death.
most consciously. However, the power of fate and death and the impotence of rebellion is yet further intensified in the fourth and last tragedy of the cycle, "The Feast During the Plague."

"The Feast During The Plague"

This tragedy has been the most problematic for Pushkin scholarship. It does not at all fit the theory that each tragedy deals with a specific vice leading to retribution. The group of people who have taken refuge from the plague and are devoting their last days to revelry can hardly be classified as carriers of vice. This applies above all to their master of ceremonies, Walsingham -- a noble character and a grief-stricken widower. However, Walsingham cannot be considered a protagonist in the same sense as the Baron, Albert, Salieri, or Don Juan. He is but part of an entire group, the members of which are equally grief-stricken and free of vice. To parallel this fact, Fate too is depersonalized. It is not a miserly father, nor a spend-thrift son; it is not an unreachable rival or even a stone statue. It is not a person and not a tangible object, it is the black plague, a "force" of death. Walsingham and his friends cannot see their enemy; the plague is invisible and at the same time it is everywhere. As the cycle of The Tragedies progresses, the "enemy" becomes more and more depersonified and at the same time more and more powerful, until it finally reaches the "imperial"
status of the omnipotent Plague. Now it becomes personified as a Tsarina
(«царица грозная чума» (5-355)) who possesses the elemental powers of an
abyss, an ocean, and a hurricane:

Есть уношение в бою,
И бедны мрачной на краю,
И в разъяренном океане,
Средь грозных волн и бурной тьмы,
И в аравийском урагане,
И в дуновении Чумы. (5-356)

As a result of its ravages, all bonds are broken, all kin are dead, houses are
empty, cemeteries dominate the landscape. There is no rational justification for
this destruction; this tragedy offers the quintessence of universal injustice
inflicted upon people who do not deserve this punishment: «Пало столько
отважных, добрьих и прекрасных жертв» (5-353). In her song, Mary
(«погибшее, но милое создание» (5-358)) recalls happier days when she was
innocent («мой голос... был голосом невинности» (5-353)). Then the people
who now are lost to the Plague lived virtuous lives:

Было время, процветала
В мире наша сторона:
В воскресенье бывала
Церковь божия полна;
Наших деток в шумной школе
Раздавались голоса,
И сверкала в светлом поле
Серп и быстрыя коса. (5-352)
It could, of course, be argued that the revelers celebrating their last feast during the plague are dissolute. It could equally well be argued, however, that dissolution is their response to divine injustice. Undeserved collective punishment evokes collective rebellion. The facts are undeniable: prosperous, hard working, religious people and their innocent children have all succumbed to the plague. Those who are still alive cannot find any logic in such undeserved punishment and cannot reconcile themselves to it. Thus this drama still deals with the conflict between man and a frightening and senseless universe, only now the situation is presented in its extreme variation: the protagonist is not a man but all men -- mortal mankind. This is precisely why no particular sin or passion is prominent in this, the purest of all the four tragic paradigms. Fate is presented as ultimately unjust, and the central figure, Walsingham as well as all mortals, as ultimately not deserving punishment according to any rationally conceived scheme of justice.

Walsingham is a poet who composes and sings hymns, making others share his inspiration as is manifested in their singing, this rebellion against death assuming aesthetic forms. Artistic inspiration is pitted against the elemental qualities of the plague as it assumes the quality of a bacchanalian orgy (Мери
The two forces of art and pestilence confront each other as the revellers demand that Walsingham's hymn become a challenge to the plague: "войную, живую песню, не грустную шотландской вдохновеньу, а буйную, вакхическую песнь" (5-366). The mood of the desperate victims of the plague is often characterized as cynical hedonism under the motto: "eat, drink, and be merry..." It is clear however, that these people are not merry but defiant. Victor Terras is of the opinion that the tragedy speaks not of struggle against, but fascination with death. It is hard to agree, that the primary motivation for rebellion on behalf of these frightened people is mindless gaiety and demonic insanity. Vice versa, the rebellious excitement and fascination in the presence of danger are induced by the victims' mind and reason searching for a logical solution. And the only solution they see is to rebel.

In "The Feast During the Plague," everyone in Walsingham's circle is a rebel, and it is in this context that the portrayal of departed Jackson acquires special significance. Already a dead man, he is one of them, and they describe him as if he were still living:

я напомню
О человеке, очень нам знакомом,
О том, чьи шутки, повести смешные,
Ответы острые и замечань,
Столь едкие в их важности забавной.
It is not obvious for quite a while that Jackson is already dead. It is even more interesting that his jokes, maxims, stories, his mind and reason are mentioned as his most prominent features. They make him an almost pure archetypal hero of The Little Tragedies. At the same time, the dead Jackson becomes a part of a larger unity, since the Plague in general threatens the mind and reason (чума «зараза насыляет на самые блестящие умы») of the group. Jackson functions as Walsingham's double. Both are archetypal rebels. The function of the dead double is to emphasize that both dead Jackson and dying Walsingham chose a demonic path that precludes immortality in a religious sense. Walsingham may gain immortality; but only in art, as a poet. The supreme immortality of Mozart — the immortality of artist and man — is denied to him. Mozart accepts his fate and therefore will find his immortality both through art and in some transcendental realm attaining salvation.

Not all characters in the tragedy share the rebellion of Jackson and Walsingham. An alternative view of immortality is offered by the priest who
advocates submission. In his view, their orgiastic rebellion has demonic features:

Безбожный пир, безбожные безумцы!
Вы пиришеством и песнями разврата
Ругаетесь над мрачной тишиной,
Повсюду смертию распространенной!
Средь ужаса плачевых похорон,
Средь бледных лиц молюсь я на кладбище —
А ваши ненавистные восторги
Смущают тишину гробов — и землю
Над мертвыми телами потрясают!
Когда бы стариков и жен моленья
Не освятили общей, смертной ямы,
Подумать мог бы я, что нынче бесы
Погибший дух безбожника терзают
И в тьму кромешную тащат со смехом. (5-356-357)

Sometimes perceived as a pedestrian moralist, the priest nevertheless seems to be right. Like Mozart, he understands that rational protest is powerless in the face of death. Meeting the "black messenger of death," Mozart offers no protest. He is one of those who are able to see beyond rational justice, humbly accepting his fate, whatever aspect it assumes. The priest too points to reconciliation with fate as a path of salvation. While his voice is drowned by the chorus of rebellious revelers, their leader reacts differently. Although cursing those who would follow the priest («проклят будь, кто за тобой пойдет» (5-358)), Walsingham admits twice that, in fact, it is his soul that is
cursed («мо́й надни́й дух», «я здесь удержал́ сознанием беззаконья мосто» (5-358)). This defiant hero makes a huge spiritual leap: he is aware of all the lawlessness of his action. Although still defiant, his statement to the priest sounds like a confession. But Walsingham does not follow the priest, who gives him God's blessing nevertheless: «Спа́си тебя Господь! Прости, мой сын» (5-359). However, the last lines of the drama state in the stage direction that, while the crowd resumes the revelling, the master of ceremonies remains in profound contemplation (Председатель остается погруженный в глубокую задумчивость). This profound contemplation of the most outspoken ideological proponent of rebellion against God changes dramatically the tone of the entire cycle. Parables of damnation, *The Tragedies* offer in the end contemplation of the alternative outcome: salvation, grace.

*The Little Tragedies* is only one of the two extraordinarily creative cycles written by Pushkin in Boldino. If these sketches could be defined as variations on the theme of "bad luck" and damnation, then *The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin* perhaps present variations on the theme of "good luck"
and the ways of salvation. This premise will be discussed in the following chapter which will treat unifying themes and recurrent motifs within the prosaic cycle of *The Tales*. 
CHAPTER III

THE CYCLE OF BELKIN TALES AS VARIATIONS ON THE THEMES OF FATE, GRACE AND GOOD LUCK

The Cain and Abel Conflict

Vladimir Golstein, in his insightful article "Pushkin's 'Mozart and Salieri' as a Parable of Salvation," views the tragedy as an allegory or parable on both Old Testament and New Testament themes. Its subtexts are "the story of Cain and Abel" and "Christ's parable of the householder and his vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16)" (156). Golstein substantiates his assertions by the fact that "Cain kills the object of God's choice and so does Salieri" (158). He also points to the moral of Christ's parable of the householder and the vineyard, namely that it denies the logical notion that a "heavenly reward should follow a meritorious deed" (161). Golstein also points to the important invariant that links all rebels of Cain's type: that they are unable to wait for God's grace -- they want their reward now. They do not understand "Hamlet's words: 'Readiness is all'"
They do not belong to "those who know" (Mozart's *voi che sapete* is the piece played by the blind violinist in the play (5-308)). They constantly misuse the phrase "it is time" (*nopa*) when they "willfully designate the moment suited for action" (165). Golstein emphasizes that Mozart's "attitude toward time is the very antithesis of Salieri's" in the sense that he "does not try to control events," preferring "to be acted upon rather than act" (166).

Golstein's observations illuminate not only the tragedy "Mozart and Salieri," but also *The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin*. Although *The Tales* do not deal with a Mozartian genius, they constantly present characters who have an infallible sense of "timing" and therefore act in accordance with intuited patterns of existence that realize Fate's, God's, Providence's plans for them. Mozart was a genius, and Providence's plans for him were not those of continuous personal fulfillment. Instead they were conceived in terms of artistic fulfillment.

Salieri does not realize the supreme irony of the events that befall him, i.e. that, contrary to his own perception, he is not the director of the play that unfolds before him. As Golstein puts it:

Salieri talks of Mozart, and Mozart appears; Mozart talks of poisoning and is poisoned; at their last dinner Mozart anticipates Salieri's crime by expressing his fears of the threat present at the table; he completes his *Requiem* precisely when Salieri makes up his mind to kill him; Mozart drinks the poisonous cup, but has time to perform
his composition; he pronounces judgment upon Salieri
(Гений и злодейство - две вещи несовместимые)
before the crime has even occurred. (168)

It is clear that Salieri is not dictating the timing of events, but that a higher plan is being enacted. Fate has given Mozart time to fulfill his destiny as an artist and even though he is denied time to find a continuation of his personal fulfillment, he would be the last one to dispute Providence's decrees -- being a genius and, as such, party to insights that transcend the level of everyday life (быт).

The "Artists of Everyday Life" in *The Tales*

In *The Tales*, to restate it, we do not deal with protagonists whose task in life is to fulfill an artistic destiny. They are, instead, to fulfill their personal lives, to be artists of everyday life. They have the artistic talents of knowing when to trust fate, when to heed a new development; they know how to wait patiently and they also master the art of improvisation. The only difference between them and the real artists is that they apply their talents not to literary or musical texts, but to their life texts. This holds true of the young count in "The Shot" when he comes to the duel eating cherries. He knows that his time has not yet come and that he is destined to pluck many more cherries. Yet, when
we meet him again in the second narrated part of the tale, he has changed. He now lacks the self-confidence of his early youth. A married man, in love with his wife and concerned for her well-being, he again acts in accordance with the "laws of life," only they have changed for him. His firing at Sil’vio, dictated by the instinct of self-preservation, may not be romantically heroic, but it is in accord with life's logic. Life therefore prevents him from committing a murder (he misses Sil’vio's head by an inc.) and he preserves himself for his destiny: to become a good husband, father and representative of his ruling class.

Dunia, the prodigal daughter of "The Stationmaster," also has a supreme talent for trusting the moment. Torn between filial duty and the dictates of her heart, she obeys her natural inclinations. And her natural inclinations tell her that her filial duty has assumed forms that can only stunt and pervert her simple true destiny — that of being a spouse and mother. Her rakish Hussar also knows when meeting Dunia that his rakish days are over and that a new, more responsible, phase of his life is to begin.

The two tales discussed above, are the most "serious" of the cycle. In two others, the pure love stories "The Blizzard" and "The Lady-Peasant," the same principle works in such an obvious way as to "lay bare the device." In "The Blizzard," the protagonist -- a young woman, Mar’ia Gavrilonva -- is so attuned to what I have termed the "laws of life" that nature itself acts on behalf of the
heroine. Nature prevents her from making the wrong choice of husband (caused by her reading of novels and romances that could but obfuscate her immature judgment) and aids her in making the right choice. Maria Gavrilovna, the young heroine who finds her true suitor thanks to an improbable chance event, is thus related to Tat'iana in *Eugene Onegin* (completed concurrently with *The Belkin Tales* in Boldino). Led astray by literature in her first choice of Vladimir, she is sufficiently anchored in the natural, common sense life of country life to be rescued from a fatal mistake by elemental forces of nature itself. While not stated in the tale, it may be deduced both from the partial parallel to Tat'iana and from the very passivity of Maria Gavrilovna's behavior. Easily swayed in opposite directions, she is nevertheless brought to safety and reality by the snow storm, when she allows herself to be carried in the direction dictated by Providence. It is tempting to interpret her swooning at the moment Burmin arrives as her giving her consent to being carried off by forces wiser than she is. And Maria learns from her "elemental" experiences as well. She is able to wait out the denouement of her fate and her reward is Burmin, her true husband, selected for her by "life" itself and certainly not by literature.

The tale "The Lady-Peasant" presents a different female character. Liza resembles not Maria but rather Dunia. Like her, she possesses initiative and
will, and again, like her, pits these against false parental authority.

Nevertheless, there is nothing of a rebel challenging fate in her or should be in this pure comedy of errors. Liza uses her ingenuity not to rebel against fate, but to aid in its realization. Naturally far removed from any Mozartian realms of genius, she still has the "Mozartian" feature of seeing the comicality of a given situation. Those who laugh not at Fate, but with it, are rewarded by stern Fate in its guise as benevolent Providence. It is to uncomplicated sunny natures attuned to life, that Fate yield; indeed the targets of its demonic powers are those who cannot distinguish between the injustice of life and their own egotistic concepts of what ought to be.

The Demons in The Tragedies

The demonism of the rebels in The Tragedies is obvious. The Baron in "The Covetous Knight" is obsessed with his gold as an emblem of power. Albert considers parricide. Salieri is a murderer who justifies evil. Not only are their actions, passions, obsessions evil, -- they literally are increasingly demonized. Albert speaks of his fury as a "demonic" feeling («ВЕБЕСИЛЯ Я» (5-287)) and sees his life as "damned" («ПРОКЛЯТОЕ ЖИТЬЕ!» (5-295)). The Baron is characterized as a "watchdog" («ПЕС ЦЕПНОЙ» (5-291)) and as a
"demon ruling the world" («как некий демон отселе править миром я могу» (5-295)). It does not frighten him that his gold can turn evil and crime into his obedient servants.

Я свистну, и ко мне послушно, робко
Внурет окровавленное злодейство,
И руку будет мне лизать, и в очи
Смотреть, в них знак моей читая воли.
Мне все послушно, я же – ничemu. (5-296)

Salieri is not unacquainted with the whisper of temptation («шепот искушения» (5-311)), since it has obsessed him for eighteen years. Undoubtedly, it is this "whisper" that has deluded him into mistreating his "lack of love for life" and for a superior sense of justice (he admits: «мало жизнь люблю» (5-311)).

Don Juan may love his life fully, but has a disdain for that of others. Certainly there is something of demonic disdain in Don Juan's making sexual overtures to Laura while her lover's corpse is still in the room. Death acts like a peculiar aphrodisiac on the Don. Does he derive a sense of being from the non-being of another? If so, Don Juan can be seen as something of a vampire and perhaps also something of a necrophiliac. Certainly his love for the dead Ineza displays some "unnatural" features:
Whatever the specifics of the Don's demonism, it is there. Both Donna Anna and Laura call him "demon" and "devil" (демон, дьявол); other characters call him "blasphemer" (безбожник). He himself speaks of his conscience as "fatigued by much evil" («на совести усталой много зла» (5-347)). In "The Feast During the Plague," Walsingham's defiance of death is "godless" (according to the priest) and he himself admits that his rebellion is marked by "lawlessness" («я здесь удержан... сознаньем беззакона моего» (5-358)).

It is true that Walsingham's and Don Juan's demonism is of a more "elevated" nature than that of Salieri, the Baron and Albert. All of those defined as "rebels" in the present work partake of the demonic realm however. What is the situation in regard to demonism in The Tales? Clearly their "Mozartian" characters (as defined above) do not partake of demonism, but what is the situation in regard to those who try to bend fate to their will? Are
they touched by demonic forces as are the protagonists of *The Tragedies* -- even if to a much smaller degree?

**“The Devils”**

Before we turn directly to an examination of Sil’vio, Samson, Vladimir, the Coffinmaker and other "non-Mozartian" characters in *The Tales*, let us briefly examine the poem "The Devils" («бесы») written soon after Pushkin's arrival in Boldino (on September 7th to be exact).

Мчатся тучи, вьются тучи;  
Невидимкою луна  
Освещает снег летучий;  
Мутно небо, ночь мутна.  
Еду, еду, в чистом поле;  
Колокольчик дин-дин-дин...  
Страшно, страшно поневоле  
Средь неведомых равнин!

«Эй, пошел, ямщик!» — «Нет мочи:  
Кошам, барин, тяжело;  
Вьюга мне сипает очи;  
Все дороги занесло;  
Хоть убей, следа не видно;  
Сбились мы. Что делать нам!  
В поле бес нас водит, видно,  
Да кружит по сторонам.

Посмотри: вон, вон играет,  
Дует, плает на меня;  
Вон — теперь в овраг толкает  
Одичалого коня;  
Там верстой небывалой
Он торчал передо мной;  
Там сверкнул он искрой малой  
И пропал во тьме пустой.  

Мчатся тучи, вьются тучи;  
Невидимою луной  
Освещает снег летний;  
Мутно небо, ночь мутна.  
Сил нам нет кружиться доле;  
Колокольчик вдруг умолк;  
Копи стали... <<Что там в поле?>> —  
<<Кто их знает? пень или волк?>>

Выся злится, выся плакет;  
Копи чуткие храпят;  
Вот уж он далече скачет;  
Лишь глаза во мгле горят;  
Копи снова понеслись;  
Колокольчик дин-дин-дин...  
Вижу: духи собрались  
Средь белеющих равнин.

Бесконечны, безобразны,  
В мутной месяца игре  
Закружились бесы разны,  
Будто листья в ноябре...  
Сколько их! куда их гонят?  
Что так жалобно поют?  
Домового ли хоронят.  
Ведьму ли замуж выдают?

Мчатся тучи, вьются тучи;  
Невидимою луной  
Освещает снег летний;  
Мутно небо, ночь мутна.  
Мчатся бесы рой за роем  
В беспредельной вышине,  
Визгом жалобным и воем  
Надрывая сердце мне. (3--167-168).
This poem could be interpreted as a man's dealing with the fact that he has strayed from the road of life and lost his way in a whirling snowstorm of demonic chaos. Scared and victimized, he imagines that it is "devils" that have created the confusion around him. Even more interesting than this "balladesque" and romantic situation is the notion that the demonic creatures terrifying the lost traveler are themselves also miserable, confused and victimized by yet some other force.

The theme of demons invading a stable human world is manifestly explored in "The Coffinmaker," which was written on September 9th and, as I demonstrate below, is thematically the most important story of The Tales. Again we have the same curious combination of threatening supernatural powers that are simultaneously plaintive and miserable. This mixture, I would argue, is characteristic of the "unhappy" protagonists of The Tales. They are "pitiable demons" -- petulant, annoying, disturbing, upsetting and destructive. To substantiate this claim, let us examine some of the "unhappy devils" of The Tales.
The Demons in *The Tales*

Sil’vio in the opening story of the cycle, "The Shot," has all the appearance of a "demonic hero" -- at least to the unsophisticated young officers of his regiment stationed on the periphery of the Empire. He wears all black, lives alone and befriends young inexperienced men, has a non-Russian name (as a resident of an alien, demonic world) and displays a mysterious somberness:

...его обыкновенная угрюмость, кругой нрав и злой язык имели сильное влияние на молодые наши умы. Какаго таинственность окружала его судьбу; он казался русским, а носил иностранные имя. Некогда он служил в гусарах, и даже счастливо; никто не знал причины, побудившей его выйти в отставку и поселиться в бедном местечке, где жил он вместе бедно и расточительно: ходил вечно пешком, в изношенном черном сюртуке, а держал открытый стол для всех офицеров нашего полка... Никто не знал ни его состояния, ни его доходов, и никто не осмеливался о том его спрашивать. (6-58)

He has perfected his shooting to such a degree that it has become a "horrible art," transgressing human abilities and seeming almost supernatural («полагали, что на совести его лежала какая-нибудь несчастная жертва его ужасного искусства» (6-59). According to the rather naive narrator, Sil’vio has many other demonic features, such as "sparkling eyes," pallor, a threatening facial expression, a volcanic temperament and so forth. His verdict
is that all these characteristics made Sil’vio appear a "real devil" («Мрачная бледность, сверкающие глаза, и густой дым, выходящий изо рту, придавали ему вид настоящего дьявола» (6-61)).

Sil’vio views himself in similar demonic terms. He emphasizes that "he is used to being the first ever since his youth" and that he will not tolerate any change in this regard («Характер мой вам известен: я привык переменствовать, но с молоду это было во мне страстно... Товарищи меня обожали, а полковые командиры... смотрели на меня как на необходимое зло» (6-62)). Refusing the role of fallen angel, he nevertheless functions as "necessary evil" (and this is how many view Sil’vio). The word "evil" (зло) recurs with great frequency in Sil’vio’s self-characterizing speech («я злобствовал... волнение злобы было во мне столь сильно... злобная мысль мелькнула в уме моем» (6-63) and so forth). One is almost ready to suspect that Sil’vio exaggerates his evil aspect in order to appear terrifying and thus to hide a very whiny, petty and, quite simply, confused soul.

However, Sil’vio not only looks, but also acts demonically. He is obsessed with the desire to punish the count for the fact that this young man outdid him in wealth, grace and charm, reducing him, Sil’vio, to a secondary position. In anticipation of the long-awaited revenge, Sil’vio even becomes a "beast of prey"
-- he paces the room "like a tiger in a cage" («Ныне час моей расплаты настал... При сих словах Сильвию встал, бросил об пол свою фуражку и стал ходить вдвад и вперед по комнате, как тигр по своей клетке» (6-64)).

Everything in Sil'vio's revenge is carefully calculated. He appears on the count's threshold "out of the blue," when he is least expected by his now happily married antagonist. He does not announce himself, but withholds his name. Acting with great rudeness, he scares the count's wife to the point of causing her to swoon. When he finally speaks, he repeats all the cliches used by the devil in Gothic stories who comes to collect his debt; in "The Shot," this scene is narrated by the count:

...мне сказали, что у меня в кабинете сидит человек, не хотевший объявить своего имени, но сказавший просто, что ему до меня есть дело. Я вошел в эту комнату и увидел в темноте человека, запыленного и обросшего бородой; он стоял здесь у камина. Я подошел к нему, стараясь припомнить его черты. «Ты не узнал меня, граф?» — сказал он дрожащим голосом. «Сильвио!» — закричал я, и признаюсь, я почувствовал, как волоса стали вдруг на мне дыбом. «Так точно, — продолжал он, — выстрел за мною; я приехал разрядить мой пистолет; готов ли ты?» (6--68-69)
Sil’vio does not take the count's life, because he claims that he has taken his enemy's soul by humiliating him. This is not the case however. Sil’vio, this devil who makes so sure of frightening everyone, does not depart with the count's soul, since the count does not equate his "soul" with pride, as Sil’vio does; therefore he continues to live happily with his wife long after Sil’vio has departed. Perhaps Sil’vio knows that he has failed to restore "justice" by humiliating the count -- just like Salieri, he seems to be left with nagging doubts about the impact of his actions. Is this the reason that Sil’vio goes to war in a foreign country, i.e. without a cause, to be shot there ("magic" sharp-shooter that he is)? Although this cannot be fully demonstrated in Sil’vio's case, there are indications that he is but a very pitiful "demon" -- not much more impressive than Sergeant Kurilkin in "The Coffinmaker." In both cases, animated apparitions of the demonic realm "fall apart" leaving but a heap of broken pieces. Sil’vio, just like the devils of the poem «Бесы», cannot find his place in the world but is driven hither and thither by the "storm of fate:"

Бесконечны, безобразны,
В мутной месяца игре
Закружились бесы разны,
Будто листья в ноябре....

Мчатся бесы рой за роем
В беспредельной вышине,
Визгом жалобным и воем
Надрывая сердце мне. (3-168).
Another personage from *The Tales* who could be classified as a "whiny, stupid devil" is Samson Vyrin from "The Stationmaster." I have already suggested that his surname links him to the demonic realm and that his pursuit of his daughter makes him a parody on "The Stone Guest." His impotence is more obvious than Sil'vio's. Unable to drag his rival into hell, he departs for the underworld himself. Before he does so, he indulges in "whining" about his fate over a drink for quite some time, however. Ludicrous as Samson Vyrin's stubborn and stupid behavior is, his spiritual blindness does not prevent him from being a "poor devil." Undoubtedly he too could join the chorus from Pushkin's poem «Без вила» to "howl out" together with them both a genuine misery and perverse determination to ruin something he cannot understand. This may well be the archetypal situation of all "devils" — large or small, villains or just perverse fools — in Pushkin's oeuvre: they are all determined to impose their self-will on others, but they do not find peace whether they succeed or not, and their suffering is entirely genuine.  

In "The Blizzard," in spite of its title, there is hardly any demonism. As already stated, in this tale the elements separate only those who should be separated, but unite those who belong together. Only Vladimir will lose his way
in the blizzard, clearly being too "lightweight" a person to carry off his beloved. It is left open to speculation where exactly his insubstantiality is to be found. Perhaps he is a fortune hunter -- he is considerably poorer than Mar'ia -- perhaps his whole hare-brained scheme of elopement testifies to "stupidity." One thing is certain: Vladimir is an irrelevant character and "life" sweeps him away. Like Sil'vio, whose fate he shares insofar as he too goes to war and is killed after his personal failure, he also belongs to the category of "demonic" characters.\(^7^7\) But in this tale, as in the entire cycle, the demonic forces turn out entirely impotent. The main protagonists here are Mar'ia Gavrilovna and Burmin who trust the order of things and confirm it by tying the bonds of marriage.

"The Lady-Peasant" is virtually free from any traces of demonism. It is true that the fathers of the two lovers are "devilishly" proud, but their enmity is wiped out by a lucky accident. When the two happen to meet on the border dividing their estates, the horse of one of them, scared, bolts and throws off its rider. Hospitality is immediately extended to the injured party and hostilities are canceled as generosity is rewarded by gratitude.\(^7^8\)

The children of these easily reconciled fathers are likewise free of all demonism, i.e. free of those negative emotions that create the syndrome of demanding "justice" here and now and "on my terms."\(^7^9\) True, Liza uses
deceitful little tricks to get her way, but her feelings are sincere. True, Aleksei is somewhat flirtatious, but he is certainly not a Don Juan:

Дело в том, что Алексей, несмотря на роковое кольцо, на таинственную переписку и на мрачную разочарованность, был добрым и нынешний малый и имел сердце чистое и способное чувствовать наслаждения невинности. (6-107)

Innocence, purity and kindness enable Aleksei (and in fact all the characters in the story) to hear the whispered "advice" of fate and to act accordingly. Demons do invariably yield to goodness and to all those qualities that make the "lucky" protagonists live and love life as it "is." The restless demons, always complaining about their lot, can neither "take" opportunities when these are given, nor "let go" of that which fate denies them. They cling to life when the time has come to renounce it. Whereas divine Mozart quietly submits to the "black messenger," not asking for one more symphony, -- noble, but "greedy" and egotistic Don Juan wants one (?) more conquest or one more exhilarating experience. Whereas Dunia "knows" when to leave her father's house, the "poor devil" Vyrin does not know when to let his daughter go. In all its manifestations, the "demonic" is marked by obsession, proprietoriness and greed; and the "divine," or just "truly human," -- by their opposite: inner freedom, the granting of freedom to others, and generosity.
In *The Tales*, all major characters live in a world which they probably do not understand but where they are saved through their ability "to feel the enjoyment of innocence" («чувствовать наслаждения невинности» (6-107)). They are attuned to nature and follow the natural order of things with open heart and little analysis. Sil’vio, Samson and Vladimir, like the fallen angel and his legions of demons, cannot accept the order of things bestowed upon them by higher powers. They do not agree with the "Mozartian" position in life and attempt to rectify the situation -- Sil’vio almost at any cost, Samson and Vladimir with less obsessive intensity. Salieri, Don Juan, Walsingham cannot be made to give up. Here we find the two cycles both linked in thematic concern and separated by "key."

In *The Tales*, the majority of characters abide and accept, and the demonic rebels do not have the power to ruin their harmonious lives. In *The Tragedies*, the majority of characters rebel and protest, and sometimes have the power to destroy their victims (Mozart), at least in this world. But usually, the only power they have is to destroy each other (Baron Philip and Albert) and themselves. *The Tales* display a dwindling of demonic forces from the obsessive hero of "The Shot," Sil’vio, to the idyllic-comic characters of the last story. *The Tragedies* display an increasing strand of demonic rebellion (even
Thus both cycles demonstrate the same point from opposite perspectives: fate favors those who trust it and it elevates those who accept its dark side to the status of the divine (Mozart); it destroys those who want to control it even if they can offer noble reasons for their wish to change the workings of Providence.
CHAPTER IV

THE CREATIVE WRITER AS A COFFINMAKER: THE CENTRAL TALE OF THE CYCLE

The Pushkinian Concept Of The "Poet"

The Pushkinian concept of the "poet" is traditionally perceived as being one in the romantic and idealistic tradition. He is a genius, a prophet, a Priest in Apollo's temple; often he is opposed to the ignorant and hostile mob (чёрный). Above all he is a prophet of national destinies, as no one after Dostoevsky's Pushkin speech of 1880 could fail to mention either approvingly or disapprovingly.

At the same time, Pushkin scholars have noted an all-pervasive duality in the poet's vision of himself and his calling. He insistently demarcates the two sharply divided hypostases of himself as an exalted visionary (at times) and a very ordinary man (most of the time). The clearest statement to this effect is found in the poem "The Poet" (1827) where the two states are described thus:
ПОЭТ

Пока не требует поэта
К сиявшей жертве Аполлон,
В заблужденьях суетного света
Он молодушино погружен;
Молчит его святая лира;
Душа вкушает хладный сон,
И меж детей ничтожных мира,
Быть может, всех ничтожней он.

Но лишь божественный глагол
До слуха чуткого коснется,
Душа поэта встречается,
Как пробуждившийся орел.
Тоскует он в забвеньях мира,
Людской чуждается молвы,
К ногам народного кумира
Не клонит гордой головы;
Бежит он, дикий и суровый,
И звуков и смятенья полн,
На берега пустынных волн,
В широкопламенные дубровы... (3-23).

Here Pushkin emerges as the romantic ironist, creating a complex interaction between the two hypostases of the lyrical hero -- his almost mutually exclusive "higher" and "lower" self. This is not an isolated statement. As has recently been demonstrated, Pushkin is a romantic ironist par excellence. What has not been noticed is that the most complex and ironically fullest statement made by Pushkin on himself is not to be found in his poetry, but in...
his prose. To be exact, it is found in the central piece of *The Belkin Tales*, in "The Coffinmaker."

"The Coffinmaker"'s Position in the Cycle

Pushkin began the most productive season of his entire career, the 1830 Boldino autumn, by writing "The Coffinmaker." This tale he places right in the middle of the cycle, already thus indicating its function of "core-piece." It has often been noted that this tale significantly diverges from the mood and structure of the other tales. To begin with, its plot (or absence thereof) sets it apart from the intricate and complex story-lines of the other four tales. As Richard Gregg has pointed out, this story also has an urban, not a rural, setting unlike the other stories. It draws its characters entirely from a lower class environment -- that of petty craftsmen. It is the only tale, as Gregg emphasizes, which depicts no handsome gentleman, no fair maiden, no romantic incident of any kind. While the other four stories may be seen as "miniature novels,"85 "The Coffinmaker" is nothing but "anecdote." In centers on a bizarre dream dreamt by a most ordinary man, the central character Adrian Prokhorov, a coffinmaker. The story "peeps out of *The Tales* like a dwarf from a group of normal human beings," Gregg states.86 He sees it as serving the function of providing comic relief and perceives Prokhorov as neither pathetic, nor
sympathetic, but simply ridiculous. The question that arises is whether *The Tales* need comic relief, or not. None of them is tragically conceived and no "relief", in my view, is really needed in this fairly "happy" cycle. Other critics perceive "The Coffinmaker" as a parody on the Gothic genre; yet others see it as an experiment in the new style of realism, as a sample of the "physiological sketch" -- here the study of a profession (that of the undertaker). Why should this profession have interested Pushkin, however? None of the interpretations offered above are fully satisfactory. Let us explore other functional possibilities.

**Adrian Prokhorov**

Adrian Prokhorov is indeed an unappealing character. He has been characterized as stupid, greedy and as a product of his dull environment, as unimaginative and unscrupulous. He has no biography; only two or three details from his past are given. We know little of his current family life: he has two daughters but no wife, -- is he a widower? How his wife died, what his relationship to his daughters is like, remains unknown. His family is presented "off-stage," as it were. He appears to be a rather lonely man, at least in the sense that he does not seem to feel close to anyone. Certainly he is shown
strictly in the context of the present and in his bizarre dream, in which his clients, the corpses he helped to bury, come to visit him.

Nevertheless, some links between this dull personage and some elements of Pushkin's biography have been noted. Bethea and Davydov, for example, have observed that the initials of the protagonist's name coincide with Pushkin's -- A. P. (even A. S. P. in earlier drafts); also Adrian Prokhorov's moving to a new house may be seen in the context of Pushkin's plans to marry and settle down. The location of the story -- Nikitskaia street in Moscow -- is where Pushkin's fiancee Goncharova lived at the time. There was also an undertaker's shop next-door to her house. Finally, the year 1799 marks the beginning of both Adrian Prokhorov's career and Pushkin's life.

As already stated, none of the existing interpretations explain why such a story should belong to the cycle and, moreover, placed in its center. Although the scholarship on "The Coffinmaker" is not fully convincing, it contains some valuable insights. Thus the notion that Pushkin was interested in the profession of the coffinmaker has merit. I would suggest, however, that Pushkin was not involved in the realistic aspects of the profession, but rather its symbolic aura. There is in fact only one "profession" by which Pushkin is endlessly fascinated throughout his career, and that is the craft and calling of the writer. All other occupations are related to this one in the poet's sphere of interests.
Coffinmaking may well be the next most unusual thing to professional writing. What might they have in common?

The Professional Aspect: Craft

Both professions separate a person from the rest of the world. Both are easily made objects of unhealthy curiosity and annoying jokes. Certainly Pushkin discusses both professions in strangely similar terms. He does so, for example, in an autobiographical piece, usually titled "Fragment" («Отрывок») written in Boldino concurrently with "The Coffinmaker." In this three page fragment, which later served as a basis for "Egyptian Nights," Pushkin discusses what he perceives as the most bitter and demeaning aspect of a poet’s life, namely his status in society, a status which is defined by his "trade": «Зло самое горькое, самое нестерпимое для стихотворца есть его прозвище, коим он заклеймен и которое никогда его не покидает» (6-391). The public treats a man of letters who is just a "simple fellow" (самый простой и обыкновенный человек) as if he were an exotic and curious creature. It insults his sensitivity with endless banal comments on his unusual work. In fact, he cannot find sympathy even among fellow men of letters (среди своих братьев литераторов).
The poet's resentment towards the public's attitude\textsuperscript{90} to his profession is fully comparable with the Coffinmaker's sentiments of insult and indignation when representatives of more normal crafts poke fun at his occupation: «Чем ремесло мое нечестье прочих? разве гробовщик брат налачу?... разве гробовщик гаер святойный?» (6-85). Adrian Prokhorov's self-esteem suffers no less than a poet's professional pride at the offensive implied comparison with an executioner or a clown.\textsuperscript{91} 

The "poet as executioner" is a motif that Pushkin takes up in another work also, the meta-poetic poem «Разговор книгопродавца с поэтом» written in Mikhailovskoe in 1824. Here we encounter a book-dealer who envies the poet's alleged privileges:

И впрямь завиден ваш удел:
Поэт казнит, поэт венчает.\textsuperscript{92} (2, 176).

The point of comparison in both cases is of course that the poet is not and executioner in the ordinary sense. Just as a coffin-maker does not kill people, but only buries them, so the poet executes people with his biting tongue, but not with an ax.

The naive envy of the poet's alleged privileged status in this poem also finds an analogue in "The Coffinmaker," where Prokhorov has a comic conversation
with a shoe-maker on the subject of what is more profitable -- to sell coffins or boots. Boots and books are clearly more profitable goods than coffins and poems. Far from enjoying economic privileges, the poet is constantly harassed by financial difficulties, and certainly Pushkin was. Coffins and poems are sold at small profit -- shoes are for the living and books sell well, even though manuscripts do not. And even if they do, the poet is not the master of his finances. This is a state of affairs that "Fragment" deplores in no uncertain terms: "Книгопродавцы платили ему довольно дорого за его стихи... (но он был) беден" (6, 392). Pushkin is in fact the first Russian writer to make his finances a literary topic, both in his poetry and his prose, especially in his "thick" literary journal *The Contemporary*.

Pushkin was not even adverse to "cheating" if this could improve his finances. In the 1830s when his finances were in dire straits, he mentions money matters in practically every other personal letter. His only hope lay in publishing even more, or at least giving the impression that he did. This is what he wrote to his publisher Pletnev, after the completion of *The Belkin Tales*, giving him instructions on how the text should be arranged, in order to squeeze out more money from prospective customers:

"Как можно более оставлять белых мест, и как можно шире расставлять строки; на странице помещать не более 18-ти строк; Имена печатать полные, напр."
This kind of "cheating" is exactly what the coffinmaker Prokhorov engages in. In his dream, he acknowledges having sold cheap pine coffins for the price of oak coffins passing them off as such («продать сосовый гроб за дубовый»). Adrian Prokhorov and Alexander Pushkin both "sell out" to a tough economic market, engaging in "shameful trade" («постыдным торгом») (2-175)). The parallelism between the two "tradesmen" is further emphasized by the fact that "cheating" brings no wealth to either of them. It has taken Prokhorov many years to acquire enough money to move into a better home, and a very modest one at that. Their clientele is equally unreliable: a coffin maker never knows when he will have another customer. Who is going to die? Nor does the poet know who will buy a book of poetry. And there is yet another problem: their tools of trade need to be constantly updated. Prokhorov deplores the fact that his stack of coffin ornaments has greatly deteriorated: («давни
The poet too constantly runs the risk of being considered "outdated."

Let us now turn from Pushkin's "artistry" in the realm of finance to that in the realm of creativity. In one of the most perceptive critical analyses of "The Coffinmaker," Bethea and Davydov suggest that the coffins, which Prokhorov rents, remakes, and remodels and to which the author refers as произведения, actually symbolize those traditional European literary models and genres, which Pushkin borrows and adjusts so that they could be planted on Russian soil.94

The Professional Aspect: Art

I would like to expand and elaborate on this interpretation and suggest that Prokhorov's trade paraphernalia, which need urgent renovation are the symbolic sum of poetic devices in toto, the lack of which Pushkin began to experience in all genres, including poetic ones. In Boldino, Pushkin not only "lays the foundation" of Russian prose with his Belkin Tales (and "The Coffinmaker," the first story written upon his arrival there), but creates a whole cluster of works in various genres: philosophical-metaphysical tragedy, the fairy tale, an attempt at a novel, the parodistic chronicle and the long poem. The long poem he writes is The Little House in Kolomna.95 There are numerous intratextual echoes
between this poem and "The Coffinmaker." A brief comparison between the two works will help clarify the tale under discussion.

The poem begins with the narrator treating the arsenal of his artistic trade paraphernalia, very much like Adrian Prokhorov making an inventory of his coffins. Both furthermore decide on similar strategies: to reuse old wares. The narrator of The Little House in Kolomna decides to use very "lowly" literary materials, those in most common use, such as adverbs and conjunctions (to which he refers as мелкая сволочь (4-234)) and to bring them into the elevated genre of the poem.⁹⁶

He is departing from the principle:

Стремиться к небу должен гений,  
Обязан истинный поэт  
Для вдохновенных песнопений  
избрать возвышенный предмет. (6-250)

Instead he plans to go to the "marketplace."⁹⁷

— Нет, я собираюсь на базар,  
Люблю базарное волненье,  
Скуфы жидов, усы болгар  
И спор и крик, и торга жар,  
Нарядов пестрое стесненье. (2-72)

In short, Pushkin, the exclusive poet of "high art," "lowers" his genre system, his lexicon, his themes. Pushkin-the-"aristocratic"-visionary shoulders the role of craftsman. His often disdainful, exclusive muse too is transformed
into a common girl, or even two. If Adrian Prokhorov is Pushkin's new hypostasis, his two daughters may well be considered the poet's new muses. The two girls are constantly "ordered around" by their irritable and short-tempered father (журтун дур). The poet in The House of Kolomna treats his Muse with more affection but nevertheless demands obedience from this common girl:

Уси́дься, музя; ручки в рукава.
Под лавку ножки! не вертись, резвушка! (4-236)\(^9\)

Another detail that links Adrian Prokhorov's two daughters to the function of modest muses is the color of their shoes and hats -- red and yellow. These few facts that we learn about them link them to the Boldino stay's autumnal setting and Pushkin's favorite creative season in general: autumn.

**The Personal Nature of "The Coffinmaker"**

It has hopefully been demonstrated that there is much evidence to substantiate a reading of "The Coffinmaker" as a meta-poetic piece. This is the tale in Belkin's cycle that deals with a shift in paradigm: the "tsar" and "prophet" of the poet's previous period has become a humble and despised craftsman, a not very likable man who is also not above cheating. This shift of
paradigm clearly relates to the overall thematics of the two cycles, in one of which the "profound personage" predominates and in the other of which the "humble personage" takes center stage. The story of Adrian Prokhorov (A. P.) is placed in the center of The Tales, written by Belkin and published by an anonymous editor A. P. The whole structure resembles a nut with the "A. P." as its nucleus and "A. P." number two as a shell. This "nut" is handed over to the "Squirrel" (belka). As was mentioned in the Introduction, Pushkin's messages, or "lessons" (y p o n) could be often found disguised as motifs in his later fairy tales. For example, one of Anna Akhmatova's most fundamental insights into Pushkin's oeuvre was the discovery of a subtle "lesson" in The Tale of the Golden Cockerel. Akhmatova sees in this quasi-folkloric tale the poet's profound and bitter auto-commentary on his unfortunate relationships with the two Russian Tsars, Alexander I and Nicholas I. 

In this context, it is tempting to recall one more fairy tale, namely The Fairy Tale of Tsar Saltan, written less than a year after the Boldino autumn, in 1831. It features a wonder of Gvidon's kingdom marveled at by everybody. This wonder is a squirrel that sings songs and cracks nuts. The nuts, however are not simple: the nucleus is emerald and the shell is gold. This marvelous squirrel is protected by guards.
The folkloric form allows for a subtle disguise of the message, which never appears bluntly in Pushkin's oeuvre. Anyway, if Akhmatova's discovery holds true for one fairy tale, it is possible that it does in our case also. In *The Fairy Tale of the Tsar Saltan*, we have another enclosed auto-commentary and in this case, it contains the answer to the riddle posed by Belkin and his *Tales*. Carefully protected or guarded by the intricate sets of narrators, the imaginary "Squirrel-Man" (Belkin) holds the "nut" of Pushkin's artistic "trick." The implied author appears in disguise in two hypostases: golden on the outside -- as the commercial publisher A. P. and as a sparkling emerald inside -- as a newly accepted humble self -- Adrian Prokhorov.

It is in "The Coffinmaker" that Pushkin indicates the deeply personal nature of his exploration of "man and fate" in two keys. Here he acknowledges that the man and the poet are not separated in time but coexist. It is here that he raises the question of reward, justice, entitlement in regard to himself. It is also here that he accepts a side of himself that he previously deemed irrelevant to his
art. And it is here that he implies the conclusion that one can be a genius and an ordinary man at the same time -- like Mozart who can be immersed in "trivia," yet (or because of that) create great art. In "The Coffinmaker," the dream is no less than a "lesson from above." It contains the "message" that even the greatest genius can become a Salieri, a Silvio, or just a scribbler, maker of verses if he begins to demand his "just rewards and financial awards."

The poet of The Little House in Kolomna is still bitter and gloomy. His self-characterizations are almost identical with the portrait of Adrian Prokhorov in "The Coffinmaker." They are both "sad, ill-tempered, depressed, and gloomy" (грюстный, озлобленный, унылый).

The tale of Adrian Prokhorov is however told by a more distanced author -- one who is prepared to parody himself as a coffinmaker, living under the uncertainties of life, his art as a bizarre trade, rebellious against fate. This self-parodistic portrait reveals new insights and departures, above all the revelation that a genius does not demand just rewards, but accepts whatever the heavens decree. In characterizing these insights as a "struggle for humility," I do not intend to present Pushkin as the Russian "universal genius" of humility in the Dostoevskian tradition. Pushkin was not a humble man, as Dostoevsky characterizes him, but a man who strove to confront his pride and face his shadow-figure. He was not a "Mozartian" genius, a "child of heavenly
harmonies," but a more complex genius who also saw the Salieri within himself. Nor were his insights easily won. In the poem "My Work" («Труд») (also composed in Boldino), he wrote:

Окончен мой труд многолетний.  
Что ж непонятная грусть тайно тревожит меня?  
Или свой подвиг свершив  
Я стою как поденщик ненужный.  
Плату прияний свой,  
Чуждый работе другой? (3-175)

While he deplores his fate as unjust and rebels against its meager rewards, he also parodies this type of sterile rebellion. This is what saves Pushkin from Adrian Prokhorov's insignificant fate: the rebel is able to transcend rebellion and accept "everything as blessed fate." This is why he can frame his "autobiographical" tale with the stories of people who entrust themselves to fate and find themselves as they lose themselves, to use a Christian phrase, which may well have guided Pushkin in the composition of his two cycles.
CONCLUSION

It has been demonstrated that the two cycles, The Little Tragedies and The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin gain in semantic richness and complexity when allowed to mirror each other. Read intratextually, they reveal otherwise hidden aspects. The Tales prove to be much more than amusing anecdotes or formal experiments – in fact they prove to have a philosophy, even a metaphysics, at least when they are reflected in the tragedies. Conversely, The Tragedies find additional meaning when held up as a mirror to The Tales.

Relying on Old and New Testament subtexts, they present – together – the constellations of Cain and Abel on the one hand and the Prodigal son on the other, and his dutiful brother as two basic attitudes to life and the world order. The Tales predominantly present the Abel perspective. Here those who trust in God and are in intuitive harmony with the world order are shown to be the recipients of grace. The “Scape-graces” (to use Gregg’s terminology) predominate. In The Tales, prodigal sons and daughters are forgiven, if not by their father, then by Providence. The Tragedies are dominated by the Cains.
and the dutiful brothers (of *The New Testament* parable). They demand justice for themselves and are undone by this demand. This is not to say that Pushkin is a Christian writer who advocates trust and faith in God. He is, however, in my view, a spiritual and "religious" writer who explores two basic attitudes towards existence. I am thus not following in Dostoevsky's footsteps, agreeing with him that Pushkin proclaims the message: "humble yourself, proud man," as Dostoevsky stated in his well-known 1880 speech. Pitting morality against a "higher wisdom," law against grace, labor against inspired creativity (that may well include a great deal of work), Pushkin does not moralize. He is rather exploring two aspects of his own self. Pushkin avoids identifying with Mozart or of the "darling of heaven," the young "scape-grace" count. He does not condemn the avaricious knights and hardworking Salieris. In a more comprehensive way, he identifies with both the recipients of grace and the "scape-goats" of justice, seeing rebellion against the world order and acceptance of it as two basic human conditions. Most important, he himself shares in these two conditions.

My reading of the two cycles leads me to the conclusion that Pushkin is not "the sun" of Russian literature, at least not in the sense that he was in possession of radiant harmony. Rather Pushkin knows both the darkness of human nature as well as the light which transcends all questions of "right" and
“wrong” in the narrow, moralistic sense of those words. Strictly speaking, we might add a third type of protagonist to Pushkin’s two cycles and, for that matter, in his entire oeuvre. We have already identified the “dark rebels” (Cains) and the “children of light” (Abels). Yet, in this second category, there are two subdivisions. First, there are those who never question the world order and therefore find their place in it without struggle. Then there are those who know the darkness, accept it and thus reach the light in a sublime act of submission. Of Pushkin’s two sets of characters, perhaps only Mozart attains this most perfect state of grace and light. In this sense, Pushkin identifies with Mozart. He equates Mozart’s position with his own at those moments when he conquers the Don Juans and Walsinghams in himself and is ready to accept whatever Providence brings. In other works by Pushkin, the “Mozartian man” may reappear at times, albeit lacking his genius. To return to Dostoevsky’s Pushkin speech once more, the text he quotes most often is the 1828 poema The Gypsies. This text does indeed offer constellations that illuminate the issue humility-versus-rebellion well, but not quite in the sense that Dostoevsky implies. Here we find the tortured rebel Aleko, an archetypal Cain-figure. We also find the “children of nature” who live in intuitive harmony with the laws of life. And we find the old gypsy who well knows that there is “no defense against fate,” yet accepts fate in a spirit of acquiescence,
not identical to Christian humility, that makes him a Mozartian personality of sorts. The young Lenskii may belong to this category also when he accepts the possibility of his early death with a wisdom transcending both his youthful immaturity and banal versifying.

This is not the place to discuss Pushkin’s oeuvre as a whole, yet we may draw a significant conclusion: Pushkin is an intratextual writer _par excellence_. Naturally all writers profit from a reading that allows for their texts to reflect upon each other. In Pushkin’s world, however, we are in a veritable hall of mirrors where texts derive their full meaning only in interaction, when they are seen as commenting on and reflecting each other. In Pushkin’s world, Don Juan gazes at his reflection and sees Dunia; the stationmaster at his, and it is the stone guest. Sil’vio is mirrored in Salieri and vice versa. Lenskii and Mozart and the old gypsy are reflected in a series of mirrors. Of course, they do not “see” each other. To see the play of mirror reflections is the reader’s task. The task of the Pushkin critic is to guide the reader through the writer’s _mise-en-abyme_ world where on the surface, everything is clear and transparent but where from the right perspective, the mirrors begin their complex interaction and surface clarity is replaced by depth, that depth that has been called Pushkin’s "genius."
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NOTES

1 See an account of the reception of *The Tales* in *The Russian Short Story*, xi-xv.

2 Ibid, 13.

3 Grigoriev, 176-180.

4 See his Article 11 on Pushkin's works, where he states: «Повести в прозе Пушкина... далеко не могут равняться в достоинстве с лучшими стихотворными его произведениями даже превозного периода» (Belinskii, 456) he concludes: «Действительно, хотя и нельзя сказать, чтоб в них уже совсем не было ничего хорошего, мое-таки эти повести были недостойны ни таланта, ни имени Пушкина» (ibid, 458).

5 Victor Terras explains this phenomenon by the mere fact that Pushkin was their author: "If *The Tales of Belkin* had not been written by Pushkin, these stories would hardly stand out significantly among their competitors." *The Russian Short Story*, 8.

6 Mirsky, 151.

7 Gershenzon, quoted in *The Russian Short Story*, 7.

8 John Mersereau's evaluation in *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature*, 172.

9 Pushkin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v desiaty tomak* (8--12-13). All references to Pushkin's works are to this edition and are noted parenthetically within the text. In Boldino, Pushkin's search for meaning and ultimately the meaning of life enters his lyrics, for example, «Стихи, сочиненные ночью во время бессонницы»:

... Жизни мышь беготня...
10 Upon the conclusion of this the most productive period in his artistic career, Pushkin wrote to his publisher Pletnev:

"Скажу тебе (за тайну), что я в Болдине писал, как давно уже не писал. Вот что я привез сюда: 2 последние главы Онегина, 8-ю и 9-ю, совсем готовые в печать. Повесть, написанную октавами (стихов 400), которую выдадим Анониму. Несколько драматических сцен или маленьких трагедий, именно: «Скупой рыцарь», «Моцарт и Сальери», «Пир во время чумы» и «Дон-Жуан». Сверх того, написал около 30 мелких стихотворений. Хорошо? Ещё не все (весьма секретное). Написал я прозою 5 повестей, от которых Баратынский ржет и бьется — и которые напечатаем также Анонимом. Под моим именем нельзя будет. Булгарин заругает». (3-186)

11 Most explicitly these "patriotic" approaches to Pushkin are propagated by a modern Russian critic Viacheslav Nepomniashchii.

12 Kodjak (1979).

13 Rassadin, 79-99.

14 Vinogradov, 545-550.


16 The Russian Short Story, 8.

17 On the attitudes of the reading public to various literary modes of narration in Pushkin time, see Debreczeny, 56-65 (1984).

18 See my discussion of this issue in Chapter IV.
Paul Klanderud, who compares Sil'vio and Salieri, emphasizes their similarities rather than their differences, arguing that they "fundamentally are variations of a single type." He states that in "Vystrel" "the element of parody is less widespread than is generally acknowledged" and that Sil'vio is primarily a tragic character. The only parodic level in the tale that he discerns "is directed at the environment, or the societal codes in which Sil'vio and those around him are ensnared." Klanderud, 445-448.

J. W. Smeed points to Pushkin's highly original treatment of the Don Juan character, as compared to that of his predecessors: "However much Pushkin's plot may owe to tradition, his Don Juan is an original conception, a poet of passion." Smeed, 98.

Wolf Schmid in his article "Three Diegetic Devices in Pushkin's Tales of Belkin," 505-525 (1984), also extensively examines the famous parodic motif of the prodigal son in "The Stationmaster." In my present study, I do not touch upon this issue partly because it has been done by Schmid and partly because the theme of the prodigal son is beyond the scope of this article. Although Dunia obviously is a prodigal daughter, the theme leads to many greater issues. One of these is the notion that Don Juan is an archetypal prodigal son, but one who goes to hell rather than being forgiven by his Heavenly Father. Thus, the pictures on the wall of Vyrin's household not only parody the fate of his prodigal daughter, but also the entire Don Juan legend. Once more we perceive the linkage of the cycles as essential to a full understanding of both texts.

Schmid, 512-513 (184).

We are dealing with zagrobaia revnost', to use the term coined by Akhmatova in one of her articles on Pushkin. See hers "The Stone Guest" («Каменный гость»), 532.

Traditionally it is Samson Vyrin who is viewed as the central protagonist of the tale. See, for example, A. Slonimskii, 502: "V 'Stantsionnom smotritele' na pervom plane sam smotritel' Samson Vyrin, a istoriia Duni prokhodit gde-to
pozadi," or V. V. Vinogradov, 544-545: "povesti s zaglaviiami, vneshne oboznachaiushchimi litso... ('Stantsionnyi smotritel', 'Baryshnia-krest'ianka) i vneste s tem ydvigaiushchimi obraz glavnogo geroia povesti."


29 This is an ironic variation of Pushkin's equestrian imagery on the relation of the ruler and his subject (see Boris Godunov and "The Bronze Horseman"). Continuing his discussion of "The Stationmaster" in his recent book, Schmid once again points to the dominant role played by Dunia the horse-rider. He states: "Sopostavlenie sidiashchei verkhom na ruchke kresla elegantnoi damy s derevenskoi krasotkoi, smiriavshei serditykh puteshestvennikov, naprasno trebovavshikh loshadei" (and, we should add, with her father who could not provide for them -- L. Y.) "vyiavliaet, kto stal khoziainom polozheniia." Schmid, 33 (1994).


31 See Pushkin i teatr, 23. In Terras' oppinion, the very perfection of The Tragedies may be owing to a long period of gestation, since three of the dramatic plots took their origin from the poet's stay in Mikhailovskoe. See Charles A. Moser, Ed. Cambridge History of Russian Literature, 174.

32 I. Feinberg, 31, 40.

33 Quoted in B. M. Shubin, 103-4.

34 Pushkin, 10--252-253.

35 The idea of the derivative nature of The Tales can also be supported by Yuri Lotman's concept of the secondary nature of prose in relation to poetry. In Analysis of the Poetic Text, he states that prose is a later phenomenon than poetry: "Precisely because prose is esthetically secondary in relation to poetry... prose is esthetically more complex than poetry." Lotman sees the same correlation in the development of Pushkin's oeuvre. Yuri Lotman, 24 (1976).

36 The Russian Short Story, xv.

37 Vinogradov in his Stil' Pushkina, for example, speaks of Pushkin's "realism": 'Deistvitel'nost', realisticheski vosproizvodimaia Pushkinym, delitsia na dva kruga iavlennii: na mir lits, natsional'nykh kharakterov i tipov -- i na mir sobytii
i predmetov, sostavliaiushchii kul'turno-bytovoi uklad zhizni," 532. Realism, in my view, is not the primary concern of Pushkin.

38 This is for example, Gukasova's interpretation of "The Stationmaster," where she repeats Soviet cliches, 177-91.

39 An interesting interpretation of The Bronze Horseman is offered by Tertz, who suggests that Evgenii and Peter the Great are two sides of the same autobiographical image: Pushkin-the-man and Pushkin-the-poet respectively: "Pushkin rassek i razvel sebia v litse Petra i Evgeniia." Tertz (Terts), 140.

40 It is in these terms that Bethea and Davydov define Pushkin's principle of plot construction and character treatment in the cycle of The Tales. See their "Pushkin's Saturnine Cupid," p. 16.

41 "Strannye sblizheniia" is Pushkin's own term from his "Note on Count Nulin" (7-156).

42 Andrew Wachtel, 81.

43 The translation of the following is mine -- L. Y. Заметка о «Графе Нулин».

В конце 1825 года находился я в деревне. Перечитывая "Лукрецию", довольно слабую поэму Шекспира, я подумал: что если бы Лукреции пришла в голову мысль дать пощечину Тарквинию? быть может, это охладило бы его предприимчивость и он со стыдом принужден был отступить? Лукреция б не зарезалась, Пубикола не вбежал бы, Брут не изнал бы царей, и мир и история мира были бы не те. Итак, республикою, консулами, диктаторами, Катонами, Кесарем мы обязаны соблазнительному происшествию, подобному тому, которое случилось недавно в моем соседстве, в Новоржевском уезде. Мысль пародировать историю и Шекспира мне представилась. Я не мог воспротивиться двойному искушению и в два утра написал эту повесть. Я имею привычку на моих бумагах выставлять год и число. «Граф Нулин» писан 13 и 14 декабря. Бывают странные оближения. (7-156)

44 According to Dal', (1-310-11) and Vasmer, (1-370). Other interpretations state that the character's last name stems from the name of a mail coach station, Vyra, on the outskirts of St. Petersburg (Granovskaia, 41). Nowadays at Vyra, tourists can visit the "Museum of Pushkin's Literary Characters and
Travelling in Russia." The interior design of the museum closely follows Pushkin’s description of Vyrin’s household in the story. This was pointed out to me by Professor William Mills Todd III (Harvard University).

45 Pushkin's letter to Pletnev quoted in Veresaev, 228.

46 See for example Russian Short Story, xi, the first paragraph of which states that The Tales have become "the most important single collection of what we would now call short stories in Russian literature." Speaking of The Tragedies, S. Bondi praises them as one of the peaks of Pushkin's artistic achievements: "Sozdannye im [Pushkinym] dramaticheskie proizvedeniia, vkhodiat v obshchii riad ego... tvorchestva, zanimaia tam samye wysokie mesta." Bondi, 241. Terras defines them as "the pinnacle of [Pushkin's] artistry." Victor Terras, 214. Rassadkin, 240 states that in The Tragedies, Pushkin is foremost a "humanitarian."

47 Speaking of Pushkin as "the greatest cultural phenomenon in the West," Bethea and Davydov in their article "Pushkin’s Saturnine Cupid: The Poetics of Parody in The Tales of Belkin," 8 (1981), note that the quantity of scholarly studies written on Pushkin’s oeuvre (where the Boldino autumn works are extensively covered) is comparable only to the bibliography on Shakespeare. Among the most influential scholarship of the last two decades are Paul Debreczeny, The Other Pushkin: A Study of Alexander Pushkin's Prose Fiction; Andrej Kodjak, Pushkin's I. P. Belkin; Samuil Shvartsband, Istoriia "Povestei Belkina"; Wolf Schmid (Vol'f Shmid), Proza kak poezija: Stat’i o povestovovanii v russkoi literature.

48 Critics usually discuss thematic aspects of each drama and their supposed linkage with the author's biography: The Little Tragedies are not primarily experiments in form. They are dramatic investigations of character and situation. They were not intended to revolutionize the Russian stage, but just to embody certain dramatic situations that occurred to their author" (Mirsky, 163). It is also often noted that specific aspects of Pushkin's life found their expression in each tragedy. Critics provide extensive biographical data and outline its connection with the dramatic plots. Many suggest that he disregarded publications of two dramas ("The Covetous Knight" and "The Stone Guest") because the plots all too vividly represented unattractive sides of his own personal situations. The quarrels between the poet and his father over money and Pushkin's numerous relationships with women make these two dramas in many aspects autobiographical. Gershenzon sees a certain
"Salierian" side of Pushkin's personality: «Пушкин сам был Моцартом, — в искусстве, — и он знал это; но во всем остальном он был Салieri, — и это он тоже знал» (Gershenzon, 8). Akhmatova points to Pushkin's quarrels with his father over money (reflected in "The Covetous Knight") and his relationship with women (revealed in "The Stone Guest"): «Если «Скупого рыцаря» Пушкин не печатал шесть лет, боясь, как тогда говорили, «применений», то что же подумать о «Каменном госте», которого он вовсе не напечатал.» 530. The connections between the plague in "The Feast During the Plague" and the cholera quarantines are all too obvious to be discussed here at length.

49 Simmons, 328.
50 Quoted by Brown, 134.
51 The italics are mine - L.Y.
52 Goldstein, 157.
53 Gershenzon, 114.
54 Gershenzon, 117.
55 D. S. Mirsky notes that Pushkin treats a "borrowed situation with a sureness of a touch and skill that do not belong to the originals. It is constructed with the precision of a mathematical formula," 164.
56 Brown, 119-120.
57 In her article "Love and Death in Pushkin's Little Tragedies," Barbara Heldt Monter, 67 states that "the love plot of 'The Stone Guest' is something more than conventional... but in each of the other plays a distorted love does exist. An extraordinary passion for persons, things or abstractions gives each play its dramatic momentum, until this passion finally consumes either its object or itself."
58 It is usually suggested that the play concentrates on yet another passion, namely Eros. Significantly perhaps, Pushkin's scholars usually avoid using a more precise definition of the perennial hero's passion, namely the fifth deadly sin lust (covetousness is the second, and envy is the fourth.) Whereas traditionally Don Juan has always been the villain of world literature, Pushkin's variation presents the familiar character in a non-traditional way:
this hero is usually described in positive terms. "Gambits of the utmost bravado" of this "boldest of rascals" (Brown, 125) are very likely to arouse the reader's (even a critic's) sympathy, rather than fear and disgust. See also Anna Akhmatova's article on "The Stone Guest." Unlike his cold-blooded literary predecessors, Pushkin's Don is a lover as much as a seducer.

59 Smeed's book on the theme of Don Juan. in world literature.

60 Brown, 125.

61 Mirsky, 164.

62 Akhmatova's sympathetic interpretation of Don Juan's character is also reinforced in her poetry via her image of Blok and emerges stronger in her Poem Without a Hero.

63 Brown, 127.

64 See Caryl Emerson's discussion of some similar situations in Boris Godunov, pp. 81-82.

65 Bondi, 227 summarizes the evaluation of The Tragedies thus: "Обострение всех ситуаций дает Пушкину возможность раскрыть характеристики действующих лиц с небывалой глубиной, проникая в самые сокровенные тайники человеческой души. Об этом удивительном богатстве и глубине человеческого анализа много раз говорилось, и не стоит повторять этого."


67 The Italics are mine -- L.Y.

68 Barbara Heldt Monter points out that "Mozart is aware of his coming death (he understands the man in black) and writes his Requiem," 68. But then she links Mozart's inspiration with the obsessions of the other characters, stating that Walsingham's "inspiration which enabled him to compose the hymn" is connected with "the same genius which led Mozart to write his Requiem. But it is also close to that passion which gave the Baron his sensation of enacting a murder, spurred Salieri to kill Mozart, and brought Don Juan to invite death upon himself. The gap between immortal art and death is bridged only by an inspiration ever closer to madness," 71. In her attempt to find the unity
within the cycle the critic does not make a distinction between Mozart's divine inspiration closely linked with the fact that he is attuned to Fate and Providence and the demonic inspiration of the rebels who fight against what is allotted to them by God.

69 Gukasova, 129 gives an example of one such interpretation:

Показательна в этом смысле позиция Д. Дарского. «В песне Вальсингама, - резюмируя он, - пронзительный клич к брату по человечеству: Мужайтесь, боритесь, о храбрые други!» Но, толкуя гимн Вальсингама как «экстатическое мгновение субъективного состояния, а не реального преодоления смерти», Дарский в финале сцены Пушкина — в эпизоде со священником и в глубокой задумчивости председателя увидел «обнаружение атеистической воли» и «разоблачение лживого пафоса».

70 The extraordinary creativity and experimental character of the works is vivid in the type of material used by Pushkin for its construction. The author writes one work of his own creation ("The Covetous Knight), constructs the second one ("Mozart and Salieri") using a new-paper report, the third one ("The Stone Guest") is a reworking of Moliere's comedy, while the forth one ("The Feast During the Plague") is largely a translation of Wilson's tragedy. The cycle creates such an impression as if Pushkin set out to deliberately experiment with major approaches to the search of a plot: personal experience, history, borrowing (intertextuality), and direct incorporation of already existing work into his own cycle. The original message of Wilson's work was completely different from that one which it acquired in Pushkin's context. Pushkin translated only one passage from Wilson's tragedy and added two songs of his own. Noteworthy, both songs play a crucial role in out interpretation of the central archetypal conflict: Mary's song shows the injustice of the cruel celestial punishment, while Walsingham's hymn demonstrates the defiance and rebellion of the active hero. Thus Pushkin's method in the case of the last tragedy could be defined as presenting the familiar as unrecognizable. To the best of my knowledge, in Russian literature it was not used by anyone since Pushkin's time in such a volume and with such a complete reversal of the original message.

71 Golstein, p.157. Hereafter all references to Golstein's article will be parenthetically given within the text.
Both "The Devils" and "The Coffinmaker" reflect Pushkin's personal preoccupation with the supernatural, as will be demonstrated in Chapter IV and in the Conclusion. It is well known that Pushkin was very interested in fortune telling and omens. All his life he was afraid of a "white head" that was destined to kill him in a duel. The poet would not part with a talisman ring given to him by his close friend Nashchokin which allegedly ensured magical protection against violent death. Nashchokin later wondered why Pushkin took it off before his fatal duel with the blond D'Antes.

In "The Coffinmaker" of The Tales, Pushkin tries to exorcise the demons of his life. The whole cycle is a literary and philosophical experiment to come to terms with inner and outer demons.

Note that Silio's arrival is "felt" by a horse that bolts without any obvious reason. As a consequence, the count's wife, soon to be scared by the encounter with the villain, is forced to walk home. The demons similarly scare the horses in "The Devils": Von teper' v ovrag tolkaet odichalogo konia ... Koni chuktie khrapiat. Vyrin-vyre'i's entrance into his daughter's room cause this beautiful "horse-rider / naezdnitsa the fall from Minskii's chair on which she sits as in a saddle.

Pushkin's opinion of the revolution in Greece and Byron's participation in it was not favorable at the time.

Sergeant Kurilkin also in many ways reminds of the retired soldier Samson Vyrin who appears like a threatening Commander but presents his claims in a confused and humble manner. All devilish creatures in The Tales fall apart, disappear and disperse before they have a chance to cause any real damage.

Samson's character has been usually interpreted as that of a "simple" "downtrodden" man. The meaning of his first name was usually overlooked, although it suggests biblical connotations. Wolf Schmid, in one of his later works (1994), concentrates on the Biblical interpretation of the story and the hero's character.

There are some minor demonic motifs in the story though, such as Mar'ia Gavrilovna's dream which foretells the ominous events of the next day and predicts the failure of the planned marriage because of her fiancee Vladimir's loss of the way to the church in the blizzard, his loss of mind and his untimely loss of his life in a violent way. Pushkin defines the dream as a disorderly sequence of ugly, meaningless and frightening scenes: uzhasnye mechlania...
bezobraznye, bessmyslyennye videniya nesli pered neiu odno za drugim...

They leave her broken -- even sympathetic attention "tears her heart apart": razdirali ee serdce. Vladimir appears in the dream as dying, his pleas are desperate, his voice piercing: molit ee pronzitelem golosom. Compare the dream to this image in "The Devils": Strashno, strashno ponevole...

/Beskonechny, bezobrazny... /Mchatsia besy roi za roem... /Vizgom zhalohnym 1 voem / nadryvaia serdce mne. Vladimir struggles through the blizzard and in the same way the persona in "The Devils" tries to find his way in the storm. He becomes a victim of uncanny elemental forces, but he is perhaps part of them. Bizarre demonic imagery was attributed to him in Maria's dream, and Vladimir begins to function as a part of this inhuman force which first misleads him and then destroys him. Indeed, his mind undergoes a dramatic change as a result of the terrifying experience of losing his happiness. Even when things seem to settle down later and Maria's parents bless the marriage, Vladimir responds by a half-crazy polushumasheeshe pis'mo and claims that death is the only hope left for him in this world: prosil zabyt' o neschastnom, dla kotorogo smert' ostal'sya edinoi nadezhdoiu. He causes Maria Gavrilovna to faint when she discovers his name on the list of mortally wounded in Borodino action. This control from beyond the grave lasts until a more powerful and lucky suitor appears on the horizon and eclipses Vladimir's "sacred" and bloody image in her mind. Note that the "demonology" diminishes from one story to the other within the cycle. If Sil'vio is directly referred to as a demon, Vladimir is not. "The Lady Peasant" is almost free of devils.

As we have already seen, in Pushkin's texts horses are very responsive to fate. They perceive the power of elemental forces and know exactly in what direction to turn, however persistently the human driver tries to turn them into wrong direction. Sil'vio does not own a horse. When he comes back to avenge his insult, he arrives in a poor carriage (дрожку) not as a horseback rider, like the count and his wife, just before the fateful incident. Even Vyrin, whose job it is to be in charge of horses, has none when he sets out to save his daughter. He has to walk all the way to St Petersburg and back on foot, only to reach an early grave).

Or is it fate itself which determines that the fight should stop just on the arrival of young Berestov and his meeting with Liza? Aleksei and Liza are not visibly interested in their fathers' rivalry before they meet each other. Socially they are of equal standing. They accept love bestowed on them from above with gratitude.
The italics are mine -- L. Y. The final story of the cycle shows a world where
demons do not exist, or rather where they are driven away by good luck.
After all, Muromsky and Berestov could have continued to exercise their
pride, Aleksei could have fallen in love with the wrong girl - a real peasant, or
might have taken his childish romantic vows, affections, interest and talismans
too seriously to accept reality of the prosaic countryside.

По так-то – нежного слабей жестокий,
И страх живет в душе, страстью томимой. (5-354)

As in Pushkin's poem "The Prophet."

Dostoevsky, 137-145. This tradition is also strongly represented by
Khodasevich, 110.

Shrayer, 397-414.

Unbegaun as quoted by Gregg, 760 (1971).

Gregg, 759-760 (1971). Gregg's analysis of "The Coffinmaker" is most
representative of traditional interpretations of the story.

Gukasova quotes Gippius who quotes Apollon Grigoriev: «Гробовщик --
зерно всей натуральной школы», 176. Petrunina approvingly quotes
Yakubovich, D. P., who says: «Гробовщик» -- первый опыт создания
повелли профессиональной, цеховой, с героем -- мелким
ремесленником», 86.

Gukasova's evaluation of Adrian Prokhorov is typical for Soviet criticism:

Развязка… говорит о живучести Прохорова и об отсутствии у него совести. Смысл «веселого лукавства ума» Пушкина
заключается в найденной им форме рассказа, подчиненного двойной цели: нарисовать гробовщика как в
профессиональном, так и в человеческом плане, и выявить обусловленность человеческого профессиональным и
социальным. Несмотря на то, что мертвецы и угрошили, и
испугали Прохорова, они не смогли и не смогут ни
наставить, ни прочитать гробовщика, т.к. его, торгаша и
барышника, невозможно ни наставить, ни прочитать.
Gukasova, 174-175.
The Poet is always alone like the echo: «тебе ж нет отзыва» (3-214). Adrian Prokhorov is also a character whose profound loneliness sticks out in the cycle.

Ten years later, in a letter to Pletnev, Pushkin expresses the same idea in even more bitter terms:

Вообще пишу много про себя, а печатаю поневоле и единственно для денег: охота явиться перед публикою, которая Вас не понимает. Было время, литература была благородное, аристократическое почище. Пыше это нищий рынок. (10, 366).

The poet is so insulted by this disrespect, that one aspect of him (Charskii) even agrees with public opinion: «Чарскому неприятно было видеть поэта в одежде заезжего фигура» (6-252).

The italics are mine.

Pushkin became one of the first victims of the changing attitude to poetic endeavors in Russia in the first third of 19th century, when it was no longer possible to follow Karamzin's example of an independent writer; especially so, since Karamzin retained his financial independence, and Pushkin's fortune was rapidly declining. In order to survive, an artist like Pushkin had to enter an increasingly tough economic market.

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The Little House in Kolomna still remains quite problematic in terms of generic and thematic definition.

In his personal correspondence of this time, Pushkin switches to the lower mode of expression as well when talking about creativity and inspiration. Instead of the more traditional "divinity" and "inspiration" (божество и вдохновение) we now read about creative "diarrhea": «Иписался сказкой в тысячу стихов. Другая в брюхе бурчит» (10-295).

The poet often breaks the reader's anticipation of an elevated romantic setting and his lyrical persona appears deliberately common and even vulgar. The poet wishes to demonstrate that he too dwells on earth and, remaining an aristocrat, still might enjoy at times common tastes and various manifestations.
of lowly lifestyle. Only those who never saw so called "aristocratic" circles would undoubtedly assume that a poet-aristocrat is and should remain a heaven-dweller. The poet-aristocrat wishes to choose at times something so primitive and lowly, that even a civil servant would stay away from such pleasures or at least would not find any poetic values in them. Thus in a poem «Чиновник и поэт», a low-ranking civil servant attempts to predict, what the poet is inspired by and suggests idyllic scenes: «эфиром утренним дышать и с вашей музыкою мечтать...?» The poet’s response is the opposite: he claims to love dirty lowly crowd: «Люблю толпу, лохмотья, шум. и жадной черни лай свободный» (2-72). The poet descends from Parnassian heights to the market place («с классических вершинок на толкучий рынок» (4-236) or а мещанская свобода of The Little House in Kolomna and "The Coffinmaker."

Pushkin, the artist/artisan, and his new Muse embrace meshchanskii byt. The town of Kolomna and "The Coffinmaker" feature the same meshchanskaia sreda with its samovars, endless tea drinking, glances through the windows at the neighbors and strangers, monotonous Russian folk singing and conversations about money and professional problems.

Akhamatova states, that the quasi forlcloric form also helps Pushkin to mask the political meaning of his work: «Бутафория народной сказки служит здесь для маскировки политического смысла», 508. No wonder that censorship did not approve of the last lines containing Pushkin's "lesson":

Сказка ложь, да в ней намек,
Добрым молодцам урок. (4-363)

At the same time, Pushkin elevates himself while lowering himself. For example, in «Моя родословная», written concurrently with "The Coffinmaker," Pushkin ironically lowers his aristocratic heritage to the level of meshchansstvo. He does this in response to Bulgarin’s attack on him as the descendant of an Ethiopian who was allegedly purchased by Peter the Great for a bottle of rum. In other words, Pushkin lowers himself in order to demonstrate the baseness of his attacker.

Писаки русские толпой
Меня зовут аристократом:
Смотри, пожалуй вздор какой!
Я просто русский мещанин...
Я, братцы, мелкий мещанин...
The defiant tone of these lines against Bulgarin echoes the Coffinmaker’s complaints about disrespect towards his occupation.

Here we may recall one more distressing intonation in the opening line of *The Little House in Kolomna*:

Четырехстопный ямб мне надоел.  
Мальчикам в забаву Пора б его оставить.

Pushkin, who constantly searched for new forms and seemed to be impatiently switching from one discovery to yet another one, found himself confined to the tight, suffocating, and claustrophobic casket (or should we say coffin?) of the Onegin stanza for seven long years.

See previous reference to Dostoevsky’s Pushkin speech.

Italics are mine.

Gregg, (1989).

Richard Gregg proposes a similar theory positing that Pushkin identifies both with his “dark” rebellious heroes and “fair” conformists. However, the critic largely applies this concept to the writer’s political stance and philosophy of statehood. See Gregg, 547-557 (1989).