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# Comparative Characteristic of Eugene Onegin and Vladimir Lensky

Alexander Pushkin's novel, *Eugene Onegin*, gives the reader an excellent insight into his thoughts and beliefs regarding different types of human behavior. Throughout the novel Pushkin illustrates many of his own characteristics via the two main male figures, Eugene Onegin and Vladimir Lensky, despite them being quite different from one another. However, an interesting distinction can be made between the ways that he approaches the two characters by comparing two stanzas from the novel. Stanza 45 in chapter 1 describes the hero of the novel, Eugene Onegin, and depicts his disenchantment with life, and with humans in general. This is also an excellent example of Pushkin showing parallels between himself and Onegin, whom Pushkin seems to take very seriously throughout the novel. On the other hand, in stanza 10 in chapter 2, we meet young Vladimir Lensky, described in a much more sarcastic manner. Lensky's appreciation of poetry and nature are obvious here, although Pushkin's tone is clearly mocking the young poet. Despite drawing characteristics of both characters from himself, they are extremely different and the narrator addresses them both in extremely distinctive tones.

The first stanza comes towards the end of the first chapter, and at this point the reader has only recently been introduced to Eugene Onegin, to whom this stanza is referring. This stanza illustrates some of the main concepts from the previous stanzas, mainly the lifestyle and character traits of Onegin. He definitely leads a fashionable, comfortable life, but this does not leave Onegin satisfied. Eugene can be described as a Byronic hero, burned out and unhappy with life. This stanza clearly shows similarities between Onegin and Pushkin, although the author denies throughout the novel that Onegin is a representation of himself. The resemblance between the two can be seen in the following lines: "The cold sharp mind that he possessed; I was embittered, he depressed;" (1.45.7-8). Of course, there is the one glaring difference between the two, which is that Onegin has no love of poetry. Throughout the entire first chapter and much of the novel, Onegin is described as self-centered, uncaring, and superficial, and it is done in a serious tone more often than not.

The second stanza describes Lensky in an entirely different way than that in which Onegin was shown. Lensky is not introduced to the reader until stanza six, and he appears to be another aspect of the narrator. He is portrayed as a young, stereotypical poet; much like Pushkin was before he was betrayed by his friends. He is still ambitious and hopeful about the future, quite different from Onegin's view of the world. Lensky is genuinely interested in poetry, but the narrator makes this seem to be immature and humorous. It is clear in the last two lines. "He sang life's bloom gone pale and sere---/ He'd almost reached his eighteenth year." (2.10.13-14)

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In these two lines the narrator's idea of Lensky seems to be more sarcastic and light-hearted; it is almost as if he is making fun of the young poet. There is definitely a difference in the tone with which the author regards these characters, which is much more serious towards Onegin and more mocking towards Lensky. Pushkin seems to be looking back on his younger years with a sense of nostalgia, and through Lensky, is remembering it affectionately.

An intriguing aspect of both of these stanzas is the way the author is so similar to each of these characters, yet he attempts to keep his distance from them. It seems possible that Pushkin is looking at Lensky as himself in his youth, and Onegin more as what society had turned him into. With these two characters, he is showing the pros and cons of both ways of life without taking a side. In the first passage, the narrator says "The fire in both our hearts was pale;", but soon thereafter introduces young Lensky, who still has that fire that the narrator and Onegin now lack. Onegin's current view of the world is foreshadowing the eventual downfall of Lensky. He hasn't had the experiences with the world or felt the pain of betrayal that both Onegin and Pushkin had - but he will. This concept appears to be somewhat humorous to Pushkin, who is looking back at how innocent and hopeful he was in his youth, and also how irrational he was.

An important comparison between these two stanzas can be made in the last two lines of each stanza. They each give a clear example of the tone that the narrator has taken towards the two characters, Onegin and Lensky. In the first passage, the final two lines read:

"While life was still but in its morn---

Blind fortune's malice and men's scorn."

These lines have a definite somber tone, completely different from the sarcastic approach taken towards Lensky in the last two lines of the second passage.

The two stanzas also have very distinctive approaches towards love, which are played out throughout the rest of the novel. In the first passage, regarding Onegin, the narrator says:

"With passion's game we both were sated;

The fire in both our hearts was pale;"

These lines illustrate the fact that neither the narrator nor Onegin are really passionate or loving towards anything anymore. They have had their experiences with love; THEY have felt the pain that can accompany it and are not interested in pursuing it further. Young Lensky, on the other hand, approaches love with a much more positive outlook. This is clear in the first line of the second stanza; "He sang of love, by love commanded,". These differences in the two characters

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and their views on life allow the author to approach them with different tones and ideas, giving the novel a greater level of depth.

When analyzing the characters in this novel, it is important to understand why it is that Pushkin describes them the way he does. Through consideration of Pushkin's history, it is possible to consider the tone with which he regards the characters and also to draw something out of this. By observing the descriptions of these characters early in the novel, it is easy to rationalize their actions throughout the rest of the story. The fact that Lensky is shown to be immature and inexperienced leads all the way up to his untimely death. Furthermore, the comparisons made between Onegin and the narrator, particularly their disenchantment with life, and the tone that the narrator describes Onegin in, explain a lot of his interactions with others.

Stanzas Analyzed:Chapter 1, Stanza 45

I too had parted with convention,  
With vain pursuit of worldly ends;  
And when Eugene drew my attention,  
I liked his ways and we made friends.  
I liked his natural bent for dreaming,  
His strangeness that was more than seeming,  
The cold sharp mind that he possessed;  
I was embittered, he depressed;  
With passion's game we both were sated;  
The fire in both our hearts was pale;  
Our lives were weary, flat, and stale;  
And for us both, ahead there waited---  
While life was still but in its morn---

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Blind fortune's malice and men's scorn.

Chapter 2, Stanza 10

He sang of love, by love commanded,

A simple and affecting tune,

As clear as maiden thoughts, as candid

As infant slumber, as the moon

In heaven's peaceful desert flying,

That queen of secrets and of sighing.

He sang of parting and of pain,

Of something vague, of mists and rain;

He sang the rose, romantic flower,

And distant lands, where once he'd shed

His living tears upon the bed

Of silence at a lonely hour;

He sang life's bloom gone pale and sere---

He'd almost reached his eighteenth year.

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