

PUSHKIN PRESS



YEVGENY ONEGIN



ALEXANDER PUSHKIN

Alexander Pushkin

Yevgeny Onegin

The aristocratic Yevgeny Onegin has come into his inheritance, leaving the glamour of St Petersburg's social life behind to take up residence at his uncle's country estate. Master of the nonchalant bow, and proof of the fact that we shine despite our lack of education, the aristocratic Onegin is the very model of a social butterfly - a fickle dandy, liked by all for his wit and easy ways. When the shy and passionate Tatyana falls in love with him, Onegin condescendingly rejects her, and instead carelessly diverts himself by flirting with her sister, Olga - with terrible consequences. *Yevgeny Onegin* is one of the - if not THE - greatest works of all Russian literature, and certainly the foundational text and Pushkin the foundational writer who influence all those who came after (Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, etc). So it's no surprise that this verse novella has drawn so many translators. It's a challenge, too, since verse is always harder to translate than prose....

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ALEXANDER PUSHKIN YEVGENY

ONEGIN

—*A Novel in Verse*—

Translated from the Russian

with an introduction

and a note on the translation by

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INTRODUCTION

ALEXANDER PUSHKIN is, by universal assent, the most important figure in the history of Russian culture, and his finest work is *Yevgeny Onegin* (1823–31). He is to Russia what Dante is to Italy, Shakespeare to England and Cervantes to Spain, and for the Russians his novel in verse is a rough equivalent to those other nations' greatest achievements, *The Divine Comedy*, *King Lear* and *Don Quixote*. Without Pushkin the literature of his country could not have developed in the way that it did, and the Russian language itself would have been different. So, why is *Yevgeny Onegin* less well-known than all the other world-class masterpieces? The answer has to do with the peculiar properties of this work, which underwrite its quality but also make it very difficult to translate. English translations there have been, a dozen or so since the first one in 1881, and if we are to understand this matter we shall have to look into them in order to define the special difficulties and consider the ways in which they have been dealt with by the various translators in Eng-

land and America.

This is not to say that a new formula has been discovered, and we can now magically produce a definitive or proper version to outshine all that have gone before. For one thing, each of the previous translations of this novel is an enormous achievement in itself, accomplished through hundreds of hours of devoted application and no little talent for the job in hand. English translators of Russian prose are also, in general, good linguists and gifted writers, but in their ranks lurk a good number of rather poor amateur optimists who have not been quite up to the task. There are no such mediocrities in the small field of *Onegin* translators; all have served Pushkin well. To equal their efforts would be no small achievement, to surpass them may be impossible, but to be different from them (in a carefully considered way) is worth attempting. But first we must look briefly at the man himself, his life and the general run of his work. *Russia's Best-Loved Writer*

Alexander Pushkin, poet, dramatist, novelist and short-story writer, lived a life that was short, intense and largely unhappy. His ancestry is unusual: on his father's side he came from an an-

cient noble family, and, on his mother's, his great-grandfather had been brought as a black slave boy from Abyssinia, eventually to become a long-living favourite of Peter the Great. The poet was always proud of his African origins.

Born in Moscow in 1799, he attended the *lycée* at Tsarskoye Selo, where his talent for poetry first emerged. In 1817 he entered government service, but because of his liberal views he was exiled to the south in 1820. In 1824 he was dismissed from the service and sent into house arrest near Pskov, from where he did not return to Moscow until after the accession of Nicholas I the following year. Nicholas, aware of the dangerous attitudes displayed by this popular young writer, became his personal censor. Pushkin escaped involvement in the Decembrist revolt of 1825, not least because the serious subversives regarded him as unreliable, but his life in the capital was uncomfortable and fraught with political danger. In 1832 he married a society beauty, Natalya Goncharova, but penurious married life brought him little happiness. He died after a duel defending his wife's honour in 1837. His had been an unsettled and recurrently troubled life, partly uplift-

ted by his acceptance as an important writer, though even that began to fade as the age of prose stole over the landscape of poetry in which he had thriven. As with Mozart, who died at a similar age, rather than regretting what he might have written had he lived on, the world must be grateful that he wrote so prolifically during his short life. Pushkin was the author of eight hundred lyrics, a dozen narrative poems culminating in *The Bronze Horseman*, several dramatic works including *Boris Godunov* and *Mozart and Salieri*, a number of stories in prose, the finest of which is *The Queen of Spades*, and a large body of critical articles, historical studies and letters. His works are deeply loved, and many of them have been consigned to memory by educated Russians.

This writer's greatest achievement, apart from the literary quality of his work as a whole, in which the disciplines of classicism mesh with new freedoms released in the age of Romanticism, is nothing less than to have reformed his national language. This bold claim is no exaggeration. As he grew up, the young Pushkin was presented with at least three different linguistic forces existing as separate entities in his large

country. Posh people spoke French, ignoring or despising ordinary Russian, though Pushkin heard a good deal of this tongue from the local lads and also from his dear old nanny, Arina Rodionovna (who makes an endearing guest appearance as Tatyana's nurse in the third chapter of *Yevgeny Onegin*). In addition, he was continually subjected in church and at school to the rich sonorities of Old Church Slavonic. By some miracle, almost without thinking about it, he created modern Russian simply by using it, choosing at will between elegant Gallicisms, vernacular Russian and his nation's equivalent of our King James Bible and Book of Common Prayer, with a sensitivity to sound, style and meaning that gives him an elevated place in the annals of linguistic reform. The newly expressive modern language was snapped up immediately by writers such as Lermontov and Gogol, and gratefully assimilated by all the (now legendary) Russian authors who followed on so soon. Every writer since Pushkin has acknowledged the latter's significant contribution to his rapidly developing culture, and they all look back with special affection to *Yevgeny Onegin*. *The Story*

(New readers may prefer to leave this section until later)

This strange work is both a poem and a novel, with the advantages of both—a good, modern story of frustrated love and death, with many fascinating incidents, a group of interesting characters who raise still unresolved questions of human psychology, and a literary manner that combines an acute sense of construction and form with a remarkable feeling for language at its most effective, all of this seasoned with a strong sense of humour. It has no equal or parallel in the great pantheon of world literature.

First the story. A young man, Yevgény Onégin (twenty-four years old when the novel starts in 1820), inherits his uncle's estate, but when he goes to live there he finds the place no less boring than the city (Chapter One). He befriends a bright seventeen-year-old neighbour, Vladímír Lénsky, who is in love with a local girl, Ólga Lárina (Chapter Two). Her elder sister, Tatyána, falls in love with Onegin, and naively offers herself to him in a long letter (Chapter Three). Uninterested, Onegin rejects her approach and lives on in the country like a recluse. Months later he is

invited to Tatyana's name-day celebrations. By this time Olga and Vladimir are planning their wedding (Chapter Four). Tatyana endures a lurid nightmare, in which she is rescued by Onegin, who then stabs Lensky. The evening dance is too provincial and rustic to merit being called a ball; nevertheless, Onegin is furious with Lensky for drawing him into a grander occasion than he had anticipated, and he monopolizes Olga to an insulting degree. Lensky has no option but to challenge his "friend" to a duel (Chapter Five). He is shot dead (Chapter Six). Onegin departs. Tatyana visits his manor, browses through his books and discovers what a shallow character he is. Her family moves to Moscow (Chapter Seven). Three years later Onegin arrives in Moscow to find her married to a rich, prominent figure. In a letter echoing hers, he declares his love for her. She rejects him, saying she will not betray her husband. The story concludes in the spring of 1825 (Chapter Eight).

Many people who do not yet know the original work will recognize this as substantially the same story that is told in Tchaikovsky's famous opera of the same name. This work has enjoyed a

massive rise in popularity over the years (as has the overall public estimation of the composer's genius) and it has now become a special favourite among opera-lovers. Tchaikovsky not only wrote the music but also penned nearly all of the libretto, which is a work of the highest literary-musical achievement—anything but the desecration of a sacred text, as it has so often been described by the Russians themselves. But that is another story...

Critics have been rather too kind to Onegin. The cold facts could scarcely be clearer: an experienced man about town with several duels behind him ruthlessly dispatches an ingénu poet for no obvious reason, though one suspects he is motivated by envy of the young man's happiness. We have no space to develop this argument in detail, but readers should be warned against the diversity of false excuses paraded to exculpate the eponymous "hero". He has been seen as a helpless child of his age, someone constrained by the stifling political atmosphere of the day in Russia, a victim of Fate, a sufferer from the mysterious (non-existent) European malaise called *mal du siècle*, a slave to contemporary convention and

codes of behaviour, and a prey to all sorts of other unseen forces conditioning his conduct—all of this in a (largely unsuccessful) attempt to mitigate his guilt as the murderer of young Lensky. The most famous of *Onegin* critics and translators, Vladimir Nabokov, tried to persuade himself (and us) that Yevgeny is much younger than he really is, so that the two men might seem more evenly matched and the killer less culpable. Some critics acknowledge his unprincipled behaviour but claim that in his worst moments he is “acting out of character”. But the truth remains clear: Onegin had many opportunities and methods for avoiding first the duel and then the death of his opponent—and he spurned them all. Moreover, everything he does, sad to say, is consistently *in* character. Mind you, this is only one opinion; its very opposite was asserted by an American critic who believes that “Onegin is actually determined [by Russian society] *in all his actions*.” A great deal of alternative critical material is available to those interested in looking further into the characterization of *Yevgeny Onegin*.

Much the same applies to other characters in the novel, who are also open to a wide range of

interpretation. The heroine, Tatyana, for instance—lovely young girl that she is—may have been glorified somewhat beyond her deserts. For one thing, her rapid development over a couple of years from bumpkin status to the top echelons of St Petersburg society is a challenge to probability, as indeed is the conversion (over a similar period) of the amoral, hard-hearted Onegin into a lovelorn worshipper near to madness. And, by the way, the famous rejection scene in Chapter Eight is rather a sham—there could surely be no serious prospect of Tatyana's throwing away the advantages of her new position for the corpse-like apparition who has suddenly re-emerged to stalk her. As to Lensky and Olga, they have been treated rather too ponderously by a number of critics. The young couple are still teenagers and surely cannot be expected to bear scrutiny as if they were fully developed adults with a lot of life experience.

These issues, and numerous others like them, need to be argued through in detail—as they often have been in many dozens of books. We mention them briefly to demonstrate the psychological complexity of this novel, as well as the life-and-

death issues that are at stake in it. These factors alone put this novel into an important place; despite the flippant tone adopted by the ostensibly casual narrator, his story plumbs greater depths of significance than you will find in contemporary stories and novels in Europe, from Austen to Chateaubriand, and from Richardson to Rousseau and Goethe. The Onegin narrative, with its interest in psychology, morality and (obliquely) politics, its musings on happiness and death, and its remarkable progress from the boisterous, youthful high spirits of Chapter One to “the resigned and muffled tragedy” (Prince Mirsky) that ensues, reads like a true and immediate precursor of the profound Russian writing that will outclass the literary achievement of all other nations in the nineteenth century. Even without the poetry, it makes the husband-hunt of *Pride and Prejudice*, written only a decade earlier, seem old-fashioned and superficial.

But you cannot begin to assess *Yevgeny Onegin* without the poetry, because this is its greatest strength. It flows and bubbles “like champagne in sunshine” (Mirsky again), with all the fluency and irony of Byron at his best but under stricter con-

trol. As in *Don Juan*, for instance, there are many digressions, but Pushkin keeps them shorter, timing their flow and return with immaculate precision and nice apologies for having strayed from the path of narrative duty. These little cadenzas are among the loveliest delights of the novel, especially in the first chapter, when Pushkin amusingly presents ideas on education, society values, food and drink, seduction techniques, the theatre, the ballet and the ballroom, the loveliness of a winter morning in the city and the contrasting countryside—while all the time sketching a subtle portrait of his “hero”, not sparing the faults of his character, which will determine the tragedy about to unfold. The carefully modulated developments and interruptions are so exquisitely written, and the details of Russian life are so lovingly set down (with indiscriminating twenty-twenty vision), that all lovers of Russian literature come together in nominating the opening section of *Yevgeny Onegin* as the best Russian ever written, and they all know large tracts of it by heart. (This admirer once learnt the first sixty stanzas by heart and went about like William Wordsworth, declaiming them in the country

air.) Would that an earnest translator could capture even a glimmer of this unusual quality in a poor English version. Further details about the quality of the novel, and some technical material explaining the translator's strategy and tactics may be pursued in the Translator's Note.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE *The Cultural Road Not Taken*

PUSHKIN'S spontaneous incorporation of vernacular speech into ancient and modern Russian was matched by a similar, but more carefully considered, development in his themes, subjects, stories and style. With access to a large library when very young he read voraciously, especially the classics, French Neoclassical works (particularly the stylized seventeenth-century theatre) and not a little English literature. To his eternal credit he chose not to follow the French models. French professors have always controlled their language carefully, guarding it against "corruption" from abroad by scrutinizing every new word or phrase, and voting on whether to accept it into the French lexicon or refuse its admission. (Incidentally, I have just checked on Google and discovered to my astonishment that, even in our digital age, the Académie française still operates as the "official moderator of the French language", insisting that definite rules always be obeyed in the interests of "purity and eloquence".

It is an unpleasant thing to say, but the collapse of the French language from its position as the main language of international communication a couple of centuries ago may owe much to unhealthy overprotection of this kind.)

Pushkin would bring Russian into line with the *English* language. Here was an impure tongue that had flourished and expanded through promiscuity—she was anybody's. It was the same story in literature. Take, for instance, the famous and favourite line of French poetry, the Alexandrine, long before Pushkin so tied-down, symmetrical and unbending that it had become tedious. Every line (of twelve or thirteen syllables) must be end-stopped, and at the halfway point it must pause noticeably to create a "caesura". Rhyming couplets were de rigueur, and they must alternate one-syllable rhymes with two-syllable rhymes (hence the twelve or thirteen). What mattered was not the actual ending alone—in the interests of "rich rhyming" you were even required to supply a "supporting consonant" (before the last stressed syllable), which would mean in an English equivalent that bloom/gloom was a legitimate rhyme, but tomb/gloom was not; likewise, be-

lated/related yes, related/created no.

Pushkin's response to all this was to throw the rule book away and elope with Shakespeare, having fallen in love with the Englishman's unrhymed iambic lines with their asymmetry, free-flowing enjambment, linguistic inventiveness and capacity for springing surprises (such as lapsing occasionally into prose). This libertarian attitude was also applied to subject matter. Voltaire had raised an acidulated protest against Shakespeare's use in serious drama of the vulgar phrase "not a mouse stirring" on the Elsinore battlements; Pushkin thought the mouse had as much right to be there and to enjoy being mentioned as anyone else in the play. Like his master, the Russian poet wanted every sort of disregarded creature to emerge onto the published page. Commoners would sit down with kings, bawdiness would live alongside beauty, and people of every description would be brought forward.

Take, for instance, an inconspicuous stanza halfway through the first chapter of *Yevgeny Onegin* (35), in which the jaundiced young Onegin comes back home in the early morning after

partying. Interesting and beautiful things are happening all around him, but he is too disaffected and hungover to notice anything. Pushkin rubs this idea in by treating us readers to a little pantomime of morning-fresh activity totally lost on his hero. The morning drum has sounded, telling people to get up and start the day. They have responded as they always do. Out they all come, a dealer, a hawker with his tray, a cabman, a delightful girl from the Okhta district with her milkmaid's jug, and a fussy German baker busy at his little window, while blue smoke rises in a fine line, showing the stillness of the early day. This a delicious little scene, relevant to the story because its charm is lost on the main character, which tells us much about him, and consisting only of the sights and sounds (and smells from the bakery?) of everyday life. Nothing could be more typical of Pushkin's manner. You will find another such example in the second stanza of Chapter Five, where another winter morning is brought to life first by a peasant sledging cheerfully through fresh snow, then by a gaudily dressed driver deriving even greater pleasure from hurtling past in a covered sleigh. But hap-

piest of all is a little boy who has made his own form of transport by sitting his little dog up on his sledge while he acts as the driver and mum scolds him through the window. All three are revelling in the natural winter scene, and the little boy would fit straight into Pieter Bruegel's realistic painting of children's games that dates back to 1560, were it the right time of year. These modest, anonymous representatives of our species have no obvious claim to intrude upon the pages of a cultural masterpiece, but they add realism and atmosphere, and once you think of them there is no good reason to exclude them. Nothing could be nearer to Shakespeare or more remote from French classicism; none of these people comes near to passing Voltaire's test of nobility and weighty relevance. Alexander Pushkin's spontaneous introduction of the common touch into his country's language and literature is the best thing about him, a stamp of instinctive genius and his greatest claim to fame. *The Translator's Burden*

The new interpreter starts out with a strong admiration for Pushkin and his finest achievement, mixed with deep respect for all the amateur versifiers who have already toiled lovingly

to transmit some inkling of it into another language. This is the double burden to be borne by any new translator, together with the certain knowledge that the task is literally impossible.

One can only hope that the thrilling energy of a Pushkin poem can be released in sufficient quantities for some of it to carry across to the non-Russian mind. This is not quite as hopelessly optimistic as it may seem. Russian and English are closer to each other (with their shared strong word stress, huge vocabulary and wide range of acoustic expressiveness) than, for example, French and English. More specifically, Shakespeare, as we have seen, was ten times dearer to Pushkin than any confection of Racine, Corneille and Molière, and Byron's irreverent appeal was massively greater than that of Lamartine. Thus there is a small chance of making an English translation sound something rather like the original, whereas a French version of Pushkin is unimaginable. (Is there such a thing? Even the transliteration of the poet's name tells us something: the English "Púshkin", stressed on the first syllable, looks and sounds quite close to the original whereas the (stressless)

French “Pouchkine” has an alien quality, nothing like the Russian.) Armed with this small advantage, we can advance.

When translating a long prose work (as I well know from long experience with *War and Peace*) it is best to keep well away from earlier translations until you are well into the project. This will avoid all possibility of borrowing or imitation, conscious or otherwise. With *Yevgeny Onegin*, however, the opposite applies. It is essential to know and judge how previous attempts have tackled the various technical difficulties, such as the English spelling of Russian names, the sonnet-like stanza with its original and slightly complicated rhyme scheme involving many two-syllable rhymes, the variations in language register, the decision to modernize the English or attempt to keep it sounding slightly archaic and self-consciously poetic, and so on. There is a surprisingly wide range of solutions to these problems, and they all need careful consideration.

This is not the place to comb through the existing translations one by one, making close comparisons. That exercise is best left to postgraduate students with time to spare. Besides, it would be

invidious to dwell on supposed examples of bad practice or mistaken judgements; the purpose of examining earlier versions is not to revel in triumphalist “improvements” but rather to avoid any dangerous pitfalls and improve the general quality of decision-making. Still, we must report briefly on what we have found in looking at all of the translations listed below. *What’s in a Russian Name?*

First, the titular Russian name: Yevgény Onégin, which has not been rendered in this way by any other translator in English. The general preference is for “Eugene Onegin”, though you will also find the forename written as Evgeny. We are going for a straight *transliteration* of the original rather than the obvious and popular translation into a near English equivalent. One problem with “Eugene” is that, while the name has been widely used in Ireland and has transferred itself to America by emigration, the rest of the anglophone world is less comfortable with it. It does not sound like something central to English culture, as the Russian name is in Pushkin’s world. The first-syllable stress (*Eugene*) is also hard to manage, and it will sound odd if it is used

to rhyme with “seen” or “spleen”. But the most important consideration is simply that the transliterated form preserves a delightful acoustic effect of the original: the fact that these two words (six syllables employing thirteen letters in either language) form a little lyric on their own:

Yevgény

Onégin.

The pleasant euphony of this small phrase is not a thing to be lost. The name makes up a tiny poem in two parts, each consisting of three syllables. (Say it out loud: Yevgény rhymes with “rainy”; Onégin is pronounced “An-yé-gin”, the “o” being unstressed. *Yev-gé-ny An-yé-gin.*) It does not matter whether you read each word, technically, as a one-foot iambic line with a feminine ending (i.e. having two-syllables, as in habit/rabbit) or treat the two words as perfect amphibrachs (two times *te-túm-te*); either way you have a couple of perfectly balanced lines in a combination that has an appealing ring. But there is more to it than that. The interplay of consonants and vowels is typical of Pushkin, who is famous for hitting on successful acoustic arrangements apparently through serendipity. Look what happens

here. Not only do the two little lines form a strong (if approximate) feminine rhyme (-ény/-égin), but the main letters in the two phrases go like this: e... gén... nég... i, with the first “e” and the last “i” sounding the same (both in Russian like an “i” because the “e” is unstressed). So we suddenly realize that this is a modest example of chiasmus, a device in which parallel forms are presented in one order and then re-presented in reverse (as in, “Nice to see you. To see you nice!”). Thus the name given to the hero sings with its own sweet harmony every time it is used, and since it is possible to fully retain this property in transliteration, we should certainly do so. However, there is irony even in this positive decision: the poetic beauty of this miniature creation is not merited by the hero on whom it has been bestowed: his character and behaviour are not in tune with it, being unbalanced and unbeautiful in the extreme, as we shall see.

Anyone who thinks all of this sounds fanciful could be challenged to change the name to something else, and see if it makes a difference. What if the poet had hit upon Yevgeny Bazarov, Yevgeny Oleshin or Dmitry Onegin? The story

and the characters would remain the same, but some spangle of acoustic refinement would have departed from an important work of poetry; on the finest scale of ideal values this hidden property of a *novel in verse* would have been thinned down, driving it one nuance away from perfection. The importance of such values to this poet was made clear in a poem of 1829 ('Winter...'), in which he describes what it is like when inspiration deserts a poet: "The *sounds* won't come together..."

The ease with which Pushkin achieves intricate effects like this one reminds me of younger days. At the age of eleven I watched a famous batsman (Len Hutton) compile a score of 104 at Bramall Lane; at sixteen I heard my first Mozart, the clarinet concerto. I remember being struck by the simplicity of the skills used on both occasions. You could obviously rush home and perform this kind of high art yourself, because it was so effortless, except that you couldn't get remotely near the models when you tried. Pushkin's poetry is consistently of that order: nearly every line of his seems like a happy fluke that could have happened to anyone, until you try to do it your-

self and the lucky chances don't materialize.

We have dwelt long on the two words at the head of this poem, and we shall have to linger over other examples of Pushkin's poetic effectiveness. (The small number of enthusiasts who want more of this could consult my short book on the novel in the Cambridge University Press series: *Landmarks in World Literature*, 1992). The point is this: don't be fooled by the seductive idea of serendipity. Complex organization by a master intelligence is the name of the game. If you are prepared to think like a modern physicist, treating the word like an atom, you will find in the *subatomic* realm a full range of interrelated particles of sound sharing magical relationships. But it isn't magic, it isn't luck; it is creative genius in a holiday mood. And Pushkin's translator must be intimately aware of the imperceptible tricks and forces that drive and decorate his work, not in order to replicate them in some mechanical way, but at least to guide the English language in some appropriate direction, in the hope that now and then a modest turn of phrase will produce the occasional flash of wit, aptness or originality strong enough to bring out a memory of the ori-

ginal. *The Onegin Stanza*

The stanza used in this novel is a tried and tested poetic form: the sonnet. It contains the standard fourteen lines and a fixed rhyme scheme. However, Pushkin's version is unusual in at least two ways. First, the line has been shortened from the traditional five feet to four (from iambic pentameter to tetrameter). Second, the rhyme scheme has an unusual property. In order to understand what this is, it is necessary to be familiar with the two main family branches into which the sonnet has been traditionally divided. The "Italian" sonnet breaks into two unequal halves. Its first eight lines (the octave) introduce the main idea; a strong break appears at the end of line eight, and the last six lines (the sestet) are then left to provide some kind of response to the first idea—a counter-proposal, reaffirmation or some new departure. Wordsworth's sonnet composed on Westminster Bridge in 1802, "Earth has not anything to show more fair...", and Christina Rossetti's famous poem "Remember me when I am gone away..." are good examples of the form in English literature.

By contrast, the “English” sonnet works the fourteen lines into a different pattern. It begins with three four-line groups (quatrains), each with its own idea, though the three ideas usually amount to an ongoing argument of increasing intensity. These are followed by a terminal couplet containing a good deal of explosive power, enough to complete the preceding argument or dramatically subvert it. Another name for this form is the Shakespearean sonnet since our finest poet was its greatest exponent. (Curiously, Shakespeare appears to have written one sonnet—No. 145 of 154—in eight-syllable lines, the iambic tetrameter used by Pushkin in this novel, though it is not highly regarded in our poetry and it didn’t catch on.)

Within these two basic sonnet shapes there is some room for varying the rhymes, but not much. Typical rhyme schemes might be:

Italian sonnet: [abab abab] + [cde cde]

English sonnet: [abab] + [cdcd] + [efef] + [gg]

With a stroke of genius (more suited to Russian than English) Pushkin has hit upon a “sonnet” form that can go either way. It can become Italian or English at the flick of a switch in mid-stanza.

Here is the basic pattern:

Onegin sonnet: [ababccddeffegg]

This group of rhymes has no inbuilt preference for one sonnet form over another. Everything depends on the sense and where you place the punctuation. If, according to his whim, the poet chooses to end a proposition at line eight and develop it over the next six lines, he can do so and will produce the following grouping:

[ababccdd] + [effegg]

As a matter of interest, the sestet may be construed as [eff] + [egg] or [effe] + [gg], again according to where the sense provides a strong line-ending. In either case, there will be an Italian feel to the sonnet as long as the sense comes to strong conclusion—with a full-stop, question mark, exclamation mark or at least a semi-colon—at *the end of line eight*.

On another occasion he may want the sense to run on down the stanza and come to a resonant conclusion in a powerful final couplet. The way to do this is to take the emphasis away from line eight and supply *a strong ending for line twelve*. His stanza will then assume the English shape, as follows:

[abab ccdd effe] + [gg]

Pushkin makes full use of this inbuilt flexibility. Almost all of his stanzas begin with a clearly defined first quatrain—there is usually strong punctuation at the end of line four—and a majority of them seem to favour the English mode, because of the limitless possibilities in the terminal couplet for all sorts of striking effects (humour is common among them). But beyond these general observations nothing is predictable. The *Onegin* stanza is a mettlesome creature; when it starts out you can never tell where it may take you, or by what route. Similarly, when you look back on a stanza it will not remind you of its predecessor, nor of any other stanza; each one will seem to be what it is, a unique little lyric in its own right. Variety of this kind is a true friend, a strong defence against tedium.

Apart from its flexibility, this stanza has one further property underwriting its richness. Two-thirds of the way through it, the reader is almost certain to lose all sense of direction in formal terms. However well you know Pushkin, and this novel in particular, you are not likely to escape the feeling of disorientation in the region of lines

eight, nine, ten and eleven. The rhymes fall out in such a way that it is difficult to see immediately in any of these lines whether you are completing a rhyme set up earlier (and precisely where this might have been) or starting a new one. It is surprising to note that in a stanza so carefully regulated by rhyme there are *three* occasions when *three* successive lines do not rhyme with each other: [abc], [def] and [feg]. Two of these three occasions occur at this point in the stanza. All of this creates an impression of greater complexity than really exists, promotes subtlety and suggests mystery. One famous critic has likened this poetic performance to that of a painted ball set spinning: you see its pattern clearly at the beginning and end of its movement, but in mid-spin all you get is a colourful blur.

To sum up: the *Onegin* stanza is an imaginative version of the sonnet, consisting of three four-line groups, each with a different pattern of rhymes—an easy “alternating” quatrain [abab], a quatrain made up of two couplets [ccdd] and an “envelope” quatrain [effe]—all of this topped off with a strong couplet [gg]. A rhyming formula that looks rigid turns out to be the last word in

flexibility. But there is one further complication, which gives rise to the biggest single difficulty for the translator of this magical work—the feminine rhyme. This is not just a problem; it is an intractable bugbear, for the treatment of which you need a bold strategy. *Feminine Rhymes*

Paired words ending in a single stressed syllable are called “masculine” rhymes: for example, “what/spot”, “man/began”, “displease/striptease”. There are masses of these in English and in Russian. The problem arises with “feminine” rhymes, in which a stressed syllable is followed by an unstressed one, as in “token/spoken” or “level/be-devil”. Russian can form pleasing rhymes like this with ease; English cannot. In English there are so few feminine rhymes available that they strike us as boring. When you hear the word “languish”, isn’t it all too easy to guess what its rhyme will be? There is no other rhyme than “anguish”. “Feature” belongs only to “creature”, “habit” to “rabbit” and “sentence” to “repentance”. True, you can make up plenty of feminine rhymes by using common noun endings such as those ending in “-tion”, but these tend to be both obvious and tedious. Verbal rhymes are easily formed but

utterly boring, especially participles like “hoping/moping” or “related/dated”. Almost all the available feminine rhymes in English are unusable because of their wearisome predictability, which is why our poets avoid them (unless you are a humorist like W.S. Gilbert).

Pushkin uses feminine rhymes throughout *Yevgeny Onegin* on a regular, alternating basis. This can be demonstrated best by giving feminine rhymes a capital letter and using lower case for masculine ones. The stanza which we have described actually rhymes like this: AbAb, CCdd, EffE, gg. Six of the endings are feminine (two syllables) and the other eight are masculine (one syllable). Here are the rhymes used for the opening stanza of the novel in one of the better English translations (with the feminine rhymes picked out):

AbAb: *condition*, *prune*, *recognition*, *opportunity*
CCdd: *others*, *brothers*, *day*, *away*
EffE: *glaring*, *dead*, *head*, *bearing*
gg: *cough*, *off*

If you look closely at, say, the rhymed dedication to this novel and its first stanza you will discover that every single existing translation employs more than one rhyme that can only be de-

scribed as weak by being obvious, hackneyed, verbal or ending in “-tion”.

No one is going to notice anything wrong with the choice of these rhymes taken individually, but really they are far from ideal. The first pair belongs to that tedious group of words ending in “-tion”, the second pair are so obvious as to be virtually inevitable, and the third pair depend upon another tedious termination in “-ing”. You will not find many lazy rhyming pairs like these in the works of our major poets. And, although they float past unnoticed in any particular stanza, you can imagine the soporific effect of their use on a regular basis. To take a particularly unfortunate example, one translator uses the following six feminine rhymes in one stanza: reflection/complexion, fascination/condemnation, conversation/disputation; elsewhere he allows this sequence covering three successive stanzas: waiting/abating, agreed with/speed with, unsuspecting/inspecting, pretension/condescension, arising/apprising, rolling/strolling—all of them rather tedious (except for the splendidly surprising “agreed with/speed with”). He is not alone. Here are the feminine rhymes from one stanza in

another version: inscribing/gibing, imbibing/transcribing, sobbing/throbbing, with quacking/a-lacking quick to follow in the next verse. Similarly, one of the very best translations allows a succession of verbal rhymes as long as this: quicken/thicken, quivers/shivers, playing/saying, pleading/reading, presented/invented. In at least two versions you will find a stanza using nothing but present participles for all of its six feminine rhymes: descending/wending, flaring/faring, commanding/standing, and grieving/receiving, keeping/sleeping, waiting/debating. Hardly what you would encounter in Milton or Wordsworth. (Incidentally, my German translation of this work demonstrates this tendency even more effectively. At the start of the fourth chapter, for example, the first *twenty-one* stanzas begin in a discouraging way. Pushkin has omitted the first six stanzas; stanza 7 begins with the feminine rhyme *stehen/gehen*, stanza 8 with *verstellen/darzustellen*, and so it goes on down to stanza 26 with *vorzulesen/Menschenwesen* and stanza 27 with *reiten/Seiten*. Only one stanza (10) fails to end in an “-n”. Of the others only 15 and 19 fail to end in “-en”. All the others—that is, *eighteen* out

of twenty-one stanzas—have the same two letters as an ending for the opening feminine rhyme. Does everything in German have to end in an “-n”? The tedium experienced when reading pages treated in this way must stand as a stark warning to any new anglophone translator tempted in this direction.)

Such examples in our language could easily be multiplied, but we have seen enough to demonstrate one of the trickiest problems of English translation: the besetting danger of verbal rhymes and other hackneyed pairings. All the existing translations, to varying degrees, are diminished by this recurrent disadvantage. (The present one will not be flawless in this respect, though at least it helps to have started out with this danger in mind and with every intention to keep feeble rhyming to a minimum. For example, the first five feminine rhymes of this translation, covering the dedication and the opening of the first stanza, are as follows: amusement/perusal, spirit/fill it/I will it, tragic/pragmatic, insomnia/phenomena, probity/nobody. The justification for such unusual rhymes is given below.)

But where exactly is the problem? Couldn't we

just refrain from using feminine rhymes, thus following the best English poets? It is not so easy. At least two translations have done exactly that, without success. The very first poetic version of *Yevgeny Onegin*, by Lt Col. Henry Spalding, came out as early as 1881, with Pushkin scarcely forty years dead; more than half a century would pass before the next translations began to appear, to celebrate the Russian poet's centenary in 1937. Given the disadvantages under which Spalding laboured (lack of good dictionaries, research materials, and so on) he did a remarkably good job. His work is fluent, accurate and easily readable, though two things stand out as unfortunate. First, his use of our language seems archaic both in the words chosen and in their artificial deployment. For instance, nowhere but in poetry would you write, as Spalding does, "To freeze his finger hath begun..." This is unfaithful to Pushkin, whose language always seems modern and natural even after the passage of so many generations. The second defect is more subtle. He has decided, for reasons that will be obvious from our discussion above, to dispense with feminine rhymes. This has an effect that becomes immediately appar-

ent to anyone who can read the original: the rhythmic flow of Pushkin's poetry has been changed and subverted. The imposition (in English) of snappy endings to lines that are already two syllables shorter than our national favourite (the iambic pentameter) creates a kind of jerkiness and staccato insistence that is slightly unpleasant and humdrum, a sharp contrast to the uncoiling subtlety of the Russian. It is not surprising that of all the subsequent translators only one has reverted to Spalding's masculine-only style of rhyming; all the others do what they can to preserve the original rhythm. An imaginative attempt to get round this problem by using feminine endings on the usual regular basis but without rhyming them (the first line-ending "úpright" is paired with "respéct him") certainly keeps to the original rhythm, but at great cost in terms of disappointment with the shape of the stanza (which depends entirely on the disposition of its rhymes).

There is one way out of this dilemma, which works admirably but may offend the purist because it involves an apparently anachronistic intervention. This is to allow *approximate rhyming*

of the feminine endings (otherwise called near-, half-, off- or embryonic-rhyming). Here the danger is that if you overdo things you risk making the text read like a version of a modernist like Mayakovsky (1893–1930) or even e.e. cummings (1894–1962). Several translators of *Yevgeny Onegin* have used this device sparingly, risking the occasional rhyme that is slightly imperfect. Thus, here and there, you will encounter thoroughly acceptable rhyming partners like these: before him/decorum, hokey-pokey/trochee, shoulders/soldiers, palace/malice, rum-swirls/Come, girls!, purring/astir in.

As it happens, the use of approximate rhyming for Pushkin's period is not quite the anachronism that it may appear to be. If you look closely at the rhyming patterns of English poets in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, you will discover some pleasant little anomalies of approximation that have lain there on the page for centuries unnoticed. (Examples follow; one or two may be due to subsequent changes in pronunciation, but most are true instances of deliberately faulty correspondence.) As far back as Alexander Pope (1688–1744), "the epitome of neo-

classicism”, there are inexact rhymes such as air/star, glass/place, devil/civil, beams/Thames, give/believe and foredoom/home. In the work of Thomas Gray (1716–71) you will find flood/god, abode/God, towers/adores, cleave/wave, remove/love, ecstasy/spy, car/bear, sincere/there and bowl/scowl. William Blake (1757–1827) gives us pigeons/regions, field/ behold, mine/join, sit/sweet and valley/Melancholy. Coleridge (1772–1834): cold/emerald, thus/Albatross, root/soot, gusht/dust, alone/on and sere/were/there. As for Lord Byron (1788–1824), apart from his obvious jokes with rhyme, such as answering “intellectual” with “hen-pecked you all” and “mathematical” with “what I call”, he will slip in a good number of approximations like Cincinnatus/potatoes, Homer’s/newcomers, already/Haidée, acquaintance/sentence, morsel/a horse ill, Agamemnon/the same one and never/river. Since Pushkin imitated Byron consciously (confident of his ability to tidy and transcend the unkempt genius of the English lord), it seems justifiable for us to indulge in this form of rhyming for our translation, given the dreadful pitfalls of not doing so.

Unfortunately, the one translator of Pushkin who saw the value and justification of approximate rhyming, Stanley Mitchell (2008), almost invalidates it by what we may describe as misuse. It is, for example, acceptable and enterprising to rhyme like this: *sérvice/impérvious, Látin/smáttering, Tányá/mánner, madónnas/ónus* and *háazard/gáthered*. These are just what we need—fresh, new, closely associated compilations carrying wit and surprise, far superior to the verbal obviousness so often employed elsewhere. Despite the flavour of anachronism they are fully in tune with Pushkin’s own light touch and constant humour. We could have done with more of them. But where the system breaks down for this translator is his inclusion in the category of approximate rhyming of some words related only by consonants. Consonantal rhyme carries so little impact that it simply does not work. Sometimes called “consonantal dissonance”, it was not used at all before Hopkins, Owen and Dylan Thomas; it is difficult even to detect on the page and has never enjoyed full acceptance or popularity. To use it in relation to Pushkin is truly anachronistic and unsuitably experimental.

In his welcome discussion of this important subject, Mitchell rightly defends the cause of near-rhyming, but he is surely wrong to suggest that rhyming pairs like these are permissible: Lyudmila/fellow, live/love, face/peace, Muse/joys. These are his own examples, to which we can add from his text unacceptable formulations like: handsome/custom, theatre/Phaedra, orient/imprint, Phyllis/promise, and many more. The difference is palpable and terribly important. Approximate rhymes must carry similarity *between their stressed vowels*, as in Mitchell's delightful rhyme between "whispered" and "persisted", in which the slight lack of correspondence between consonants is completely over-ridden by the stressed "í". The lack of a vocalic echo leaves not a weak rhyme, it leaves no rhyme at all, and that will puzzle and upset most readers. To make matters worse, this translator uses bad examples of it in the worst possible place, right at the beginning. His opening (feminine) "rhyme" is between "honour" and "demeanour", and in the second stanza the opening (feminine) rhyme is between "scapegrace" and "póst-chaise", in which the busy consonants and the unstressed vowels (in "grace"

and “chaise”) cannot possibly compensate for the discrepancy between the stressed vowels—you simply cannot claim “scape” and “post” as anything resembling a rhyme. This is a splendid translation overall, and it has rightly received much praise, but the solid principle of approximate rhyming has been undermined by the infringement of a simple rule: such rhyming works only when there is close or exact correspondence between *two stressed vowels*, whatever the consonants (which can have no stress) may be doing.

This parading of the faults and pitfalls besetting all translators is intended not as a claim to instant improvement on all that has gone before, but as a demonstration of the difficulty of this task and a tribute to the few brave souls who have attempted it. All of them have worked out of an obsessive love of Pushkin and his masterwork, and each has produced a version worthy of the original. Some, however, have taken strategic decisions that are hard to live with. For instance, two translations have introduced an impossible anomaly, the use of lower-case letters at line-beginnings. You can see why they wanted to do this—in order to encourage the reader not to stop

the sense at the end of the line but to read on fluently to the next one. But we do not do this with Shakespeare or any other English poet, and the text presented without capital letters at the line-beginnings looks like an amazingly modern innovation, quite out of tune with Pushkin and his age. One of the two also repeatedly omits the definite article, thus: “at sound of drum”, “in gondola’s seclusion”, “from pistol’s click”, and so on. Others show too quick a readiness to leap upon an obvious feminine rhyme without realizing how unimpressive it will sound in the overall context.

The present translation makes no special claim other than to have borne these disadvantages in mind from the outset and tried to avoid some of them some of the time. We seek approval for one slight anachronism, the extensive use of approximate rhyming, on the grounds that this is the only way to avoid the pitfalls of feminine rhyming in English, and that it can be tucked away in the run of poetry in a way that radically altered line-beginnings, for example, cannot be. This apart, our new version of *Yevgeny Onegin* lines up with earlier versions as nothing more

than an equal partner in a richly rewarding endeavour.

The ultimate test of a poetic translation of a narrative text is to see how it looks when set out in prose. Despite the constraints of rhyme and stanzaic form it ought still to read fluently, almost like prose. It seems appropriate to end with a random example of a stanza from this new translation that is intended to work that way. Here is a modest offering from Chapter Six (34), which would read as follows if set out in prose:

Imagine this: you with your pistol have murdered someone, a young friend, because some glare, some silly whisper or wrong response chanced to offend your feelings while you drank together, or maybe in his wild displeasure *he* took offence and challenged *you*—what is there left for you to do, and will your soul feel any different to see him stretched out on the ground with death depicted on his brow, and even now his body stiffening, as he lies deaf and dumb down there, scorning your cries of wild despair?

This is poetry, but if it also reads almost like prose we are at least on the way towards a reas-

onable representation of how Pushkin sounds. Beyond that, we can only hope that, to develop an idea from Jorge Luis Borges, the original doesn't seem too unfaithful to its latest translation.

ANTHONY BRIGGS

PREVIOUS ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF *YEVGENY ONEGIN*

Eugene Onéguine: A Romance of Russian Life, translated by Lieut.-Col. [Henry] Spalding (London: Macmillan and Co., 1881).

Eugene Onegin, translated by Babette Deutsch, in Avram Yarmolinsky (ed.), *The Works of Alexander Pushkin* (New York: Random House, 1936; reprinted with revisions by Penguin Books, 1964).

Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse, translated by Dorothea Prall Radin and George Z. Patrick (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1937).

Evgeny Onegin, translated by Oliver Elton (London: The Pushkin Press, 1937; reprinted [as *Yevgeny Onegin*] with revisions by Anthony Briggs, by Everyman, 1995).

Evgenie Onegin, translated by Bayard Simmons (London: unpublished typescript, 1950).

Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse, translated by Walter Arndt (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1963).

Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse, translated with a commentary by Vladimir Nabokov, 4 vols (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964).

Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse, translated by Eugene M. Kayden (Yellow Springs, OH: Antioch Press, 1964).

Eugene Onegin, translated by Charles Johnston (London: Scolar Press, 1977).

Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse, translated with an introduction by James E. Falen (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990).

Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse, translated by Douglas Hofstadter (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

Eugene Onegin, translated by Tom Beck (Sawtry: Dedalus, 2004).

Eugene Onegin: A Novel in Verse, translated with an introduction and notes by Stanley Mitchell (London: Penguin Books, 2008).

YEVGENY ONEGIN

*P*étri de vanité il avait encore plus de cette espèce d'orgueil qui fait avouer avec la même indifférence les bonnes comme les mauvaises actions, suite d'un sentiment de supériorité, peut-être imaginaire.

TIRÉ D'UNE LETTER PARTICULIÈRE

He was so steeped in vanity as to display even more the kind of pride, arising from a perhaps misguided sense of superiority, which calls for the acceptance of good and bad behaviour with an equal lack of concern.

FROM A PRIVATE LETTER

DEDICATION

to P. A. Pletnyov (1792–1865)

Not for the stately world's amusement,
But as your friend, I'd have been pleased
To dedicate for your perusal
A better pledge, a worthier piece
Truer to your exalted spirit,
Brimming with limpid poetry,
And holy dreams by which to fill it
With high thoughts, yet simplicity...
Still, take this pledge. To you I will it,
A hash of chapters set in rhyme,
Half-humoristic and half-tragic,
Some idealistic, some pragmatic,
The casual fruits of too much time,
Swift inspirations and insomnia,
The callowness of withered years,
Cold, intellectual phenomena,
A heart, a lifetime, washed with tears.

CHAPTER ONE

He rushes life and hurries through emotion.

PRINCE VYÁZEMSKY

1

“Uncle, a man of purest probity,
Has fallen ill, beyond a joke.
Respected now, and scorned by nobody,
He has achieved his masterstroke
With this exemplary behaviour,
But it would try the Holy Saviour
To tend a sickbed night and day,
And never stir a step away,

Employing shameful histrionics
To bring a half-dead man some cheer,
Plump pillows and draw sadly near,
Indulging him with pills and tonics,
Heaving deep sighs, but thinking, ‘Ooh!
When *will* the devil come for you?’” 2

These were the thoughts of a young gallant,
Lodged in his dust-blown chaise, whom
chance

(Or mighty Zeus) had willed the talent
Of family inheritance.

Friends of Ruslán, friends of Lyudmíla,
Allow me forthwith to reveal a
New hero, for this novel, who
Comes thus unintroduced to you:
Onégin (we were friends for ages)
Was born by the Nevá, where you,
Perhaps, dear reader, were born too,
Or maybe ran around rampageous.
I've also had some good times there—
But I can't breathe that northern air. 3
With worthy service now behind him,
His father lived from debt to debt.
Three balls a year soon undermined him.
He was as poor as you can get.
Fate saved the boy, who was aware of
Madame, and being taken care of,
And her replacement, a *Monsieur*.
The child was frisky, though demure.
Monsieur l'Abbé, a Catholic father,
Not keen to weigh Yevgeny down,
Taught him by acting like a clown.
Morals seemed irksome; he would rather
Chide him for the odd naughty lark,
And walk him in the Summer Park. 4
Rebellious youth came in due season—

A season full of hopeful dreams
And gentle sadness—ample reason
To give *Monsieur* the sack, it seems.
Onegin now, devil-may-care-style,
Copied the very latest hairstyle
And came out like a London fop
To see society. Tip-top
In spoken French (no less proficient
In speech and writing), he could dance,
And with the utmost nonchalance
Perform a bow, which was sufficient
To show him in a pleasing light
As a nice lad, and very bright. 5
We've all of us been taught in smatters
Of this and that, done bit by bit.
Not that our education matters:
We shine despite the lack of it.
Onegin was esteemed by many
(Judges as hard and strict as any)
As an enlightened clever dick.
He had evolved the happy trick
Of butting in on French or Russian
With flippant comments here and there
Delivered with an expert air,
While dodging any deep discussion.

He could bring smiles to ladies' lips
With epigrams and fiery quips. 6
Although we've lost the taste for Latin,
He knew enough of it to read
An epitaph and render that in
Some Russian form, we must concede,
To mention Juvenal, and, better,
Write *Vale*, signing off a letter.
He knew by heart—or sort of did—
The odd line from the *Aeneid*.
He didn't know—having no patience
To learn in any deep degree—
The world's historiography,
Yet he remembered, from the Ancients,
A fund of jokes and tales for us
From our times back to Romulus. 7
Lacking high passion, too prosaic
To deem sounds more than life, he read
What was iambic as trochaic—
I couldn't get it through his head.
Homer, Theocritus he slated,
But Adam Smith was highly rated
By this self-styled economist,
Who knew it all: how states exist,
How to transform them, make them wealthy,

And why they have no need of gold
If they have things that can be sold—
The *product* is what keeps them healthy.
His father couldn't understand,
And went on mortgaging his land. 8
I cannot run through this man's learning
In full, but there's one field in which
He had a genius so discerning
It was incomparably rich.
This, since his youth, had proved so serious
It brought him toil and joys delirious,
Intruding with daylong distress
Into his anguished idleness:
Yes, tender passion, that same science
Which Ovid sang and suffered for,
Languishing sadly more and more,
After such bright days of defiance,
On a Moldavian plain, where he
Pined for his long-lost Italy. [9] 10
Early he learnt to sow confusion,
To hide his hopes, show jealous spite,
To build trust, then to disillusion,
To brood and droop with all his might,
To spurn with pride, or turn obedient,
Cold or attentive, as expedient.

He could be silent, malcontent
Or passionately eloquent;
In missives of the heart, off-handed.
While yearning with a single dream,
How self-dismissive he could seem!
His glances could be fond or candid,
Reserved or forthright—or appear
To gleam with an obedient tear! 11
Changing at will, today, tomorrow,
He could fool innocence by jest,
Alarm with artificial sorrow,
Flatter the easily impressed,
Pick up the early signs of ardour,
Press pure young creatures ever harder
With passion, and use all his wit
To foil reluctant girls with it.
Urging commitment by entreaty,
Catching at heartbeats, he would thrill
And harass them with love until
He winkled out a secret meeting,
And when he got the girl alone
What silent lessons was she shown! 12
Early he taught himself to ravage
The feelings of accomplished flirts,
And when he felt the need to savage

His rivals in pursuit of skirts
His vicious language was appalling.
What traps he set for them to fall in!
But you, good husbands, did not tend
To spurn him. He was your close friend,
As was the foxy spouse, whose story
Had had its Casanova days,
And codgers with their snooping ways,
And the fine cuckold in his glory,
So smug, so satisfied with life,
Pleased with his table and his wife. [13, 14] 15
He often lay abed while thumbing
Through notes brought in. What have we
here?

More invitations! They keep coming.
Three soirées to attend. Oh dear,
Then there's a ball, a children's party...
Which will be graced by my young smarty?
Where will he start? It matters not.
He'll easily get round the lot.
In morning dress he sallies yonder,
Beneath his Bolivar's broad brim.
The boulevardier born in him
Will stroll abroad and widely wander
Till his unsleeping Bréguet's chime

Announces that it's dinner-time. 16
Later he mounts his sledge in darkness.
"Drive on!" he calls. The frost, it seems,
Has daubed his beaver collar's starkness
With silver dust until it gleams.
He speeds to Talon's place, not sparing
The horses, sure to find Kavérin.
Inside, corks pop. The foam, the fizz
Of Comet wine, the best there is!
Bloody roast beef will soon restore him,
With truffles. Young folk are so keen
On this fine flower of French cuisine!
And Strasburg pie is waiting for him
Between a living Limburg cheese
And golden pineapples. Yes, please. 17
And now the glasses need refilling
To slake the chops' hot fat—but hey!
The Bréguet now alerts them, shrilling—
The new ballet is under way.
He was the theatre's closest stickler.
With actresses no one came fickler;
He loved the nice ones (any age),
And was a regular backstage.
He hurried there. With free demeanour
The liberals there will shout hurrah

To celebrate an entrechat,
Boo Phèdre or call out Moëna
Or Cleopatra. (In a word,
They shout to get their voices heard.) 18
O magic realm! There, in his season,
A brilliant satirist was seen,
That friend of freedom, bold Fonvín,
And the mercurial Knyazhnín.
There Ozerov shared an ovation,
The tears and plaudits of the nation,
With young Semyónova, and then
Katénin brought to life again
The spirit of Corneille so splendid.
There comedies, good Shakhovskóy's,
Swarmed through and filled the house with
noise,

And Didelot to fame ascended.
There, there, at a much younger age,
I spent my early days backstage. 19
Where are you now, my lost goddéses?
Oh, hear my melancholy call.
Are you the same, or have successors
Emerged to supersede you all?
Can I still hope to hear your chorus?
Terpsichore, will you dance for us

That doleful, Russian, soulful dance?
Is no one left for my sad glance
To recognize on that drab staging?
Must I allow this alien set
To disillusion a lorgnette
That finds their frolics unengaging?
Am I to yawn at everyone,
Silently ruing what is gone? 20
House full. We see the boxes gleaming,
The pit and stalls a seething world.
On high, the heckling gods are teeming,
The curtain zooms up, sweetly swirled.
Semi-ethereally splendid,
Watching the magic bow, suspended,
Surrounded by a crowd of nymphs,
There stands—Istómina. We glimpse
Two tiny feet twirling together,
One circling, one upon the boards,
And then she skips and flits and soars,
Puffed like a soft aeolian feather.
She twines, untwines, spins at the hips.
Her tiny toes touch at their tips. 21
Everyone claps. And, having tangled
With toes of people where they sit,
He peers across, his glasses angled

At unknown ladies opposite,
Taking things in on every level—
Clothing and faces that bedevil—
Onegin's still dissatisfied.

Exchanging bows on every side,
He gives the stage some small attention,
But soon, distracted and withdrawn,
He turns back, saying with a yawn,
"It's time to put this lot on pension.

Ballet! I've taken all I can—
And Didelot's such a boring man!" 22

There's many a cupid, devil, dragon
Still clomping on the boarded floor,
And footmen still, with coats to sag on,
Sleep wearily beside the door.

Much foot-stamping is in the offing,
Blown noses, hissing, clapping, coughing,
And still at every end, it seems,
Inside and out, a lantern gleams.

Chilled horses stand, pawing the whiteness,
Irrked by their harnesses and reins,
While drivers, cursing near the flames,
Beat their cold hands. And yet, despite this,
Onegin's gone. Is that so strange?

Oh, no, he's driving home to change. 23

Shall I describe, with qualm and scruple,
The hidden room of peace and rest
Where this man, fashion's model pupil,
Is dressed, undressed and then re-dressed?
Every last whim and freak of fancy
And London-born extravagancy
Exchanged across the Baltic seas
For timber and for tallow, these,
Along with goods hailing from Paris,
Where trade and good taste are on hand
To make things for our pleasure, and
Where luxury with fashion marries—
No one had more of these things than
This eighteen-year-old thinking man. 24
Byzantine pipes on tables (ambered),
Lay beside porcelain and bronze
And, to delight the truly pampered,
Bottles of perfume (cut-glass ones),
With combs and little steels for filing
And scissors straight or curved for styling
And thirty brushes (various scales)
For treating dirty teeth and nails.
I can't help adding: Jean-Jacques Rousseau
(Loquacious oddball) watched while Grimm
Dared clean his nails in front of him,

And thought it rude of Grimm to do so.
On human rights Rousseau was strong,
But in this instance he was wrong. 25
You can be an effective person
And still take good care of your nails.
Don't blame the age, the times that worsen:
Fashion's a tyrant to young males.
A new Chadáyev, my Yevgeny
Feared jealous blame and thought it brainy
To dress the pedant, toe to top,
And be what we would call a fop.
Three hours or more he (just between us)
Would spend at mirrors hung about
His dressing room, and then walk out,
For all the world a giddy Venus,
A goddess in men's clothes arrayed,
Departing for a masquerade. 26
No doubt your interest has been captured
By his toilette and taste. And how
The learned world would be enraptured
If I described his clothing now!...
This would not be a wise endeavour.
I've been describing things for ever,
But *pantalon*, *Frack*, *gilet*... Please!
There are no Russian words for these.

I know my poor vocabulary
Is reason to apologize.
It has already, for its size
Too many foreign words to carry.
I say this after having scanned
The expert wordsmiths of our land. 27
But this we cannot be delayed in.
We'd better rush off to the ball.
In a fast hackney my Onegin
Has hurtled there before us all.
Past many city houses darkling,
Along the sleeping highways, sparkling
With double lanterns, hackneys go
In relays, lighting up the snow
And scattering rainbows. In this setting,
See, here we have a splendid pile
Lit up with oil lamps in fine style,
Its plate-glass windows silhouetting
A group that features, when it stops,
Fine ladies and pretentious fops. 28
Our hero now flies through the entry,
Darts past the porter and ascends
A marble staircase for the gentry,
Smoothing his hair with finger-ends.
He's in. The room is full of dancers,

The band has thundered, but now answers
With a mazurka danced by all,
While noisy revellers cram the hall.
The boots of cavalrymen jingle
And lovely ladies flick their feet,
Leaving an afterview so sweet
They catch the eye and tease and tingle,
While scraping fiddles in the band
Drown gossip hushed behind the hand. 29
When we were sporty, yearning creatures
I loved the ballroom well. We knew
No better place for lovelorn speeches
Or handing over *billets doux*.
You, husbands—each an upright figure—
I conjure you with all my vigour:
Listen to what I have to say.
I'd like to warn you, if I may.
And you, mamas, you must be stricter.
Don't let your daughters out of sight.
Use your lorgnette, and hold it tight,
Or else... God save you... That's the picture.
I tell you this since I can say
I do not sin like that today. 30
On various pleasures (some that hurt you)
Much of my life has gone to waste,

But, if they didn't threaten virtue,
Balls still would have been to my taste.
I love the youthful dash and clamour,
The crush, the gaiety and glamour,
The ladies scrupulously dressed.
I love their tiny feet. At best,
In all our land you'll scarce discover
Three pairs of lovely female feet.
But I know two that were so sweet...
And though I'm sad—my day is over—
I can't forget them now, it seems;
They bring me heartache in my dreams. 31
So, where and when, in the out yonder,
Will you forget them, madman? How?
O tiny feet, where do you wander?
What green blooms do you trample now?
Spoilt by the east, you left no northern
Traces in snows where there is more than
Enough of sadness. Oh, the snug
Touch of an oriental rug!
The luxury! The soft entwinement!
For your sake I forgot the cause,
The thirst for glory and applause,
My homeland, where I knew confinement.
My happy youth was soon to pass,

Like your light traces on the grass. 32
Diana's bosom, friends, is charming,
And Flora's cheeks are, oh, so sweet,
Terpsichore is more disarming,
However, with her tiny feet.
That foot, a prophesy of pleasure,
A quite inestimable treasure
Of pure, symbolic beauty, stirs
A swarm of yearnings—to be hers.
I love the foot, my dear Elvina,
Beneath a tablecloth's long swing,
Tracing a greensward in the spring
Or on cold winter hearths, still keener
If treading glass-like floors, or if
On beaches by a granite cliff. 33
Once, on a shore... A storm was brewing,
And I felt jealous of the waves
That rushed on her in raging ruin,
Collapsing at her feet, like slaves.
Oh, how I longed to know what bliss is
By covering those feet with kisses.
No, not once in the fiery blaze
Of my ebullient younger days
Did I in this way long and languish
To kiss a young Armida, or

Kiss burning pink cheeks and adore,
Or kiss a bosom racked with anguish.
No, never did a surge of lust
Assault my soul with such a thrust. 34
Another scene... Let me unfold it;
The cherished memory still stands...
A happy stirrup... There, I hold it,
Feeling a small foot in my hands.
This sets imagination seething—
That touch again, beyond believing,
New grief, new love. A surging flood
Inflames the fading heart with blood!
But let's stop praising them, these snooty
Objects of my loquacious muse.
They're worthless. Why do we enthuse,
Or sing of their inspiring beauty?
These sorceresses' words and eyes
Are like their little feet—all lies. 35
Onegin? He looks none too brilliant,
Dozing his way home. Here he comes,
While Petersburg, ever resilient,
Awakens to the morning drum.
The dealer strides out, and the hawker,
The cabby to his stand (slow walker!);
An Okhta girl, her jug held close,

Crunches across the morning snows.
A morning rumble hums to wake her,
Shutters are down, from many a flue
Smoke climbs in a thin line of blue,
And there's that fussy German baker,
Cotton-capped, who for some time has
Been busy at his *was-ist-das*. 36

But noisy ballrooms leave him weary;
He now turns midnight into morn,
Sleeping in shadow, blessed and bleary,
A man to wealth and pleasure born.
His life will be, when late he rises,
Spelt out for him with no surprises,
Coloured, but in the same old way,
Tomorrow being yesterday.

But was he, in this loose employment,
A *happy* young man, in his prime,
With brilliant conquests all the time,
With this quotidian enjoyment?
Heedless and healthy he would go
A-banqueting. Was this all show? 37
No. While still young he lost all feeling,
Finding the noisy world a bore
And lovely girls not so appealing,
Not so obsessive as before.

Betrayals left him sad and weary,
Both friends and friendship he found dreary.
You cannot keep on sluicing steaks
Or Strasburg pie with what it takes—
The best champagne! And it gets harder
To please the diners with *bons mots*
When headaches leave you feeling low.
Yevgeny, once a man of ardour,
Acknowledged that his love was dead
For conflict, sabres and the lead. 38
The malady that left him undone
(Of which we ought to know the cause)
Was like imported *spleen* from London,
Known as *khandrá* within our shores.
It gradually left him emptied,
Though, thank God, he was never tempted
To put a pistol to his head,
But still he seemed to be half-dead,
Childe Harold-like, with an impression
Of brooding gloom and nothing more,
And as for cards, or gossip, or
Fond looks, or sighs of indiscretion,
He found their impact less than slim,
For nothing registered with him. [39, 40, 41]

You weird and wonderful high ladies,
You were the first that he forswore.
Oh, yes, your *bon ton*, I'm afraid, is
Considered nowadays a bore.
Some of your kind think nature meant them
To hold forth on Jean Say and Bentham,
But by and large they are awash
With empty words and dreadful tosh,
And their high-mindedness is hideous,
They are so stately and so wise,
So predisposed to moralize,
So circumspect and so fastidious,
And when it comes to men, so mean,
The only thing they rouse is spleen. 43
And those young beauties of the fun set,
Who, in those carriages of theirs
Are swept along into the sunset
Down Petersburg's fine thoroughfares,
Yevgeny learnt to put behind him,
With all such sport. Where would you find
him?

Locked in at home, where he sat still,
Yawning as he took up the quill.
He tried to write, but soon was killed off
By the hard toil, so not a scrap

Emerged from this non-writing chap,
Who never made that busy guild of
People whom I judge not. Ahem!
I could not, being one of them. 44
Idle again (and we should mention
His weary emptiness of soul),
He sat back, turning his attention
To other minds—a noble goal.
With rows of books to put his hand on,
He read and read, but quite at random,
All dull, dishonest, rambling stuff,
Not virtuous or clear enough.
They were in every way constraining.
Old things came over as old hat,
And new as old, too. That was that:
Books were (like women) *not* Yevgeny,
So all things dusty of that ilk
Were curtained off with funeral silk. 45
Freed from convention, and its burden,
Like him I gave up vain pursuits.
Befriending this man, I was spurred on
By noticing his attributes:
A strong capacity for dreaming,
A style inimitable-seeming,
A sharp and chilly cast of mind.

I was embittered; he repined.
We'd both known passion, and life's canker
Had left us both dissatisfied.
The fire in both of us had died.
Ahead of us lay only rancour
From Lady Luck and men, all strife,
And in the morning of our life. 46
To live and think is to be daunted,
To feel contempt for other men.
To feel is to be hurt, and haunted
By days that will not come again,
With a lost sense of charm and wonder,
And memory to suffer under—
The stinging serpent of remorse.
This all adds piquancy, of course,
To conversation. To begin with,
I bridled at his witticisms,
But soon I settled to his rhythms:
The stinging shafts that he would win with,
The dark remarks, half-joke, half-bile,
That made his epigrams so vile. 47
On limpid summer nights, how often,
We watched as limpid evenings passed,
And saw the Neva night sky soften
On happy waters smooth as glass

With no Diana in reflection.
Recalling romance and affection,
We hymned serenely love gone by,
Breathed vapours from the tender sky
And living gladness from the scenery,
Glorying in it, drinking deep.
Like a freed convict, half-asleep,
Transported into woodland greenery,
We dreamt ourselves away, in truth,
Back to the dawning of our youth. 48
Depressed in spirit, looking doleful
And leaning on the granite shelf,
There stood Yevgeny, sad and soulful
(As once a bard described himself),
And in the stillness, from their entries,
Night sentries hailed their brother sentries.
Rattling carriages were about—
From Million Street the wheels rang out—
And then a splashing oarsman boated
His small craft down the dozing stream.
Far off, as in a pleasant dream,
A horn blew, singing came, full-throated.
But there's no sweeter late-night sound
Than Tasso's octaves, I have found. 49
O waters of the Adriatic!

Brenta! I *will* see you one day.
Inspired anew, I'll be ecstatic
To hear your magic voice at play.
Apollo's grandchildren revere it;
I know it well. I came to hear it
From tales that England's proud lyre told.
And those Italian nights of gold
Will bring delight to me, a wanderer
Floating with a Venetian chum,
A girl, half-chatterbox, half-dumb,
Secreted with me in a gondola.
She'll teach my lips the language of
Francesco Petrarch—and of love. 50
Shall I be one of God's free creatures?
"Let it be now!" is on my lips.
I watch the weather, roam the beaches
And beckon to the sails of ships.
Clad in dark cloud, braving the waters,
Across the seas to the four quarters
I'll sail in freedom one fine day.
This shore is drab. I'll get away
From uncongenial climes so trying,
And in the shimmering haze of noon
In my own Africa I'll soon
Be thinking of dark Russia, sighing,

Where I knew suffering, love and toil.
My heart is buried in her soil. 51
We were agreed, and might have started
To visit many an alien clime,
But all too soon we two were parted
By destiny for a long time.
Death came at this time to his father,
Which left Onegin faced with rather
A lot of greedy creditors,
Each with his argument or cause.
Yevgeny, loathing litigation
And happy with things as they stood,
Handed them every copeck. Good—
It didn't seem like deprivation.
(Perhaps he could foresee the day
His rich old uncle passed away.) 52
And, sure enough, there came a letter
From uncle's steward. My, oh my,
Uncle was ill, would not get better,
And he'd quite like to say goodbye.
With this sad missive in his pocket
Yevgeny set off like a rocket
In a post-chaise to visit him,
Yawning already at things so grim.
To get the money he was ready

For tedium, deceits and sighs
(My novel started on this wise),
But once he had arrived, instead he
Found uncle on the table, worth
No more than his six feet of earth. 53
The yard was full of staff and yeomen
Hailing from all localities,
Arriving there as friends or foemen,
Enthusiasts for obsequies,
And after uncle's sad interment
People and priests fell in a ferment
On food and drink, then everyone
Went his own way, a job well done.
Onegin, in his rural wisdom,
Owns mills, lakes, woods and lands between.
The landlord, who has so far been
A wastrel with no taste for system,
Is pleased that what he used to do
Has been exchanged for... something new. 54
The first two days were a new highlight:
The far fields with their lonesome look,
The chilly oak grove in the twilight,
The beauty of a burbling brook,
But then each hill and copse and covert
Lost interest, and he could not love it.

Now he was bored with every place,
Now stark truth stared him in the face:
Boredom is just as enervating
Where streets and mansions don't exist,
Nor ballrooms, poetry, nor whist.
Depression dogged him, watching, waiting,
To chase him and to bring him strife,
His shadow or his loving wife. 55
I was born for a calm existence
Out in the country, where, it seems,
The lyre can sing with more insistence
And brighter shine creative dreams.
With pastimes innocent and plenty
I stroll the lakeside. *Far niente*
Is now a rule of life for me.
I wake up in the morning free,
Expecting pleasures with new hunger.
I read a little, sleep a lot.
Striving for glory I am not.
Those bygone days when I was younger,
Did I not spend them all like this
In shade and idleness and bliss? 56
O rural idyll, love and flowers!
O fields, to you I yield my soul...
I mark what *differences* are ours,

What *separates* us on the whole,
So that no reader, no wild joker,
No literary libel-broker
Can publish somewhere by design
Onegin's features as for mine,
And then repeat the claim (outrageous!)
That here my portrait has been daubed
Like Byron's, proudly self-absorbed,
As if one could not fill these pages
By painting someone other than
One's own self as the leading man. 57
Poets, I tell you, are romancers,
Good friends of fancifying love.
I used to dream of cherished fancies
That moved my spirit from above,
Which seized their image to record it,
And later on the muse restored it.
In this way, blithely I portrayed
My ideal girl, the mountain maid,
And the harem on Salgir's borders.
But now, friends, you bring me to task;
Time and again I hear you ask,
"Whom does your sad lyre set before us?
Which of the jealous maids is she?
Which girl is its dedicatee? 58

Whose gaze caressing and inspiring
Rewards you as she turns to nurse
You through your pensive lyring?
Who is the idol of your verse?"
There's *nobody*, my friends, I swear it.
Love's frenzy, I have had to bear it
Without delight worth thinking of.
Blest is the man who merges love
With rhyming fever; he redoubles
Poetry's ramblings blessed by God,
He walks with Petrarch where he trod
And soothes the heart in its worst troubles.
He gains fame, too, for years to come.
But I, in love, was dense and dumb. 59
Love came and went. The muse, descending,
Cleared my dark mind, and I felt free.
I sought new magic in the blending
Of feelings, thoughts and euphony.
I write now, and my heart is easy,
My pen, now swift, now bright and breezy,
No longer makes half-lines complete
With female heads and female feet.
Dead ashes, they are dead and ashen.
I still feel sad, but shed no tear.
Soon the storm clouds will disappear

From my sad spirit. *Then* I'll fashion
A narrative in verse, a gem
In cantos, twenty-five of them. 60
Already I've begun to plan it;
I've named the hero—that is done.
This novel's grown since I began it,
And now I've finished Chapter One.
I've scrutinized my work of fiction,
And find it full of contradiction,
But these are faults I'll not pursue,
Paying the censorship its due.
My toil is done. I now deliver
To journalistic scavengers
This newborn child, my tale in verse.
Go! Stroll along the Neva River.
Earn me the fame that will induce
Skewed comments shrilling with abuse.

CHAPTER TWO

*O rus!... **

HORACE

O Russia!

1

The place Yevgeny found so boring
Was a delightful rural spot,
Where you, with pleasures newly dawning,
Would have blessed heaven for your lot.
His manor house stood all secluded,
With winds by yonder hill excluded,
Above a stream. The prospect yields
A motley view of luscious fields,
Pasture and corn, sunlit and golden,
Dotted with hamlets here and there,
With cattle wandering everywhere,
And dense, dark alleys to be strolled on
Through a vast garden, overgrown,
With wistful dryads set in stone.

2

His castle, far from being squalid,
Was built as castles should be built,
Convenient, sensible and solid,

Ancestral to the very hilt.

The chambers had high ceilings, they did,
The parlour walls were well brocaded,
Tsars' portraits hung on every wall,
The stoves bore coloured tiles. It all
Looked rather down at heel and seedy—
I'm not quite sure why this was so.

In any case my friend had no
Concern for this. He wasn't greedy,
And in all settings, fresh or worn,
Ancient or modern, he would yawn. 3
A certain room drew him in deeper;
Here the old chap had vilified
For forty years his castle-keeper
As he squashed flies and stared outside—
A simple room with oak-wood floorage,
A table, soft couch, decent storage,
And not an ink-stain anywhere.

Onegin scoured the cupboards; there
He found a book, some sort of ledger,
Home-made liqueurs in a long rack,
Apple juice, and an almanac
For eighteen-eight, a source of pleasure
For one who'd had no time to look
At any other kind of book. 4

Yevgeny cut a lonely figure
Amidst his lands. To pass the time
He thought of something: he would trigger
Some changes, and reform this clime.
These peasants, thought our wasteland proph-
et,

Don't like unpaid work—take them off it!
Let them instead pay a small tax:
They will thank Heaven, and relax.
But this remission of serf labour
Displeased the man next door, who viewed
It as too risky. He was shrewd,
As was another smirking neighbour.
The locals shared one thought: “By God,
That fellow's dangerously odd.” 5
At first they came in droves to visit,
But on the back porch he would pause
Usually, wondering, “Who is it?”
And seize the reins of his Don horse.
A family carriage on the highway
Would send him shooting down a byway.
Outraged by conduct of this kind,
They soon left friendliness behind.
“He's crazy, he's a boor, a mason.
Red wine is all he drinks. How crass!

And always in a drinking glass!
He won't kiss ladies' hands. Disgraceful!
It's 'yes' and 'no', but never 'sir'."
And thus did all of them concur. 6
Into his village in that season
Came a new landowner, a man
Who gave the neighbourhood good reason
For no less scrupulous a scan.
This person was Vladímír Lénsky,
Describable as "Göttingen-sky",
A handsome young chap in his prime,
A devotee of Kant and rhyme.
From misty Germany returning,
Ardent and slightly odd, it seems,
Replete with freedom-loving dreams
And all the latest fruits of learning,
He got excited, spoke with strength,
And wore his black curls shoulder-length. 7
Society's chilling excesses
Had not yet shrivelled up his soul.
A friendly greeting, girls' caresses
Still kept him feeling warm and whole.
With silliness his heart was nourished,
And false hope still within him flourished.
The glamour of the world, the din,

Seized his young mind and took it in.
Amusement, fancy, taradiddle
Relieved his heart of doubts and strife.
For him the meaning of this life
Remained a captivating riddle
To which he often turned his mind,
Suspecting wonders unconfined. 8
He knows there is a twin soul waiting
To be united with him. She
Repines with anguish, contemplating
Each waiting day with misery;
And friends, to whom he stands indebted,
Will save his name and end up fettered
Willingly, hesitating not
To smash the slanderer with his pot.
And some there are, guided by destiny,
Whose sacred bond will one day slip
Into immortal fellowship
That beams a mighty luminescence
Upon us (be assured of this),
And furnishes the world with bliss. 9
Hot rage, compassion, with a dormant
And spotless love for all things good,
And glory with its lovely torment
Obsessed him, stirring his young blood.

He roamed the earth, and sang where Goethe
And Schiller lived, striving to nurture
The poet's eagerness—a goal
That captured and inflamed his soul.
The very muses, though exalted,
Were not disgraced by his young bliss
Nor his proud poetry, nor this
High sentiment that never faltered,
The surge of dreams unspoilt and calm,
Simplicity with its grave charm. 10
Love was what he, the lovelorn, played on,
Singing the sweetest, clearest notes,
Clear as the thoughts of a pure maiden,
A sleeping babe, a moon that floats
The night sky with its far-flung glories,
Goddess of sighs and secret stories.
He sang of partings and sad times,
“The days of yore” and “misty climes”
And roses—with romantic language.
He sang of many a distant place
Of quietude and restful space
Where he had wept salt tears in anguish.
He sang of fading life, as seen
By a young man not quite eighteen. 11
Yevgeny would be just the person

To say if he was any good.
His low opinion could not worsen
Of dining in the neighbourhood.
He shunned the locals' noisy chatter,
However sensible its matter—
Haymaking, wine production, with
Much talk of kennels, kin and kith.
They prattled with no show of feeling,
No spark of poetry, no whit
Of brightness, intellect or wit,
No communality of dealings.
Their sweet wives' talk was less intense
But even more devoid of sense. 12
Vladimir Lensky, rich, good-looking,
Was deemed by all a splendid catch.
The country folk were set on hooking
Their girls a profitable match,
In this case their "half-Russian" neighbour.
If he dropped in, the talk would favour
All comments, even if oblique,
That painted bachelordom bleak.
It's teatime now, and Lensky's coming.
Dunya controls the samovar—
"Go to it, Dunya, there you are!"
Here's a guitar, and to its strumming

She screeches (what a caterwaul!),
“*Come to me in my golden hall.*” 13
But Lensky, not exactly raging
To bind himself in wedlock, sought
Acquaintance with this man, Onegin;
It can't come fast enough, he thought.
The two men met. Liquid and solid,
Poetry–prose, ice-cold and torrid
Are not more polarized than they.
Their differences won the day
At first; they simply bored each other.
Then they drew closer. Far and wide,
They rode out daily side by side,
Each an inseparable brother.
Thus friendships form (something I rue)
From having nothing else to do. 14
But we exclude that kind of closeness.
As our unbiased thinking runs,
People are naughts, while, in our grossness,
We see ourselves as number ones.
We show Napoleon's worst features.
Millions of bipeds, fellow creatures,
Exist for us to use as tools;
Feelings we leave to beasts and fools.
Yevgeny, though, was not unshakeable.

Although he took, to all men born,
An informed attitude of scorn,
Nevertheless (since rules are breakable)
With some he went against the grain
And let his feelings have free rein. 15
He smiled at Lensky as he chattered.
The poet's language was ablaze;
His mind, his judgement of what mattered,
The inspiration in his gaze,
Seemed to Onegin unfamiliar.
His inward thoughts grew ever chillier,
Though he fought hard and held them back,
Thinking it stupid to attack
And spoil this brief bliss with correction.
"Time will enlighten him, not me.
So let the man's illusion be;
Let him accept the world's perfection.
To youth and fervour let's succumb,
Young ardour and delirium." 16
There was a good deal to divide them,
And make them *think* as thinkers should:
The compacts made by ancient tribesmen,
How science works, evil and good,
The age-old ways of superstition,
The mystery of non-existence,

Life, destiny, rose, as they must,
Before these men to be discussed.
The poet, holding forth with fervour,
Forgot himself and made things worse
By quoting bits of Nordic verse.
Yevgeny was a kind observer;
While understanding not a lot,
He listened hard with all he'd got. 17
But *passion* was what dominated
The minds of these reclusive chaps.
From its strong force emancipated,
Onegin spoke of this, perhaps
With some regret (and sighs), as follows:
"Blest he who in his passion wallows
And then at last puts it aside.
Twice blest is he who has denied
And cooled both love (with separation)
And enmity (with a sharp word),
Yawning with friends and wife, unstirred
By jealous agonies, too patient
To put dynastic funds to use
By risking all on one sly deuce!" 18
When we have hid beneath the banner
Of sensible tranquillity,
With ardour cooled in such a manner

That we can view indulgently
The lingering echoes of its surges—
Its once unstoppable emergence,
Brought down to earth with much ado,
We sometimes like to listen to
Wild passions as described by others.
They thrill the heart. Thus, drawing near
An old campaigner lends an ear
To tales from young, mustachioed brothers,
He long-neglected in his shack,
They in their wisdom talking back. 19
But youthful ardour in its madness
Hides nothing, leaves no room for doubt;
Love, enmity, delight or sadness—
Nothing will not come pouring out.
For love deemed now beyond the column,
Onegin listened and looked solemn,
Hearing the poet, who confessed
With eager, loving openness.
His simple, unsuspecting conscience
Stood openly revealed because
Yevgeny saw it as it was,
A young man's tale of loving nonsense,
A touching story, it is true,
Characterized by nothing new. 20

Such love! No one would now bestow it,
Not nowadays. It was unique,
The frenzied spirit of a poet
Condemned to love and languish, weak
At all times, in all places, burning
With dreams and a familiar yearning,
Familiar anguish, as before.
Neither the chill of distance nor
Protracted years of separation,
Nor hours devoted to the arts,
Nor lovely sights in foreign parts,
Nor study, nor wild celebration
Had changed the nature of his soul,
Still virginally warm and whole. 21
While still a lad, entranced by Olga
And free from heartache, Lensky grew
More and more happy to behold her
Frolicking wild, as young girls do,
And with the woodlands for their shelter
He shared her scatty helter-skelter.
Their fathers, neighbours and good pals,
Had them down as connubials.
Her dwelling was a humble chalet.
Her parents saw her charm and were
Delighted to consider her

A hidden lily of the valley
Mid the thick grass, for none to see,
Safe from the moths and bumblebee. 22
She gave the poet his first promptings
Of love's young dream, delight, desire.
The very thought of her did something
To animate his doleful lyre.
Leaving behind his golden playtime,
He loved the dense woods in the daytime,
The still, sequestered afternoon
And night skies with the stars and moon,
The moon, celestial luminary
Resplendent through the evening gloom,
Who strolls with us, the one to whom
We once pledged joy, and pain, and worry...
Though now it's just a thing more bright
Than our dim lanterns are at night. 23
Demure, compliant, all elated,
Brimming with early-morning bliss,
Like poets' lives uncomplicated,
As winsome as a lover's kiss,
Her sky-blue eyes so Anglo-Saxon,
Her smiling face, her tresses flaxen,
Her walk, her voice, her tiny waist...
But, no... According to your taste,

Take any novel at your leisure,
And there she'll be. The portrait's fine;
Though once a favourite of mine,
It bores me now beyond all measure.
Reader, with all respect to you,
I'll take the elder of the two. 24
Tatyana... It may seem audacious
To introduce a name like hers
Into this novel's tender pages,
But it is done; we are the first.
So? It's a good name, nice when spoken,
And yet I know it's more a token
Of olden times or something fit
For sculleries. We must admit
Our taste is almost non-existent
In choosing a becoming name.
In poetry it's just the same—
Enlightenment is somewhat distant,
Consistently an open door
To affectation, nothing more. 25
Tatyana, then—a different creature,
Lacking her sister's radiance,
Her rosiness, freshness of feature—
Seemed hardly worth a second glance.
Silent and gloomy, she would go like

A shy thing from the wild woods, doe-like,
And in the home she seemed to be
A changeling in their family.
Her parents, she could never thrill them
With girlish cuddles. She, a child,
Was temperamentally too mild
To hop and skip with other children.
And at the window she would spend,
Silently staring, days on end. 26
She stayed the same right from the cradle,
A friend of pensiveness, it seems.
Dull country leisure she was able
To ornament with her own dreams.
She was too delicately fingered
For needlework, and never lingered
O'er canvas workframes of the ilk
That called for fair designs in silk.
Signs of tyrannical intention:
A girl with her compliant doll
Anticipates what must befall
(Decorum, etiquette, convention),
Rehearsing with her poppet—ah!—
The strictures learnt from her mamma. 27
Tatyana gave no dolls a cuddle.
She did not, even at that age,

Discuss with dolly in a huddle
The town, and what was “all the rage”.
Frolicking girls tended to bore her.
What she preferred were tales of horror,
Dark deeds upon a winter’s night;
These stories were her heart’s delight.
Sometime her nurse enjoyed dispatching
Her playmates down the open lawn,
But Tanya would remain withdrawn
And would not go chasing and catching.
She found their raucous laughter dull,
Their games a silly spectacle. 28
She loved to stand outside, her eyes on
The east, the coming dawn of day,
The pallor of the far horizon,
Stars circling till they fade away.
The earth’s dark margin softly eases,
Morning is heralded in breezes,
And daytime slowly gathers light.
In winter, when the shades of night
Darkened the half-world of the valley,
A vale of lazy peace, unkissed
By moonlight in the murky mist,
The slothful east was slow to rally,
She would arise from her night’s rest,

Lighting the candles as she dressed. 29
She spent her youth in reading sessions;
Novels were all she wished to know.
She loved to take in false impressions
From Richardson and from Rousseau.
Her father was a good chap, decent,
Outdated, knowing nothing recent.
In novels he could see no harm.
He read none, he felt no alarm.
Book-reading was, in his opinion,
An empty toy. Why should he care
What secret volume she had there,
Dozing the night beneath her pillow?
His wife was smitten like their child
With Richardson. He drove her wild. 30
Though Richardson was her true favourite,
Not from the reading she had done,
And not that Lovelace seemed unsavoury
Compared to Mr Grandison.
No. Her *cousine*, Princess Alina,
In Moscow, where she'd often seen her,
Had told her all about these men...
Her spouse was her fiancé then,
Though this ran counter to her feelings.
Another man, for whom she pined,

And who had seized her heart and mind,
Was altogether more appealing—
A Grandison who played the cards,
A dashing captain of the Guards. 31
She was, like him, a stylish dresser
Following fashion and good taste...
But she was not consulted. Better
To get her wed now. They made haste.
Then straight away, to stop her grieving,
Her husband acted wisely, leaving
For their new country home, where soon,
Hemmed in all round by God knows whom,
At first she wept a lot and bridled,
Close to divorce. But soon she'd been
Domesticated by routine,
And she contentedly subsided.
Routine is heaven-sent, oh, yes,
A substitute for happiness. 32
Routine calmed the despairing daughter,
Whose grief was unassuageable.
A big discovery then brought her
Relief that comforted in full.
Midst work and pleasure she discovered
How her new husband could be governed
And mastered with an iron rod—

So that things happened on the nod.
She toured the workings, field and factory,
She pickled mushrooms, laid them down,
She shaved serfs' heads. She kept accounts.
She saw the bathhouse every Saturday.
She whacked the maids. Her every whim
Went though without a word to him. 33
She took to using blood when scrawling
In sweet girls' albums. How bizarre:
Praskovya's name was changed to Pauline
And normal speech went la-di-da.
She wore a very narrow corset.
She took the Russian "n" and forced it
Into a Frenchman's nasal sound...
But soon all this turned upside down.
Album and stays, Princess Alina,
The book of tender poems, the lot—
Even the false names—she forgot,
Saying Akulka, not Selina,
And she restored without mishap
The padded robe and floppy cap. 34
Her husband loved her with deep feeling.
Her whims and fancies left him blank.
So, blithely trusting all her dealings,
He lounged about and ate and drank.

His life has struck an even tenor,
Not least as evening drew on when a
Group of their neighbours, good and true,
Arrived, down-to-earth people who,
After the usual friendly greetings,
Would gossip, moan and raise a smile...
The time would steal away; meanwhile
Olga was sent to get the tea-things...
The friends in due time, having fed,
Were driven off back home to bed. 35
Their peaceful lives passed in the old style
With good traditions still held dear,
Thus Russian pancakes came at Shrovetide
Floating on butter; twice a year
They fasted; they were happy playing
On little roundabouts, soothsaying
In songs; they loved a choral dance,
And on Trinity Day perchance,
When folk were yawning through Thanksgiving,
They'd splash a couple of teardrops
Upon a bunch of buttercups,
And rye beer made their lives worth living,
And guests at table ate and drank,
Served in accordance with their rank. 36

Behold the pair—now ageing mortals.
And for the husband his cold tomb
At last has opened wide its portals;
He has a new crown to assume.
He died with lunch nigh on the table,
And those who mourned him were his neigh-
bour,

His children and his wife so true,
A forthright woman through and through.
He'd been a bluff and kindly *barin*,
And at the site of his remains
A monument in stone proclaims:
A humble sinner, Dmítry Lárin,
Here rests in peace beneath this sod,
A brigadier and slave of God. 37

Back on home soil, Vladimir Lensky
Came to this graveyard by and by,
Looked at the modest tomb intently
And blessed the relics with a sigh,
Which left him feeling melancholic.
“Oh dear,” he gloomed. “Alas, poor Yorick!
For he hath borne me in his arms...
How oft in childhood in my palms
I joshed his medal, that ‘Ochákov’.
He put dear Olga in my way,

And wondered if he'd see the day..."

Vladimir, with a sincere mark of
Sadness upon him, daubed his draft,
A fancy tribute epitaphed. 38

He paid another tribute, weeping,
To mark his parents and their past
And all his ancestors here sleeping.
Life with its furrows comes, alas,
To a swift harvest. Generations,
By Providence's machinations,
Arise and flourish and are gone,
And others always follow on...

And thus our giddy tribe will breeze on,
Will rise and writhe and boil and bloom,
Then speed us to the family tomb.
For all of us there comes a season,
And grandchildren will one fine day
Drive us from mother earth away. 39

But you must now enjoy life (shall you?)
In all its emptiness, my friends.
I know its less-than-nothing value,
And there my interest in it ends.
My eyes are closed to all things ghostly,
Yet hope, of the remote kind mostly,
Sometimes intrudes upon my heart.

It would be dismal to depart
This life leaving no half-seen marker.
I live and scribble not for fame,
Though I have wanted all the same
To flaunt my fate as it grows darker.
Sound is my true friend. May it thrive
And keep my memory alive. 40
And may my sounds lift hearts tomorrow,
When, by the grace of Destiny,
Perhaps the Lethe will not swallow
This stanza now compiled by me.
And also (though false hope is famous!)
Perhaps some future ignoramus
Will point to a known sketch of me
And say, "That poet, what a man was he!"
My thanks to you who take delight in
The muses and their gentle work,
In whose remembrance there will lurk
Signs of my evanescent writings,
And whose too generous hand will pat
An old man's laurel wreath—like that.
* O countryside!... (Latin.)

CHAPTER THREE

Elle était fille, elle était amoureuse. *

MALFILÂTRE

1

“Where are you off to? Oh, you poets!...”

“Onegin, I must disappear.”

“Do go. One thing, though... Take me through it—

Where do you spend your evenings here?”

“I go to see the Larins.” “Splendid.

But so much *time*—how do you spend it?

For Heaven’s sake, isn’t it dull?”

“No, not at all.” “Incredible.

I see it all from where I’m standing:

You have first—tell me if I’m wrong—

A Russian family plain and strong,

All welcoming and open-handed,

Then jam and never-ending chat:

Rain, flax, the farmyard—things like that.”

2

“There’s nothing wrong; it’s just propriety.”

“Well, being bored is wrong, I’ve found.”

“I’ve no time for your smart society.

Give me the old domestic round,
Where I..." "Spare me the eclogue, Lensky.
For God's sake, put it differently.
You're going now. Too bad... But, hey,
Listen to me. Is there some way
For me to meet this Phyllis woman,
This object of your heart and quill,
And tears, and rhymes, and what you will?
Take me." "You're joking." "No, no, come on..."
"I'd be delighted." "When, though?" "Now.
They'll make us welcome anyhow." 3
"Let's go." The friends sped off together
And soon arrived, only to be
Smothered by many a warm endeavour
Of old-world hospitality.
A common ceremony this is
With jams served up in little dishes,
And on waxed tables close at hand
Jugs of red-berry water stand.

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They take the shortest way home, racing
The horses, giving them their head.
Let's eavesdrop on the conversation
Between our heroes. What was said?
"What's wrong, Onegin. You are yawning."
"Just habit, Lensky." "Was it boring?
There's something else." "I'm fine... Look how
The fields are getting darker now.
Andryushka, move! Don't spare the horses.
Oh, what a stupid place to be!
Though Larina is straight, and she
Was so nice, such a pleasant hostess.
I fear the berry water could
Have done my state of health no good. 5
But tell me—which one was Tatyana?"
"The one who came and didn't speak.
She looked unhappy like Svetlana,
Sitting there in the window seat."
"You love the younger one, then, brother?"
"What if I do?" "I'd choose the other
If I had been like you, a bard.
Your Olga's face is lifeless, hard,
Madonna-like, with van Dyck's dry line.
It's round and pretty, but its bloom
Reminds me of that stupid moon

Standing upon that stupid skyline.”

Vladimir’s curt response was heard,
Then, all the way home, not a word. 6

Meanwhile Onegin’s recent visit
Made an impression on them all.

“There’s something here,” they thought. “What
is it?”

And local folk were much enthralled,
Which then gave rise to lots of guesses,
And enigmatic noes and yesses,
And jokes and judgements, some quite rude:
Tatyana—was she being wooed?

And some already were presuming
That marriage plans had reached a pause,
Although long fixed, only because
The latest rings were not forthcoming.

While Lensky’s wedding hereabout
Was pencilled in beyond all doubt. 7

Tatyana listened with vexation
To all this gossip, yet, within,
An inexpressible elation

Rose from her thoughts about this thing.
Thoughts stirred her heart like a new seedling.
Love’s time had come; here was the feeling.
Thus fallen granules, flourishing,

Quicken to warm soil in the spring.
Long had she felt, in flights of fancy,
When relishing a blissful mood,
A craving for the fateful food.
Long had her straining heart been lancing
Her young girl's breast. Her soul was numb,
Waiting for *somebody* to come... 8
...And here he was! Her eyes were opened.
"It's him, he is the man," she said.
Alas! Now, days and nights unbroken,
And lonesome sleep in a hot bed,
He fills them all. All things now tally,
Charming the sweet girl magically,
Speaking of him. She's quickly bored
By warm thoughts and the knowing word,
Or servants anxious for her pleasure.
Now, permanently plunged in gloom,
She will ignore guests in the room,
Cursing them for their idle leisure,
For dropping in at all—that's wrong—
And then for staying on too long. 9
How closely is her mind now captured,
In her sweet tales deeply immersed.
And with what energizing rapture
She makes the charming fancies hers.

Through the delightful power of dreaming
Characters most authentic-seeming—
The lover of Julie Wolmar,
Malek-Adhel and de Linar,
And Werther, the unsettled martyr,
And Grandison, to some unique,
Though most of us he sends to sleep—
For this young dreamer, tender-hearted,
Into a single form they ran,
Onegin being the one man. 10
A dreamt-up heroine, peculiar
To her beloved writers, she—
The new Delphine, Clarissa, Julia—
Walks to the silent woods to be
Alone, roaming with unsafe fiction,
In which she seeks and finds depicted
Her inmost secrets and her dreams,
The fullness of her heart's extremes,
Sighing as she grows ever nearer
To other people's joys and woes,
And mouthing trance-like as she goes
A letter (learnt) to a nice hero.
Our hero, though, whate'er he be,
Was not a Grandison, not he. 11
Tuning his tone with chords of gravity,

A zealous bard of yesterday
Would launch his hero with great clarity:
A perfect man in every way,
A treasured object fondly burnished:
Pursued unfairly, always furnished
With sympathy of soul and mind
And features of the winsome kind.
Endued with warmth and pure affection
The ever-sanguine hero stood
For noble sacrifice and good,
And then, in the concluding section,
Evil was punished and put down,
While virtue got its well-earned crown. 12
But now all minds are fogged, and morals
Are blamed for leaving people bored.
Evil smiles out in all our novels—
Indeed it sits there like a lord.
Those fictions from the muse of Britain
Disturb the young girl's sleep as written,
And she has come to idolize
The Vampire with his brooding eyes
Or Melmoth in his melancholy,
The Corsair or the Wandering Jew,
Or weird Sbogar. Lord Byron knew,
By some judicious flight of folly,

How hopeless egotists are given
A cloak of glum Romanticism. 13
If this makes sense, friends, let me know it.
One day, perhaps, by Heaven's will,
I'll give up writing like a poet,
Take a new devil for my quill,
Ignoring any threats from Phoebus,
And sink to humble prose. My readers
Will get an old-style novel. Mine
Will be a rapturous decline.
Dark pangs of criminal calamity
I shall not grimly offer you.
Instead, I'll simply trundle through
The legends of a Russian family,
The charming dreams love brings to us,
The manners of our ancestors. 14
I'll set down the plain conversation
Of dads, and uncles past their prime,
The children's secret assignations
Down by the brook, beside the limes,
Throes of the hapless jealous-hearted,
Tears, and the making-up when parted...
I'll show their tiffs, but without fail
They'll end up at the altar rail.
I'll catch the tones of love. The blissful

Accents of aching hearts, which I
Was wont to use in days gone by
At lovers' feet, where I lay wishful,
Inspired me, tripping off the tongue,
But now their memory is not strong. 15
Tatyana, oh, Tatyana, darling,
I weep along with you. That man's
A modish brute, and you are falling—
Your destiny is in his hands.
You'll perish, but first, darling woman,
Dazzled with hope, you wish to summon
At least a darkling form of bliss
And sample what life's sweetness is—
Desire. You drink a magic poison.
You are pursued by waking dreams,
And everywhere you fancy schemes
For meeting places blithely chosen.
Look everywhere, and everywhere
Your deadly tempter will be there. 16
Driven by aching love, Tatyana
Goes down the garden, there to brood.
She drops her gaze; her eyes are calmer.
She falters now from lassitude.
Her bosom heaves, her cheeks are bright red
And momentarily ignited.

Her breath stops at her lips and dies,
Her ears ring, flashes sear her eyes...
And night falls, with the moon patrolling
The far depths of the firmament,
And in the treetops, eloquent,
A nightingale is sweetly trolling.
Darkness. No sleep. It's getting worse.
Tatyana whispers to her nurse. 17
"I can't sleep, Nanny. It's oppressive.
Open the window. Sit with me."
"Tanya. What's wrong?" "I feel so restive.
Let's talk about our history."
"Our what? Oh, Tanya, once I gloried
In lots of well-remembered stories
Of things that don't and things that do,
With evil sprites and young girls too,
But now it's all gone dark. Oh, Tanya,
I knew it once, but now it's gone,
And awful times are coming on.
It's painful." "Tell me, Nanny—can you?—
What happened to you long ago?
Were you in love? I want to know." 18
"Oh, come, come, Tanya. I look back on
Times when we never heard of love.
His mother would have sent me packing

(God rest her soul in heaven above).”
“But how did you get married, Nanny?”
“It must have been God’s will. My Vanya
Was not as old as me, my dear,
And I was in my fourteenth year.
A matchmaker came over, plying
My kinsfolk for a week or two,
The father gave the blessing due,
Which left me bitter, scared and crying.
They cried too, shaking out my hair
For church, and then they sang me there. 19
So I was sent to a new family...
...But you’ve not heard a word I’ve said...”
“I’m feeling awful, dearest Nanny,
I have a kind of sickly dread.
I could start crying, sobbing.” “Surely,
My little one, you must be poorly.
God save you in his mercy, dear.
What do you want? Ask, I am here.
I’ll sprinkle you with holy water.
You’re burning hot...” “I’m not ill, though,
Nanny... I’m... I’m in love.” “Oh, no,
The Lord be with you!” Nanny caught her,
Prayed softly for Tatyana, and
Crossed the maid with her small, frail hand. 20

“Yes, I’m in love,” again she whispered,
Lamenting in a doleful tone.

“You’re feeling poorly, sweetheart. Listen...”

“No, I’m in love. Leave me alone.”

And all the time the moon was glowing
With a subdued light, clearly showing
The maiden’s pale charms, and her hair
Undone and scattered everywhere,
Her tears, and near the young Tatyana
Her nanny on the wooden seat,
A scarf on her grey head, complete
With her long-hanging body-warmer.
Silence and dreams. The moon on high
An inspiration in the sky. 21

Tatyana’s heart was feeling freer
As she gazed at the moon, and lo!
She had an interesting idea.

“I want to be alone. Please go,
Nanny, but give me pen and paper.
Bring me that table. I’ll sleep later.
I’m sorry.” And when she has gone
Stillness descends... The moon shines on...
Head propped on elbow, Tanya forges
Ahead with writing (him in mind)
A hasty missive to be signed

By an ingénue lovelorn and gorgeous...
The letter's done, folded in two.
But, Tanya—who is it going to? 22
I've known intractable young beauties
As cool and pure as driven snow,
Implacable, non-venal cuties,
Not for the minds of men—oh, no!
They faze me, modish and high-minded;
Their virtue has good blood behind it.
Yes, I admit to having fled,
Methinks with horror, once I read
Upon their brows that phrase from Hades:
Abandon hope now for all time.
To rouse love is, for them, a crime;
Deterrence gratifies these ladies,
And maybe by the Neva, you
Have come across such persons too. 23
With worshippers no less subservient
Other strange females I have seen
Who were self-centred and impervious
To sighs of love and flattery.
What did I find? I was astonished:
Those austere girls who had admonished,
And turned down shy love, did not lack
The clever skills to win it back,

At least by showing some compassion.
At least in the odd spoken word
A touch of tenderness was heard,
And in his unperceiving fashion
A blind and gullible young swain
Would strive for his sweet dreams again. 24
What is Tatyana's worst transgression?
That in her sweet way she has been
Free from deceit? Her one obsession
Has been to trust her chosen dream?
Or that she loves without art, yielding
To the seductive call of feeling?
That she is trustingly naive?
That heaven chose her to receive
Imagination of wild splendour,
A will so sharp, a mind so shrewd,
A head so full of attitude,
A heart so passionate and tender?
Forgive! She's only guilty of
Scatterbrain tendencies in love. 25
Whereas a flirt will judge things coldly,
Tatyana loves with true intent.
She dedicates her spirit wholly
To love, with childlike innocence.
She doesn't say, "No need to hurry,

Love's price will rise, we need not worry,
Delay will lure things to our nets.
Let's puncture vanity, and let's
Use hope and bafflement together
To overwhelm a heart, and then
Bring it to jealous fire again.
For otherwise, sated with pleasure,
Our wily captive will respond
With a strong urge to burst his bonds." 26
One further problem: I had better
Protect the honour of my land
By giving you Tatyana's letter
Translated. You must understand:
Her grasp of Russian was defective,
Our Russian journals she neglected,
And found it hard to get along
With speakers of her mother tongue.
Her letter, then, was in French phrases.
What can we do about this—what?
Again I say: Russian was not
A medium fit for love and ladies.
Our worthy language, I suppose,
Has not grown into postal prose. 27
I know some people want to *make* them
Read Russian. Horrible indeed!

Is this how I should recreate them:
Clutching *The Well-Wisher*? Agreed!
Poets! I need to know for certain:
Is it not true that these sweet persons,
To whom you sinners have conveyed
In verse a secret serenade,
To whom you gave your hearts of marble—
How little Russian did they know!
But did they not strain at it so
That, in the end, however garbled,
The foreign language that was wrung
From them became their mother tongue? 28
I pray that at a ball I wouldn't
Meet there, or on the porch mayhap,
A yellow-shawled religious student
Or academic in his cap.
Red lips are nothing when unsmiling,
And Russian speech is unbeguiling
Without grammatical mistakes.
Perhaps—ah, me! For Heaven's sake—
Sweet girls in a new generation,
Hearing the journals' siren voice,
Will teach us grammar as by choice,
And verse will add to the occasion.
But what has this to do with me?

I shall keep faith with history. 29
All incorrect and mindless chatter
And speech that is not of the best
Will always set my heart aflutter,
As long ago, within my breast.
I have no strength now for repentance,
I'll take French words in any sentence,
And tolerate old sins and worse
With Bogdanovich and his verse.
But that will do. I must get busy.
Tatyana's letter is at stake.
I promised... But, for Heaven's sake,
I could back out... I'm in a tizzy.
I know that Parny's tender brogue
Has gone, and is no more in vogue. 30
Bard of *The Feasts* and aching sadness,
If only you were with me here.
I would approach with brazen gladness,
Old friend of mine, and bend your ear:
"Bring melody with magic laden
To this inflamed, impassioned maiden
And the French phrases she recites.
Where are you? Come to me! My rights
I yield to you. Your line is my line."
But under the sad, beetling crags,

All praise gone by, his way he drags,
Alone beneath the Finnish skyline.
He wanders, knowing no relief,
And cannot hear me in my grief. 31
Tatyana's letter lies before me.
I hold it like a holy thing.
I read it through in secret torment
With a delight unwavering.
Who taught her all these tender phrases,
The easy kindness that amazes?
Who taught her this warm gibberish,
This heartfelt talk so feverish,
So fascinating yet so tainting?
I cannot tell. This version here
Is poor and incomplete, I fear,
A thin take of a vibrant painting.
It's like *Der Freischütz* tightly squeezed
From girl beginners at the keys. TATYANA'S

LETTER TO ONEGIN

*What can I do but write this letter
To you? Can I say something more?
I know that now you have the better
Of me, to punish me with scorn.
But if you, with my sad fate settled,
Retain one drop of sympathy,*

*You will not now abandon me.
At first I wanted to keep quiet.
Believe me, you would not have known
About the shame that I have shown,
If only I could have got by it
By simply hoping we might meet
Once weekly in the village street,
Or I might listen to you speaking,
And say a word to you, and then
Withdraw to think and think again,
Around the clock, of our next meeting.
But you're unsociable, they say;
The country's not exciting, is it?
And we... don't shine in any way.
We're plain, though welcoming your visit.*

*Why did you come here? What to do?
In our remote, forgotten village
I would have known nothing of you,
Nor this raw suffering. God willing—
Who knows?—at long last, after stilling
The turmoil of a maiden soul,
I might have found a friend, a heartener,
I might have been his faithful partner,
And played a virtuous mother's role.*

Another man? My heart will answer:

*It cannot go to others, no.
This comes forth from the highest council:
By Heaven's will I'm yours alone.
My life has long been dedicated
To meeting you, the person whom
I see as sent by God, and fated
To be my guardian to the tomb.*

*In dreams I have divined your presence,
Dear to my heart, though still unseen,
Your dear glance pierced me with its gleam,
Your voice has stirred my soul with resonance
For some time now. No dream was this.
I knew you even as you entered;
I felt all faint, ablaze, tormented,
Telling myself: yes, here he is!
Did I not hear your voice engaging
With me whenever silence reigned,
When I was with the poor, or phrasing
A prayer to heaven, and assuaging
The anguish of a soul in pain?*

*Here is a sudden apparition;
Is it not you, my dearest vision?
Through the bright dusk did you not slope,
Softly above my pillow bending,
Bringing delight and love while sending*

*To me the whispered words of hope?
What can you be—my guardian angel,
Or someone luring me into danger?
Scatter my doubts. I must be told.
Is this an empty dream created
By one who cheats a simple soul
While something different is fated?*

*So be it. My destiny
Is in your hands, and I surrender.
I shed my tears for you to see,
And pray you will be my defender.
Picture me: I am all alone,
And no one knows me, nothing alters.
My senses reel, my reason falters,
I cannot speak, my life is gone.
I wait. Your glance has the potential
To raise new hope and hearten me
Or wreck my hard dream, giving me
What I deserve, alas!—your censure.*

*I close, and dread to read this through.
I feel embarrassed, I feel frightened,
But honour is a pledge from you;
To this my trust is boldly plighted...*

Now only sighs and moans escape her.

The letter trembles in her hand.
She licks at the pink-coloured wafer,
Dry on her fevered tongue-tip, and
Her darling head slumps at an angle,
Her light slip slides down in a tangle,
Laying a lovely shoulder bare,
And now the moonlight everywhere
Fades in its radiance. Mist comes creeping
Along the vale, the stream reborn
In silver light. The herdsman's horn
Rouses the village from its sleeping.
Morning... Folk are long out of bed.
My Tanya isn't interested. 33
She has not noticed the dawn breaking.
She sits, head bowed, in dishabille,
Viewing the letter without making
An imprint with her graven seal.
Then the door opens, slow and quiet;
Grey-haired Filípyevna stands by it,
Bearing a tray, tea-things and cup.
"Come on, my child, time you were up.
My goodness, lovely girl, you're ready!
My early birdie, what a fright
You brought upon me yesternight.
But, heavens, how your health has steadied,

And last night's fret has passed. Instead,
Your face has gone all poppy red." 34
"Nanny, would you do me a favour?"
"Of course, my dear. How does it go?"
"You won't think... there's a *funny* flavour?...
You see... It's like this... Don't say no."
"I won't, my dear, God be your ransom."
"Well, on the quiet get your grandson
To take this note to O... that man,
Our neighbour... Ask him, if he can,
To tell him nothing, just keep quiet
And be sure not to give my name."
"But *who's* it for, though? Such a shame—
I'm muddled now, I won't deny it.
There's lots of neighbours hereabouts,
Too many, more than I can count." 35
"Oh dear, you are slow-witted, Nanny."
"I'm getting on, dear, getting on...
My mind is dull now, not so canny.
Once it was sharp, but now it's gone.
Time was, with one word from the master..."
"Oh, Nanny, dear, try to move faster.
What has your mind to do with me?
It's all about this letter. See,
It's for *Onegin*." "Such a business..."

Darling, you mustn't take offence.
You know me. I don't make much sense...
You've gone all pale again. What is this?"

"It's nothing, Nanny. Don't delay.
Just send your grandson on his way." 36

A day passed, and Tatyana tarried.
No answer—and next day, the same.
She got dressed early, looking pallid.
When would he write—what was his game?
Then Olga's suitor came to see them.

"He's your close friend—where can he be,
then?"

The mistress asked him, curious.
"I'm sure he's quite forgotten us."
Tatyana, meanwhile, blushed and shivered.
"He said today he would come by,"
Lensky confided in reply.

"He'll come—the post is being delivered."
At which Tatyana dropped her eyes
Like someone suddenly chastised. 37
Dusk settles. On the table, seething,
The evening samovar now sings
And warms the Chinese teapot, wreathing
Its clouds of steam in rising rings.
Dispensed by Olga's expert fingers,

The tea is poured, its odour lingers
In a dark aromatic stream,
And a young boy goes round with cream.
Tatyana, by the table brooding,
My sweet soul, breathes on the cold glass
And ponders as the moments pass,
Her gorgeous tiny finger doodling...
The pane is steamed, the message brief:
Y.O. She cherished the motif. 38
Sinking in spirit, she felt shattered;
Her languid eyes filled up with tears.
Hoof beats! Her heart froze as they clattered
Into the yard—and *he* appeared,
Yevgeny! Shadow-like, the lassie
Slips out into another passage...
Porch, yard and garden are attacked,
She flies and flies, not looking back,
Not daring to, as on she rushes
Past edges, bridges, onward drawn
Towards the lake, across the lawn,
Crashing her way through lilac bushes,
Past neat beds to the brook. The wench
Was breathless when, reaching a bench, 39
She flopped...

“It’s him! He’s here! Yevgeny!”

Good gracious! What can he have thought?"
Her agonizing heart is straining,
With a dark dream of hope restored.
She shakes. Her temperature has risen.
She waits. Is this him?... No, it isn't.
Out in the beds the maids, by chance,
Were picking berries from the plants,
And singing, as decreed, in chorus
(A rule intended to preclude
The master's berries being chewed
By opportunist mouths—a flawless
Country device that substitutes
Singing aloud for scrumping fruits). SONG OF
THE GIRLS

*Come, ye pretty maidens, come,
Little darlings, little friends,
Frolic, maidens, have your fun,
Dance and play and dance again.
Sing your song, oh, sing your song,
Secret and mysterious,
Lead your lad, bring him along,
Make him join the dance with us.
When you've seen him from afar,
When you've lured him into place,
Break and run, girls, where you are,*

*Throw your cherries in his face.
Cherries! Raspberries! Come near.
Berries round and berries red!
Do not try to overhear
Secrets sung and secrets said,
Do not try to watch the way
Maidens dance and maidens play.*

40

She never thought—what was their song for?
The ringing voices passed her by.
Tatyana now could only long for
The tremor in her heart to die
And for her cheeks to cease their burning.
But in her breast the pain kept churning,
Warmth in her cheeks did not disperse,
Indeed it blazed up even worse.
Thus a poor butterfly will shimmer
And give one rainbow wing a flap
When caught in a rough schoolboy's trap.
Thus, in the corn, a hare will quiver
When from afar he sees what's what—
There in the bushes huntsmen squat. 41
But soon she gave a sigh of yearning
And stood up from the garden seat.
She walked away... The path, the turning,

The avenue... Whom should she meet
But *him*, with eyes ablaze—Yevgeny!—
A presence ominous and shady.
As if scorched by some fiery bolt,
She staggered slowly to a halt.
But... what came next, that subject matter
Lies at this time beyond my strength;
I cannot tell it now, my friends.
Having indulged in so much chatter,
I need to rest and have some fun.
I'll finish this off later on.

* She was a girl, she was in love. (French.)

CHAPTER FOUR

*La morale est dans la nature des choses.**

NECKER

[1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6] 7

The less we prize and love a woman
The more she'll like us, and perhaps
The more she'll be inclined to come on,
Lured into our enticing traps.
It used to be that cold seduction
Counted as amorous instruction,
Vaunting itself, consisting of
Enjoyment not involving love,
But this game, once a major pastime
Was suited to the apes of old
Much praised in granddad's days. Behold,
Lovelace was cast off for the last time
Along with red heels flashed in jigs
And all those splendid periwigs. 8
Who isn't weary of pretending,
Repeating things that all men know,
Convincing people without ending
Of what convinced them long ago?
Attending to the same objections,

Rejecting age-old preconceptions,
Which are not, and have never been,
Believed by young girls of thirteen?
Who does not quail before dire warnings,
Entreaties, fleeting fears and oaths,
Or seven pages filled with notes,
Deceit, rings, tears and gossips droning,
While mothers watch and aunts attend
And husbands wear you down as friends? 9
These very thoughts came to afflict him.
From early youth he'd always been
Stormy and wild, a willing victim
Of passions that he let run free.
Life spoilt him, yielding what he wanted.
With one thing for a while enchanted,
Then disenchanting with the next,
He let desire cool by neglect,
The more so when he waxed successful.
No noise nor silence could control
The incessant murmur of his soul.
Laughing through yawns had seemed less
stressful,
But eight killed years had been, in truth,
The best bloom of his wasted youth. 10
When love of girls no longer reckoned

He sort of followed in their tracks:
Rejected, he came round in seconds;
Let down by them, he would relax.
He sought them out with no enthusing
And didn't grieve much at their losing—
Love or rebuffs were quick to fade.
He, a bored guest who, having played,
An evening's whist with everybody,
Sits there until the game is done,
Then sets off on his homeward run,
Soon settled and serenely nodding,
Though come the dawn he doesn't know
Where in the evening he will go. 11
Her missive, though, had left him anguished.
Onegin felt moved and distraught,
For those dreams and the girlish language
Had raised in him a swarm of thoughts.
He well remembered dear Tatyana,
Her sad complexion and her pallor,
And suddenly his spirit seemed
Flooded with sweet and spotless dreams.
Was this his long-lost ardour? Will it
Take hold of him for a short time?
He had no wish to undermine
The trust of one so pure in spirit.

But let us to the garden skim,
Where our Tatyana met with him. 12
Some moments passed while they both
listened,

Then he came up to her and said,
“Let’s talk about what you have written...
No, please don’t run away... I’ve read
Words from a trusting soul confessing
Pure innocence and love, expressing
Sincerity, which I admire
And which has somehow brought new fire
To feelings long since unawoken.

This is not praise in any sense,
But now I come without pretence,
Speaking to you by the same token.
Please, hear me out while I confess.
Then what I am—you can assess. 13
If my life’s purpose had been rather
To shrink in a domestic round,
If as a husband and a father
Kind destiny had set me down,
If the domestic hearth had beckoned
And caught my fancy for a second,
I could have chosen, it is true,
No bride more suitable than you.

I tell you with no frills and fancies:
Taking an ideal from the past,
I surely would have held you fast,
A soulmate facing life's mischances,
A guarantee of all things good.
I'd have been happy—if I could! 14
But no. I was not born and nurtured
For bliss—my soul dismisses it.
I look in vain upon your virtues,
Unworthy of them and unfit.
Believe me—conscience grips like bedrock—
We'd have been agonized by wedlock.
I might have loved you once, and then
From habit unloved you again,
And you'd have wept, but my heart, frozen,
Would not let your tears to do their work;
In fact the tears would only irk.
Consider, then, what thorny roses
Hymen would scatter in our way,
Alas, perhaps for many a day. 15
Can there be anything more disheartening
Than households where the wretched wife
Is saddened by a useless partner
And daily leads a lonely life,
Where the dull spouse, who knows her value

(Though Fate's unkind to him, he'll tell you),
Sits there without a word and sulks?
Tetchy, cold, touchy—how he bulks!
That's me. Do you seek such a person,
Deep in your pure and fervent soul?
Your letter was so clear and bold,
Intelligent... But are you certain
That this is how your life should be
Apportioned by harsh Destiny? 16
Dreams and lost years can't be recovered.
My spirit cannot be restored...
I love you like a loving brother.
(Perhaps I love you rather more.)
Hear me. I ask you to be patient:
Young girls are prone to transformations
When airy dreams chase airy dreams
Like saplings changing all their leaves
Each year in springtime, all-refreshing
And moved, it seems, by Heaven's will.
So, you will love again. But still...
Study the art of self-possession.
I understand you; some may not.
Unworldliness can hurt a lot." 17
Thus, like a preacher, spoke Yevgeny.
Eyes blinded, as the salt tears choked,

Tatyana, breathless, uncomplaining,
Was listening to him as he spoke.
He gave his arm. Far from ecstatic,
With movements now called “automatic”,
She leant on him—nothing was said—
And languidly inclined her head.
They came back round the kitchen garden,
Strolling together. No one would
Have thought this anything but good,
For rural laxity can pardon
Most things, within its happy laws,
As condescending Moscow does. 18
Reader, you must be in agreement:
Poor Tanya was gently let down.
Nothing but good was all that *he* meant.
Yevgeny once again has shown
That his pure soul could not be deeper,
And yet the ill will of bad people
Has spared him nothing, though his foes
Along with so-called friends, yes those
(Friends, foes—the difference may be worth-
less),
Pay him some desultory respect.
Foes flourish, but, to be correct,
From *friends*, not foes, may God preserve us.

Friends, friends of mine—they give me pause.
I recollect them with good cause. 19
Why so? Well, it is my intention
To put some blank, black dreams to sleep,
And *in parenthesis* to mention
That there's no jibe too low or cheap
Spawned by a gabbler in a garret
For high-born scum to hear and parrot,
No phrase too gross for any man,
No vulgar gutter epigram
That won't be smilingly repeated
In front of nice folk by your *friend*
In error, for no wicked end,
Though endlessly acclaimed and greeted.
And he's still friends through thick or thin
Because he loves you—you're akin. 20
Ho-hum. I ask you, noble reader,
How are your people? Are they well?
Permit me to insist you need a
Pointer from me so you can tell
What is implied by *family members*.
Families have their own agendas;
We must indulge them, show them love,
Woo them in spirit like a dove,
And, following the common custom,

See them at Christmas and, at most,
Send them a greeting through the post,
And then we can relax and trust 'em
To disregard us through the year...
God grant them long life and good cheer. 21
But still, the love of gorgeous ladies
Outweighs the claims of friends and kin;
With this, through all the storms from Hades,
You're in control, reigning things in.
That's it. But still there's whirling fashion,
And nature with her wayward passion,
And world opinion... All that stuff...
While the sweet sex is light as fluff.
Besides, a husband's known opinions
Must be observed throughout her life
By any truly virtuous wife.
Thus one of your female companions
Can suddenly be swept away.
Satan loves love. Watch him at play. 22
Who shall be loved? Who can be trusted?
With whom do we risk no betrayal?
Who weighs our words and deeds, adjusted
Obligingly to our own scale?
Who never blackens us with slander?
Who's there to coddle us and pander?

Who sees our sins as “not too bad”?
Who will not bore us, drive us mad?
Stop your vain search for lost illusions:
You’re wasting all your strength and health.
The one to love is *you yourself*.

You are, good reader, in conclusion,
A worthy subject, we insist,
For no one kindlier exists. 23

But what has followed the encounter?
Alas, it isn’t hard to guess!

Love’s frenzied torments still confound her,
Still harassing with storm and stress
Her youthful soul that longs for bleakness.
Her passion worsens, and her weakness
Leaves Tanya with a burning head;
Sleep will not settle on her bed.

Her health, her life’s bloom, sweet and spark-
ling,

Her smile, her maid’s tranquillity,
Have, like an echo, ceased to be,
And gentle Tanya’s youth is darkling.
Shadow-clad storms can thus array
The birth of an emerging day. 24
Tanya, alas, is fading, sinking,
Withering, wasting, pale and dumb.

Nothing impinges on her thinking,
And her unstirring soul is numb.
Shaking their heads in knowing whispers,
The neighbours say to any listeners,
“By now she should be married off!...”
But I must speed on. That’s enough:
Imagination must be brightened
By love shown in a happy sense.
I cannot help it if, my friends,
Within my heart compassion tightens.
I’m sorry if my thoughts are such:
I love dear Tanya, oh, so much. 25
Lensky was caught, and hourly keener
On his young Olga and her charms,
But sweet enthrallment pleased Vladimir,
Who welcomed it with open arms.
He’s always there. Birds of a feather,
They sit in her dark room together.
At morningtide they join up and
Stroll through the garden hand in hand.
And then? Besotted by his Olga,
Squirming with sweet embarrassment,
He makes occasional attempts
(Fed by her smile and growing bolder)
To toy with a loose curl, and then

To kiss her dress along the hem. 26
He'll read to her, sooner or later,
An educational romance,
In which the author's grasp of nature
Is greater than Chateaubriand's,
Though, should he light on some few pages
Of raving nonsense, too outrageous,
Too risqué for young girls' hearts—hush!—
He will omit them with a blush.
In some sequestered, far location
Over a chessboard, watching it,
Elbows on table, there they sit
Together in deep concentration...
And Lensky, with a distant look
Moving his pawn, takes his own rook. 27
When he goes home, he still engages
Obsessively with Olga. Hence,
He paints her album's fleeting pages
With doodled, detailed ornaments,
With rustic pictures, for example,
A tombstone or a Cypris temple,
A dove upon a lyre, a still
And slender bird of paint and quill,
Or else on pages for remembrance
Below where other folk have signed

He leaves a gentle verse behind,
Dream's voiceless monument, a semblance
Of rapid thought with lasting trace,
Unchanged years later, still in place. 28
You've done it. You have been absorbed in
The album of some country miss,
In which friends have been busy daubing
The end, the start, and all that is.
Here, with the rules of spelling thwarted,
Run old lines metrically distorted,
Lines of true friendship badly done,
Which undershoot or overrun.
On page one you will see this jotting:
Qu'écrirez-vous sur ces tablettes?
Followed by *toute à vous, Annette,*
And on the last page, at the bottom,
Let him whose love is more than mine
Write for you underneath this line. 29
Undoubtedly you will pluck from it
Two hearts, a torch and blooms amid
Assertions of true love, a promise:
My love until the coffin lid.
Some army rhymester will have thought he
Might slip in something rather naughty.
My friends, in albums such as these

I also write, and feel well pleased,
In spirit being all too certain
That my keen rubbish will entrance
The passing favourable glance,
And with a bilious smile no person
Will solemnly attempt to spot
Whether my trash has wit or not. 30
But you odd volumes once engendered
For devils' libraries, and you
Young ladies' albums bound in splendour,
The bane of modern rhymesters too,
You tomes adroitly decorated
With Tolstoy's art and magic painted,
Or Baratýnsky's quill. I call
On God's hot bolts to singe you all!
When a fine lady host approaches,
Handing her quarto book to me,
I tremble in my enmity
And a sharp epigram encroaches
Upon my soul, yet all along
Duty demands a pretty song! 31
But Lensky pens no pretty ditties
In his young Olga's book. Behold,
His quill suspires with love, and wit is
Precluded as too bright and cold.

He writes exclusively of Olga
As a close listener and beholder;
His living truth is then bestowed
On elegies in a fast flow.
Inspired thus, Nikoláy Yazýkov,
Your heart feels mighty surges too,
As you hymn someone (God knows who),
And your rich verse will one day speak of
Your past in elegies, and state
The history that was your fate. 32
But soft! We hear the critic's stricture:
Throw all those elegies away—
Their garlands make a sorry picture.
Our brother rhymesters must obey
His call: "I tell you not to snivel,
And not to croak the same old drivel;
Past times... The old days rued so soon...
Old hat! Sing us another tune!"
"All right, but then you will escort us
Back to the trumpet, mask and knife,
And old ideas devoid of life
You'll bid us quicken in all quarters.
Is this not so?" "No! Stay your pen:
Write *odes* from now on, gentlemen, 33
Like those penned in an age of glory,

And long-established in our land.”

“So—solemn odes—is *this* our story?

Oh, come, my friend. This can go hang.

Think what was said in words satirical:

Can *Other Views*, though shrewd and lyrical,

Seem more acceptable to you

Than our repining rhymesters do?”

“The elegy amounts to nothing;

Its aims are pitifully low,

While solemn odes have aims that grow

To noble heights.” We shan’t be stopping

To quibble here. My lips are tight.

Two ages won’t be called to fight. 34

Vladimir, soul of fame and freedom,

Fraught with wild thoughts that ebbed and
flowed,

Knew well that Olga didn’t read ’em

Or else he might have penned an ode.

Shall bards wax tearfully poetic

And read to others sympathetic

Their written works? They say that bliss

Holds no reward greater than this.

And blest indeed the modest lover

Who in his daydreams can immerse

The object of his love and verse,

A languid beauty like no other,
Well blest... And yet—it's hard to say—
Her thoughts could well be miles away. 35
What of the products of my fancies,
My shots at harmony? In truth,
I read them to the one who chances
To be my nurse, a friend from youth,
And after dinner—tiresome labour!—
When called on by a passing neighbour,
I corner him, grabbing his coat,
And ram my sad lines down his throat,
Or else—I swear I am not jesting—
Worn down with yearning in my rhymes,
I tread my lakeside path betimes
And scare the flock of wild ducks resting.
They hear the sweet lines that I sing,
Then they are up and on the wing. [36] 37
Onegin though... By the way, brothers,
I'm asking your indulgence here...
The daily round with which he bothers
I'll now describe, correct and clear.
He lived a hermit-like existence,
Got up at six and strolled some distance,
In summer lightly clad, until
He reached the stream beneath the hill,

Feeling like Gulnare's bard in choosing
This Hellespont to swim across.

He drank his coffee while perusing
A magazine or some such dross,
And then got dressed... [38] 39

Walking trips, sound sleep, bouts of reading,
The sylvan shade, the brooks that purl,
A cool, fresh kiss, their young lips meeting,
With a white-skinned but dark-eyed girl,
A stallion, bridle-true yet restive,
A dinner fancifully festive,
A wine flask brightening the mood,
Sequestered ways and quietude—
To this angelic life Onegin
Yielded himself unfeelingly;
Carefree, oblivious was he
To summer days fair and engaging.
Town life and old friends he forgot;
Festivities, he knew them not. 40
Our summer is a twisted version
Of winter in the south. Hello,
It's here and gone! And every person
Knows this, but won't accept it though.
Now o'er the sky comes autumn, sougning,
The thin sun shining much less often,

And we have come to shorter days
When in the woods a hidden haze
Has shown itself with a sad murmur,
And mists are on the fields released.
A honking caravan of geese
Heads south, and they leave ever firmer
The prospect of dull days... You wait...
November tarries at the gate. 41

Through the cold murk the dawn comes
searching,

The noisy field work has tailed off,
The wolf is on the road, emerging
With his half-starving lady wolf.
A passing horse scents him and bridles,
Snorting, at which the wary rider
Gallops away uphill flat-out.
At dawn no herdsman are about,
Bringing to pasture hungry cattle,
At noon no horn is heard to sing
And bring the cows into a ring.
And girls stay home to sing and rattle
Their spinning wheels. Friendly and bright,
The pine logs sting the winter night. 42
Now crackling frost descends and shows us
A silver canopy outdoors...

(You readers want a rhyme like “roses”;
You’re welcome to it; it is yours.)

Smoother than parquet stands the river,
Ice-covered, shiny and ashiver.

A tribe of gay young skaters slice
Their crunchy runs across the ice.

A tubby goose, red-footed, fearful,
Hoping to breast the waters, crawls
Gingerly out, but skids and falls

Upon the ice. Here comes the cheerful
First fall of whirling, gleaming snow,
Star-scattered on the banks below. 43

Out in the wilds what’s on this season?
Walking? The countryside, I’ve found,
Wearies the eyes for one good reason—
Unbroken nakedness all round.

Riding the prairie wild, of course, is
Perilous for your blunt-shod horses,
Who stumble on the treacherous ice
And down they clatter in a trice.

Stay in your bleak homestead. Try reading—
Here is your Pradt, here’s Walter Scott—
Or go through your accounts, if not,
Or fume, or drink. The endless evening
Will somehow pass, tomorrow too.

Great stuff! You'll see the winter through. 44
Onegin, languid like Chile Harold,
Gets up to ponder and relax,
Sits in an ice bath unapparelled,
And then all day, not overtaxed,
Lonesome, engaged in calculation,
Takes a blunt cue, anticipating
A morning spent within four walls,
Chasing a pair of billiard balls.
The country evening draws on gently;
Gone are the table and the cue.
The table has been set for two
Beside the fireplace. Here comes Lensky,
Driving a three-roan troika. Fine,
Let's serve the dinner. Waste no time! 45
Now Veuve Clicquot—or is it Moët?
A wine that's blest to the last drop
Is served up chilled before the poet
And placed upon the tabletop.
It sparkles like the Muses' fountain.
Spirited, full of fizz and flouncing
(Reminding us of that and this),
It dazzled me once; for its bliss
I would have spent my last poor lepton,
As you'll recall, my friends. You know

The silly pranks its magic flow
Has brought about, while it has kept on
Producing jokes, verses in streams,
Wild arguments and merry dreams. 46
And yet, with its unsettling fizziness
It plays my stomach false, so now
Sedate Bordeaux is more my business.
I much prefer it, anyhow.
No more Aÿ. It leaves me listless.
Aÿ is like a lovely mistress,
Vivacious, brilliant, volatile,
Quirky and frivolous. Meanwhile,
Bordeaux, you are a good friend, present
In times of sorrow and despair,
A comrade always, everywhere,
Ministering with something pleasant
Or sharing our sweet leisure. So,
Let's drink to our good friend, Bordeaux! 47
The fire's gone out. A golden ember
Is dusted over with fine ash,
The curling vapour stream is slender,
And from the hearth comes just a dash
Of warmth. The pipe smoke seems to vanish
Straight up the flue. A fizzing chalice
Still shines mid-table. Now the home

Yields to encroaching evening gloam.
(I love the friendly idle chatter
And the odd friendly glass of wine
Enjoyed at what they call “the time
’Twixt wolf and dog”. Ignore the latter—
I cannot fathom things like that.)
Meanwhile the two companions chat: 48
“The ladies! How’s Tatyana faring?
Is Olga still as sharp, old man?”
“A half-glass. Be a little sparing...
That’s it, my friend... Yes, all the clan
Is fit and well. They send their greetings.
My dear chap, she is such a sweet thing—
Those lovely shoulders, and that bust!
That spirit too! We really must
Call on them soon. They’ll be delighted.
But think... It isn’t very nice—
You’ve wandered in to see them twice,
And after that you’ve not been sighted.
But listen. Who am I to speak?
You are invited there next week.” 49
“I am?” “Yes, you. It’s Tanya’s name day—
Saturday. Olga and her mum
Want you to be there. It’s their brainwave
To have you over. Why not come?”

“But people will be there in legions,
And all the riff-raff of the region...”

“No, no one will be there. Trust me.”

“Who’s coming? Only family.

Let’s go. Do them a little favour.

Yes?” “All right.” “There’s a chap.” He drank,

And thought of someone as he sank

His wine—toasting his lady neighbour—

Then he went back to talking of

His darling Olga. Such is love! 50

His mood was merry. Two weeks later

Bliss beckoned—they had fixed the date.

The secret marriage bed... No sweeter

Love garland could one contemplate,

With his anticipation climbing.

Meanwhile the cares and woes of Hymen,

The long-extended trail of yawns,

Upon his thinking never dawned.

We hymen-haters can discover

In domesticity a rut

Of tedious scenes and nothing but—

As in a La Fontaine-style novel.

Poor Lensky, though his heart was bliss,

Was born to live a life like this. 51

And he was loved... At least he needed

To think so. Happy was the thought.
Blest hundredfold is the believer
Who sets his chilling mind at naught
And rests in heartfelt joy, reposing
Like a drunk tramp abed and dozing,
Or like a butterfly (less gloom!)
Swooning in spring upon its bloom.
But pity him who has forebodings,
Whose mind is set and never whirls,
Who views all movement, and all words
That carry extra sense, with loathing.
His heart is chilled by life, it seems,
And barred from dreaming woozy dreams.
* Morality is in the nature of things. (French.)

CHAPTER FIVE

May you never know these nightmares, My dear Svetlana.

ZHUKÓVSKY

1

That year the weather stayed with autumn,
As if the world outside had slowed,
But winter waited—then it caught them
In January, when it snowed,
The third night. Up betimes, Tatyana
Looked through the windowpane to garner
A picture of the white world hence—
The flowerbeds and the roofs and fence,
The windowpanes with gentle patterns,
Trees in their winter silver, hard,
With happy magpies in the yard
And all the hillocks smoothly flattened.
A brilliant white had overset
All things with winter's coverlet. 2
Winter! A sledding peasant revels
In ploughing through a virgin plot.
His pony, snuffing snow, bedevilled,
Gets through it at a struggling trot.

A covered sleigh flies past, and flurries
Of powdered snow rise as it scurries.
The seated coachman in a flash
Speeds by in long coat and red sash.
A peasant lad, the little tinker,
Runs round with Blackie as his fare
And him the horse. Without a care,
The scamp ignores his frozen finger,
Which hurts a bit, and still he laughs
At mummy scolding through the glass. 3
But you may think this kind of picture
Is hardly worth a second glance.
Here's Nature mean and unrestricted,
Deprived of any elegance.
Warmly inspired, as if divinely,
Another bard, of verbal finery,
Has shown us first snow and displayed
Winter delights of every shade.
I know he'll charm you with his talent,
His use of keen poetic skills
On sleigh rides with their secret thrills!
But neither poet do I challenge,
Not him, not you. Be not afraid,
Singer of that young Finnish maid. 4
The Russian spirit deep within her

Made Tanya inexplicably
A lover of our Russian winter,
So cold and beautiful to see,
The rimy sheen in frosty sunshine,
Sledging in the late dawn and, sometimes,
The bright pink texture of the snow,
Its January evening glow...
They marked the church days after Christmas
The old way, in the evenings there,
And maids came in from everywhere
To guess the fortune of each mistress.
Each year, the same thing: what's in store?
A soldier husband and a war. 5
Tanya loved legends from all quarters,
To old tales she was well attuned,
And dreams, and cards, and telling fortunes,
Prognostications by the moon.
Omens of every kind upset her,
And everything was a begetter
Of mystery amid dismay.
Forebodings took her breath away.
If Snobs, the cat, sat on his oven
And purred, pawing to clean his face,
This was a definite foretaste
Of coming visitors. Above her,

If a young crescent moon was heft
Into the heavens from the left— 6
She would turn pale and give a shudder,
And if a shooting star should speed
Through the dark firmament above her
And shower down, ah, then indeed
Tanya made haste in great confusion,
While the said star was downward cruising,
To whisper forth her heart's desire.
If a chance meeting should transpire
To place a black-robed monk before her,
Or if a swift hare shot across
Her field path, she was at a loss,
Deciding what to do, from horror,
And, full of premonitions, she
Expected a calamity. 7
So what? She welcomed the contagious
Thrill of the horror and its shocks.
And that's how Mother Nature made us,
Susceptible to paradox.
Epiphany comes round—so thrilling!—
And giddy youth goes fortune-telling,
For whom there's no cause for regret,
For whom the span of life as yet
Shines far ahead, a boundless treasure.

Old age divines, with specs on nose,
As life is coming to its close
And all is lost and gone for ever.
No matter. Hope on them has smiled
(With the false prattle of a child). 8
When hot wax was dropped into water
Tatyana looked at it transfixed,
And wonderful the things it taught her
When it was wonderfully mixed.
Then from fresh water in a basin
Their rings emerged in quick succession,
And when her tiny ring emerged
They sang an old song with these words:
“Rich toilers dwell in that far city,
Shovelling silver all day long.
We wish the subject of our song
Fortune and fame!” But this sad ditty
Tells of sad losses soon for us;
Girls are more moved by “lady-puss”. 9
Night falls... Clear skies and frosty weather.
A wondrous choir of heavenly suns
Wheel in sweet harmony together.
Into the wide yard Tanya comes,
Wearing a dress with neckline open.
Her mirror picks the moon out, hoping,

But in the dark glass, if you please,
Sad, trembling moon is all she sees.
Hush!... Creaking snow... Who is that passing?
On tiptoe, over there she speeds
And, softer than a pipe of reeds,
Her fluting voice sings to him, asking,
“What do they call you?” Whereupon
He glares and answers, “Agaphon.” 10
Tatyana’s nurse had once suggested
That conjured dreams at night come true,
So in the bathhouse she requested
A secret table set for two.
But sudden panic struck Tatyana
(As once, when thinking of Svetlana,
I panicked too... But let that go...
We’re not in Tanya’s magic show).
She took her silk sash and undid it,
Then she undressed and went to bed,
A love charm hanging by her head.
Neath the down pillow, where she’d hid it,
Lay the maid’s mirror she had kept.
And all went quiet; Tanya slept. 11
And Tanya dreams a dream fantastic,
She dreams of a white glade snow-kissed,
Which she is walking through, while past it

There swirls a dismal circling mist.
Ahead, through snowdrifts, roars a current,
A steaming, wavy, boiling torrent,
Its waters dark with light-grey flocks,
Left by the winter still unlocked.
Two sticks icily glued together
Flimsily, perilously spanned
A gorge where rushing waters ran,
The loud deeps racing hell for leather,
And there she halted in dismay,
Her footsteps dwindling away. 12
Tanya viewed this unwanted hiccup
And cursed the stream, but nowhere could
She see a proffered hand to pick up
And use to help her cross the flood.
Then suddenly a snowdrift shuddered.
You'll never guess what it uncovered—
A great, big, full-size, bristling bear.
She screamed, he roared, and then and there
He offered her his claws, a pawful.
She rallied, taking courage, and
Steadied herself with trembling hand.
Warily, dreading something awful,
She crossed. Then, with no more ado,
She walked on—but the bear came too! 13

Too scared to look back—so horrendous!—
Faster she runs. Not fast enough:
He's coming, her hirsute attendant,
And he will not be shaken off.
The ghastly bear grunts as he lumbers,
Ahead of them the pinewood slumbers,
Wasting its beauty in a scowl,
And all the branches are weighed down
With clumps of snow. The starlight pushes
Down through the treetops—birches, limes
And aspens—but though it shines,
There is no road. Gorges and bushes
Have gone from sight. They're down below,
Everything buried deep in snow. 14
Into the woods... The bear comes after...
She struggles, knee-deep in soft snow.
First a long branch comes down to grasp her
Around the neck, then a sharp blow
Sends both her golden earrings tumbling.
Her wet shoe sticks (the snow is crumbling)
And bares a charming little foot.
She lets her handkerchief fall, but
Can't stop to pick it up. She flinches,
Hearing the bear behind her, and
Modesty keeps her shaking hand

From raising her skirts a few inches.
She runs, and still he follows on,
Until she can no longer run. 15
Down she goes in the snow, and swiftly
He scoops her up. He's off with her.
She yields herself coldly and stiffly.
She's breathes not, neither does she stir
As down the forest road he rushes
To a shack lost in trees and bushes.
The woods are dense, and far and wide
The snows lie deep on every side.
Here is a window shining brightly.
From inside comes a raucous din.
The bear announces, "They're my kin.
Inside you'll soon get warmed up nicely."
Into the hallway. On the floor
He sets her down before the door. 16
Tanya stares out as her swoon passes.
He's gone. She's at the door, through which
She hears loud talk and clinking glasses—
It's like a funeral for the rich.
It doesn't make sense. It's uncanny.
She sneaks a look in through a cranny.
What's this? A table, and round it
All sorts of ugly monsters sit:

A horned beast and a dog-faced creature,
One with a cockerel's head, a weird
Old witch sporting a goatee beard,
A skeleton with proud, prim features,
A long-tailed dwarf and, after that,
A hybrid thing, half-crane, half-cat. 17
But weirder still—and more horrific—
A crayfish on a spider's back,
A red-capped skull hermaphroditic.
Rotating on a goose's neck,
A windmill dances round, legs squatting,
With sails that crack and swing like nothing.
They bark, laugh, whistle, bang and screech
To clopping hooves and human speech.
But one thing got the better of her:
Among the strange guests had appeared
The one man that she loved and feared—
Onegin—hero of our novel!
He's at the table. What is more,
He's sneaking glances at the door. 18
A sign from him, and they looked ruffled.
If he drinks, they drink, and they shout.
If he laughs, they begin to chuckle,
And when he scowls noise peters out.
He is the undisputed master.

Tanya, less fearful of disaster,
Begins to wonder how things are.
Gently she sets the door ajar...
A sudden gust of wind then douses
The light from all the candlesticks;
The ghostly gang fades with the wicks.
Eyes flashing, now Onegin rouses,
Clattering as he leaves the board.
They rise; he walks towards the door. 19
Feeling afraid and in a panic,
Tatyana tries to flee. It seems
She cannot run. Her mood is manic,
She casts about, but cannot scream,
He flings the door wide. The effect is
That all these glaring hellish spectres
Turn upon her, and mocking cries
Ring out against her. All those eyes,
The clapping hooves, the muzzles curvy,
The tufty tails, the tusky prongs,
Moustaches and the bloody tongues,
The horns and bony fingers turning
To point at her, while voices whine,
Together crying, "Mine, she's mine!" 20
"She's *mine!*" announced Yevgeny starkly,
And suddenly the pack has gone,

Leaving behind them, cold and darkling,
Onegin, Tanya, all alone.
Onegin, though, has now withdrawn her,
Settling her gently in a corner
Upon a wobbly wooden seat.
He now inclines his head to meet
Her shoulder. But then Olga enters
With Lensky. Lights flash through the mist.
Onegin makes a threatening fist
And stares round fiercely, ill-contented,
Chiding the two intrusive guests,
While Tanya, scarcely breathing, rests. 21
They argue. Louder. Of a sudden
Yevgeny grabs a long knife. Oh,
Lensky's struck down! Grim shadows huddle
Them close. A hideous cry of woe
Rings out... The wooden shack is shaken...
...In horror Tanya now awakens
And looks around. It's light again,
As through the frozen windowpane
Dawn's crimson rays send out an aura.
The door swings open. Olga flies
Across to Tanya swallow-wise,
Rosier than the north's Aurora.
"Tanya," she says, "Tell me, my love—

Who is it you've been dreaming of?" 22
Tatyana, though, ignores her sister
And lies there with a book in bed.
The pages turn—she hasn't missed her—
And now she's here nothing is said.
Not that this book, for those who know it,
Presents sweet fictions from a poet,
Or maxims, or delightful scenes,
Or texts from Virgil or Racine,
Scott, Byron, Seneca. No features,
Not even *Ladies Fashion*, could
So fascinate and stir the blood.
It was Martin Zadeck, dear readers,
A wise Chaldean sage, it seems,
And an interpreter of dreams. 23
This work of moment and profundity
Came from a travelling salesman, who
Called in one day, out in the country,
And haggled with her as they do.
For her three roubles fifty copecks
She got *Malvina* (not the whole text)
Plus extras, normal in such sales:
A bumper book of common tales,
A grammar and two Petrine epics,
And Marmontel's *Works* (Volume Three).

Martin Zadeck soon came to be
Her favourite... So sympathetic
To her when sorrows made life grim,
And every night she sleeps with him. 24
Disturbed by what she had been dreaming,
She wondered what it had to show.
What was the ghastly vision's meaning?
Tanya would dearly like to know.
Though short, the index was poetical.
She found, in order alphabetical:
Bear, black of night, blizzard and bridge,
Fir, forest, hedgehog, raven, witch,
And suchlike words. Her apprehensions,
Despite Zadeck, could not be stilled.
The nightmare showed her fate fulfilled
By most unhappy misadventures.
For several days she was distraught
With worry at this very thought. 25
But now the crimson day is dawning;
Here from the valleys soars the sun,
Ushering in for us this morning
A name day! Joy for everyone!
All day the Larins' house was writhing
With guests, whole families arriving
Together in their various ways

In carts or carriages or sleighs.
The crowded hall is under pressure
With newcomers exchanging hugs
And kissing girls and yelping pugs,
And shouts and chuckles on the threshold,
And bows and bobs. Everyone chats
Through nursemaids' calls and bawling brats.

26

With his well-fed wife in attendance
Here comes the portly Pustyakóv;
Gvozdín, who, as a host, shines splendid
(His peasants being *not* well off);
A grey-haired couple, the Skotínins,
With children of all ages (meaning
From two to thirty); Petushkóv,
The local district's fancy toff;
And my first cousin, too, Buyánov,
Fluff-covered, wearing a peaked cap
(Already known to you, mayhap);
And the ex-councillor, old Flyánov,
A gossip, rascal and poltroon,
Bribe-taker, glutton and buffoon. 27
Here's Panfíl Khárlikov's horde; with 'em
They bring Monsieur Triquet, once big
In Tambov, known for wit and rhythm,

In spectacles and ginger wig.
A perfect Frenchman and a charmer,
He's penned a ditty to Tatyana,
A children's song in melody:
Réveillez-vous, belle endormie.
In an old tome of ancient music
This ditty had been stored away.
Ever resourceful, our Triquet
Had dug it from the dust, to use it
With one bold change: *bel-le Niná*
Became *bel-le Ta-ti-a-ná*. 28
Now from a nearby urban quarter
A company commander comes,
Idol of many a grown-up daughter
And the delight of local mums.
He's here... with news to be applauded:
The regimental band's been ordered.
The colonel has arranged it all.
What joy! There is to be a ball!
The prospect sets girls' feet a-racing.
When called to table, pair by pair
And hand in hand they saunter there.
The girls crowd Tanya. Men sit facing.
All cross themselves, and at the sign
The murmuring crowd sits down to dine. 29

Then silence falls. Nobody chatters
Though mouths chew on, and everything
Is noisy—cutlery a-clatter
And glasses meeting with a clink.
But very soon again they're at it,
Raising the roof with a great racket.
There are no listeners; they all speak,
They shout and laugh, bicker and shriek...
The door flies open... Lensky enters,
Onegin too. Tatyana's mum
Cries, "Lord above, at last you've come!"
The guests squeeze up with the intention
Of freeing places. Chairs are found,
They call the friends and sit them down, 30
Facing Tatyana. Thus confronted,
Pale as the moon in morning skies,
She quivers like a doe when hunted
And will not raise her darkling eyes
Towards them. Surging passions quickly
Flood through her; she feels breathless, sickly.
The two friends greet her, but her ears
Hear nothing. She feels pricking tears
About to flow. Poor, wretched creature
She feels she is about to swoon,
But strength and reason rally soon

To win her round. Her teeth now gritted,
She mumbles something into space
And sits there rooted in her place. 31
Theatricalities and paddies,
Girls fainting, tears and all that stuff,
Yevgeny couldn't stomach; that is,
Quite simply, he had had enough.
At this big feast he, the outsider,
Was furious. But when he spied her
Shaking, producing a dark frown,
In irritation he looked down
And sulked, feeling exasperated
With Lensky. He would rattle him;
Yevgeny's vengeance would be grim.
He revelled in anticipation.
He mentally began to scrawl
Caricatures of one and all. 32
And other people saw those moments
When Tanya felt as if to die,
Though really all the looks and comments
Were centred on the rich meat pie
(Unfortunately oversalted),
Then on the tar-sealed bottles, faultless
Between the roast and the blancmange,
Where Russian-made champagne belongs,

And glasses lined up long and slender,
Just like your little waist, Zizí,
Pure crystal of the soul to me,
Sung in my verses, sweet and tender;
Love's flute so exquisitely shrunk,
Thou hast so often got me drunk! 33
Free from its moistened cork, the flagon
Burst with a pop. The wine released
Fizzed forth. Triquet, with a suave swagger,
Long-tortured by his written piece,
Got up to face the crowd, admirers
Who welcomed him with a deep silence.
Tatyana scarcely breathed. Triquet
Showed her his text and sang away,
Putting on style. Their cheers and plaudits
Reward him, though she is nonplussed,
Bobbing a curtsy as she must,
While he, the poet, great but modest,
Offers a toast. His is the first,
And he presents her with his verse. 34
Congratulations came, and greetings,
And she thanked them with all good grace,
But when it came at last to treating
With *him*, Onegin, her sad face,
Her weariness and agitation

Drew from him sympathy and patience...
He faced her with a silent bow,
But in his eyes a look somehow
Shone wonderfully warm and kindly.
Had he been moved, cut to the quick,
Or was this a flirtatious trick?
Whether well meant or sent forth blindly,
His warm look was enough to start
A lifting of Tatyana's heart. 35
And now the chairs are pulled back, scraping,
Into the parlour they all squeeze
Like bees from luscious hives escaping
In buzzing swarms to find the leas.
Pleased with the food and festive table,
They wheeze delight neighbour to neighbour.
Ladies sit by the fire, and—look—
The girls are whispering in their nook.
Now the baize tables are unfolded.
Come forth, ye players brave and bold:
Boston or ombre for the old,
Or whist, a favourite even older.
Monotonous, the kinsmen come,
All avid sons of tedium. 36
Eight rubbers have now been completed
By the whist heroes with their tricks,

And eight times they have been reseated.
Now tea is served. I love to fix
The hour by “dinner”, say, or “teatime”,
Or “supper”. Yes, we rustics see time
As something simple. We obey
Our stomachs rather than Bréguet.
And I should mention in parenthesis
That on the pages of my works
I deal with feasts, and food, and corks,
Treating them all with no less emphasis
Than you, dear Homer. (This man is
Our god of thirty centuries.) [37, 38] 39
But tea is served, and with decorum
The girls are sipping from their cups,
When with a boom outside the ballroom
The loud bassoons and flutes strike up.
Fired by the music as it thunders,
Leaving his rum-laced tea, up wanders
(Local Lothario) Petushkóv,
Who comes to Olga—and they’re off;
Lensky takes Tanya; Kharlikóva,
An old maid whom the years have marred,
Is taken by my Tambov bard;
Buyánov sweeps off Pustyakóva...
Into the ballroom they spill, all

Attracted by the glittering ball. 40
When starting on my novel's journey
(See Chapter One), I felt the urge
To picture, rather like Albani,
A ballroom in St Petersburg,
But in a dreamy intermission
I gave myself to reminiscing
About small feet that I once knew.
O tiny tracks, I followed you,
But, little feet, I'll roam no further.
Deluded by false youth, I plan
To be a more discerning man
In words and deeds more and more certain.
As to digressions, I shall strive
To purge them from my Chapter Five. 41
Frenzied and furious and blurry,
Whirling like young life, and as fast,
The waltz is in a swirling hurry,
And it sends couples flashing past.
Nearing the moment of his vengeance,
Onegin smirks with dark intentions
And comes to Olga. There's no rest;
He whirls her round before the guests,
Then brings her back and sees her seated,
Treating her to a little chat,

And then two minutes after that
The waltz between them is repeated.
People look on in great surprise,
And Lensky can't believe his eyes. 42
Now the mazurka, once delivered
To booming bangs and thunderous peals
In a great hall where all things shivered
And the floor shuddered under heels,
The windows rattling like Hades.
It's not like that now. No, like ladies,
We sweep the lacquered floor and glide.
Yet small towns in the countryside
Have kept alive the real mazurka
With all its old-world charm and dash.
The heels, the wild leaps, the moustache,
They're all still there, solid and certain,
Unchanged by fashion's cruel sway,
The bane of Russians in our day. [43] 44
Buyánov, my hot-blooded cousin,
Brings to Onegin both the girls,
Tanya and Olga; deftly choosing
The latter, *Olga*, off he whirls.
He leads her, nonchalantly gliding,
Bending to whisper and confiding
In vulgar tones and fancy terms,

Squeezing her hand until she burns,
The pink of her contented features
Turning bright red. My Lensky stares,
Distraught; his indignation flares
In jealous rage against these creatures.
Is the dance over? Yes, it is—
Now the cotillion must be *his*. 45
It isn't. Why not? What's the matter?
Olga has promised: she will dance
With him, Onegin. Heavens! Drat her!
What does he hear? Where does she stand?...
How can this be? Our recent baby,
Now a wild child and flirting lady,
Is well schooled in the art of guile;
Betrayal she can do with style.
It's too much. Lensky cannot bear it.
The tricks of women! Hear him curse!
He walks out, calling for his horse,
And rides off. Pistols now will square it;
Two bullets and a single shot
Will suddenly decide his lot.

CHAPTER SIX

*Là sotto i giorni nubilosi i brevi Nasce una gente a cui 'l morir non dole.**

PETRARCH

1

Abandoned by the missing Lensky,
Once more Onegin languished, bored.
Olga was near, and he fell pensive,
Revenged, and happy at the thought.
But she was yawning too, now keener
To search the room and find Vladimir.
Meanwhile, the oft-repeated dance
Has sent her into a deep trance.
At last it's over. Supper beckons.
Beds are made up for one and all,
Extending from the entrance hall
To the maids' room. Everyone reckons
On sound sleep. But Onegin's gone,
Off to his bed, driving alone.

2

Peace reigns within the parlour shortly.
Here snores the portly Pustyakóv
Next to his partner, no less portly.

Gvozdín, Buyánov, Petushkóv
And Flyánov (indisposed as ever)
Rest on hard dining chairs together.
Triquet lies on the floor; he'll nap
In his bright shirt and old-style cap.
The young girls rooming with Tatyana
And Olga are all fast asleep,
Though, at the pane, in sadness deep,
Lonely, illumined by Diana,
Unsleeping Tanya sits, eyes wide,
Scanning the night-black countryside. 3
That brusque arrival, unexpected,
That momentary tender glance,
The strange way Olga was directed—
All this struck Tanya like a lance
Piercing the soul. He is a person
She cannot fathom, which is worsened
By jealous anguish deep inside
That hurts like a cold hand applied
To squeeze her heart, as if black, hellish
Torrents were roaring far below.
“I'll perish,” Tanya said. “Although,
For *him*, it will feel good to perish.
Can I complain?... No... I confess—
He couldn't bring me happiness.” 4

Enough's enough. On with my story!
Another character is planned.
Some three miles on from Krasnogórye,
Where Lensky lives, there dwells a man
Who used to thrive, and thrives at present
In this philosophical desert:
Zaretsky, once inclined to rob
As hetman of a gambling mob.
A wastrel, now a pub *persona*,
Straightforward and most kind is he.
Unmarried, though *père de famille*,
A true friend, now a staid landowner.
He stands for honesty and health.
Thus does an age correct itself! 5
Society, full of flattering faces,
Approved his wild tricks quite a lot.
True, he could, at a dozen paces,
Hit aces with a pistol shot.
And once, out on the field, at random
He swung about with such abandon
That he fell off his Kalmyk horse
Into the mud (pie-eyed, of course),
And to the French he lost his liberty.
Some prize! They let him go—no fuss—
This honourable Regulus,

Though he'd have welcomed new captivity
To spend his mornings chez Véry,
In Paris, downing bottles three. 6
Once he had been a clever joker,
Foxing the fools by playing pranks
And fooling the non-mediocre
Openly or behind their backs,
Though even he suffered some sessions,
Which ended with him learning lessons.
There were times when he would collapse,
A booby caught in booby traps.
His tone when arguing was cheery,
He brought forth answers sharp and dumb,
And he could knowingly keep mum
Or knowingly refute some theory,
And he was good at goading friends
To duelling—and sticky ends— 7
Or he'd arrange a truce, and by it
A breakfast feast laid out for three,
And then malign them on the quiet
With jokes and fibs, amusingly.
But time is change. High jinks are jolly,
But like love's dream (another folly),
They fade with every passing year.
Zaretsky, as I've said, lives here.

Under acacia and wild cherry,
Sheltered at last from nature's rage,
This true philosopher and sage
Plants cabbages like Horace (very),
Breeding ducks, geese and, yes, indeed,
Small children, teaching them to read. 8
He was no fool. While always shrinking
From this man's inner sentiments,
Yevgeny liked his way of thinking
And, in all things, his common sense.
It had been nice enough whenever
The two of them had come together,
So, next day, he felt no surprise
When this man came before his eyes.
Zaretsky said hello, though gently
Declined to pass the time of day,
Cast a sly look Onegin's way
And handed him a note from Lensky.
He walked up to the window shelf
And read it through there to himself. 9
The note was dignified and civil,
A cartel (challenge), brief, polite,
All clear and cold and on the level.
Called out by his friend, he must fight.
Onegin turned to him on impulse,

The bearer of a note so simple,
And spoke without a wasted word.
“Ready as always,” the man heard.
Zaretsky rose, without explaining,
Not keen to linger there alone,
And having much to do at home,
He left at once, leaving Yevgeny
Communing singly with his soul,
Feeling dissatisfied, not whole. 10
And so he should. Searching, relentless,
His secret inner court will hear
Him charged with multiple offences...
Charge One: He had been wrong to jeer
At timid, tender love so easily
And so off-handedly that evening.
Charge Two: The poet might have been
An ass, but this, at just eighteen,
Could be excused. Judge whose fault *this* is:
Yevgeny deeply loved the youth,
And should have proved to be, in truth,
No mere plaything of prejudices,
No fiery, strapping lad, but an
Honourable and thinking *man*. 11
He could have spoken out (so easy!)
Instead of bristling like a beast.

He should have set about appeasing
That young heart, at the very least.
It's too late now. Things have developed.
"Besides," he thought, "we have that fellow,
The expert duellist, in touch.
He's a bad man who talks too much...
Contempt, of course, from the beginning,
Should have condemned the way he spoke.
But whispers... sniggers... stupid folk..."
We're talking of *Public Opinion!*
Our idol's base and honour's ground—
This is what makes the world go round! 12
Seething with rage and hatred, Lensky
Waits. A reply is what he wants.
The windbag now returns; Zaretsky
Comes solemnly with the response
That brings joy to a jealous party!
He had been worried that this smarty
Might find some way out with a jest,
Some ruse designed to save his breast
By turning down the pistols, scorning.
But doubts are banished now; they will
Drive out and meet beside the mill
At break of day tomorrow morning,
Cock weapons, and aim low or high

At one another's brow or thigh. 13
Set to detest a flirt so cruel,
Still seething, Lensky meant to shun
His Olga and await the duel...
He watched the clock, and watched the sun...
Then he gave in, and off he sallied,
Soon to be found outside the Larins',
Hoping to catch her unawares
And shake her just by being there.
But no such thing... For, just as earlier,
She met poor Lensky from his horse
By skipping down from off the porch
Like giddy hope (but even girlier).
Youthful, exuberant, carefree,
Exactly as before was she. 14
"Why did you leave the ball so early?"
Olga immediately said,
Sending his feelings hurly-burly.
Silent, Vladimir hung his head,
His rage and envy now bedevilled
By the bright glance that Olga levelled,
By her ingenuous, gentle hold,
By all that sprightliness of soul!...
He looks at her—sweet warmth is with him—
Seeing she loves him still (of course),

And, overcome with deep remorse,
He almost asks her to forgive him.
Shaking, he cannot say a word.
He's happy, very nearly cured. ... [15, 16] 17
Cast down again, once more the dreamer,
With dear, sweet Olga facing him,
There is no strength left in Vladimir
To hark back—it would be too grim.
His thoughts are: "I shall be her saviour.
I won't allow his vile behaviour
To tempt her young heart in this wise
With passion, flattery and sighs.
Disgusting worms shall not go gnawing
Beneath the lily's tender stem.
Plants will not last two days and then
Lose their fresh flowerlets half-showing.
Which means, of course, that in the end
I have to shoot out with my friend." 18
If only he had known the drama
Of Tanya's burning heartache there,
If only news had reached Tatyana,
If only she had been aware
That next day Lensky and Yevgeny
Would duel to the death, then maybe
Her love might just have brought the men

Into a partnership again.
But, no, the story of her anguish
Was, as it happened, left unheard.
Onegin never said a word,
While secretly Tatyana languished.
The nurse may well have known all right,
But she, alas, was not too bright. 19
All evening Lensky was distracted,
Silent and jovial by turns.
But men for whom the muse is active
Are always like that. Frowning, stern,
He ranged the keyboard seeing whether
He could find chords that ran together.
Then, giving Olga a close scan,
He whispered, "I'm a happy man."
It's late now. Time to go. The tension
Strains tightly at his anguished heart,
And, thinking these things as he parts
From the young girl, he feels it wrenching.
She watches his face, one to one.
"What's wrong?" "Oh, nothing." And he's gone.

20

Back home again, he went to handle
His pistols, took them from their case,
Then put them back. Undressed by candle,

He opened Schiller for a space,
Though there was one thought that obsessed
him.

His heart ached, pain that never left him.
Olga appeared; he was disarmed
Beyond words by her lovely charms.
Those pages—he no longer needs them.
He writes his poems, which, awash
With all kinds of romantic tosh,
Sing out and flow along. He reads them
Aloud and lyrically sung,
Like Delvig at a party, drunk. 21

By chance his lines have been held on to.
I have them here. They go like this:
*Oh, tell me where, where have you gone to,
You golden days of springtime bliss?
What lies in store for me tomorrow?
Vainly my eyes attempt to follow,
But all is hidden, dark as night.
No matter, though. Fate's laws are right.
If I fall by the arrow stricken,
Or if the arrow hurtles past—
All's well. Our sleep and waking last
As long as our fixed span is reckoned.
Blest are our days, if sore oppressed;*

The coming dark is also blest.

22

*The morning star will dawn tomorrow,
And bright day will see off the gloom,
While I perchance may then be swallowed
Into the darkness of the tomb.*

*The languid Lethe will devour
The memory of a young bard's hour.*

*I'll be forgotten by the world,
But you may stand here, lovely girl,
And mourn this urn brought here untimely,
Thinking, "He loved me. I alone
Received his sad life at its dawn
In all its storminess." Come, find me,
My heart's desire, come to my tomb.
Friend of my soul, I am your groom.* 23

His writing was "obscure" and "flaccid"
(In the Romanticism class,

Though I see little that's romantic
In such style—but we'll let that pass).

Thus, when the dawn was just appearing
And Lensky's head was nodding, weary,
The modish word "ideal" came past
And sent him off to sleep at last.
But hardly had he lost his balance

In sleep's enchanting welcome, when
Zaretsky broached his silent den
And roused young Lensky with a challenge.
"Time you were up. It's after six.
Onegin will be waiting. Quick!" 24
But he was not right in this matter.
Yevgeny's sound asleep. There are
Some signs that night is on the scatter,
And cockcrow greets the morning star.
Onegin, fast asleep, lies leaden
While a young sun climbs up the heaven.
A snowstorm passes overhead
In a bright swirl, but still the bed
Pulls on Yevgeny, unalerted.
Sleep hovered... Suddenly it broke,
And now at long last he awoke,
Reaching to pull aside the curtain.
He looks and sees. Time? Yes, it is.
He should have left long before this. 25
He rings the bell. In runs his valet,
A Frenchman called Monsieur Guillot.
Slippers and dressing gown he carries;
He presents linen *comme il faut*.
Onegin dresses hell for leather,
Guillot gets all the things together,

Ready to drive, bringing the brace
Of duelling pistols in their case.
The racing sleigh, brought forward, beckons.
He's in and off... They reach the mill
At speed. He checks his man, who will
Make sure Le Page's deadly weapons
Come with them. Off the horses go
To find where two young oak trees grow. 26
There at the dam wall lingered Lensky,
Impatient. Things were at a halt.
His man, an expert, diligently
Studied the millstones, finding fault.
Onegin comes, apologetic.
Zaretsky lodges an objection.
"Where is your second?" he insists,
A pedant and traditionalist
Who viewed disaster with revulsion.
He would not have a man laid out
Haphazardly, for this would flout
The strict rules of established culture,
Time-honoured since the ancient days—
For which the man deserves our praise. 27
"You what?" Yevgeny said. "My second?
He's here—my friend, Monsieur Guillot.
There should be no complaints, I reckon,

If he stands in to help me. No,
He's not a very well-known person,
But he's a good chap. Many worse than
He is." Zaretsky, though, demurred,
Until Onegin gave the word:

"Well, shall we start?" "Why not?" said
Lensky.

And so, down past the mill they walked.
Zaretsky and the "good chap" talked
Together at a distance, tensely,
Seeking agreement. Terms were set.
The enemies' eyes never met. 28
Yes, enemies. Their new displeasure
Was bloodlust, parting them for naught.
Have they not shared long hours of leisure,
Their food, activities and thoughts
As *friends*? Now they're exuding
The bitterness of foes long-feuding.
It's like a nightmare, weird and ill.
As they get ready all is still.
They make cold-blooded plans for murder.
Could they not laugh and make things good
Before their hands are stained with blood,
And part as friends, going no further?
No. Noble foes must not lose face,

Though what they dread is false—disgrace. 29
Out come the pistols (how they dazzle!),
The ramrods plunge, the mallets knock,
The leaden balls roll down the channels,
The triggers click, the guns are cocked.
The greyish powder streams out, steady,
Into the pan, while, waiting ready,
The solid, jagged, screwed-down flint
Stands primed. Guillot can just be glimpsed
Lurking behind a stump, much worried.
The two foes cast their cloaks aside.
Zaretsky walks thirty-two strides
With an exactitude unhurried,
Then leads each friend to his far place.
They draw their pistols from the case. 30
“Begin *now!*” And the two foes coolly
Walked forward, not yet taking aim.
With soft and steady tread they duly
Completed four steps... On they came...
Four lethal strides with calm prevailing
Between the two men... Then Yevgeny,
Advancing still, was the first one
To raise a gently levelled gun.
Then—five more steps along the journey...
Lensky began to do the same,

Squinting his left eye, taking aim...
Onegin fired... The hour determined
Had struck. The poet made no sound.
His pistol tumbled to the ground. 31
One hand across his breastbone resting,
He fell. But this was death, not pain;
His misted eyes gave out the message.
In this way, thick snows, having lain
Solid beneath the sparkling sunshine,
Slide slowly down the hillside sometimes.
Immediately Onegin ran
In a cold sweat to the young man.
He looked, he called him... All for nothing.
He's gone. The bard, Onegin's friend,
Has come to an untimely end!
The storm has petered out. The blossom
Has wilted in the morning light,
And, lo, the altar flame has died. 32
He lay quite still, his forehead seeming
Unusual, languidly at rest,
Blood oozing from a wound still steaming,
A bullet hole below the breast.
Just now his heart had been full, racing
With the strong force of inspiration,
With love and hope and enmity,

Beating with life, blood coursing free;
Now he looks like a house deserted,
Where all is quiet, all is dark,
The silence permanent and stark,
The shutters closed, the windows dirtied
With chalk. The mistress of this place
Has gone away and left no trace. 33
It's fun to deal in witty sallies
And irritate a foolish foe;
It's fun to see the poor chap rally,
Tilting his horns to have a go.
It's fun when he sees his reflection
As something shameful for rejecting,
And funnier still, my friends, when he
Is fool enough to roar, "That's me!"
But the most fun comes from insisting
On plans for a noble death, somehow
Fixating on the man's pale brow,
And aiming coolly from a distance.
But sending him to kingdom come—
Surely you won't find *that* much fun. 34
Imagine this: you with your pistol
Have murdered someone, a young friend,
Because some glare, some silly whisper
Or wrong response chanced to offend

Your feelings while you drank together,
Or maybe in his wild displeasure
He took offence and challenged *you*—
What is there left for you to do,
And will your soul feel any different
To see him stretched out on the ground
With death depicted on his brow,
And even now his body stiffening,
As he lies deaf and dumb down there,
Scorning your cries of wild despair? 35
Feeling the qualms of guilt intensely,
Gripping his pistol still, with dread,
Yevgeny glances down at Lensky.
“That’s it,” Zaretsky says. “He’s dead.”
“He’s dead?” The ghastly phrase, now uttered,
Shatters Onegin’s calm. He shudders
And walks off, calling to his men.
With utmost care Zaretsky then
Puts the cold body on the sledge back,
A burden of the direst sort.
Scenting a corpse, the horses snort,
Restively stamping as they edge back
And wetting their steel bits with foam.
Then arrow-like they fly off home. 36
My friends, you’re sorry for the poet,

Lost in the bloom of hope and joy,
Without a future, ne'er to know it,
So recently a little boy,
Now gone. Where is his raging ardour,
The noble striving ever harder,
The thoughts and sentiments of youth,
Bold, towering with tender truth?
Where are the longings of this lover,
The urge to learn and toil, the blame
He might have felt for vice and shame,
The yearning dreams of something other,
Those tokens of a life beyond,
Those holy dreams of rhyme and song? 37
Could he have proved a benefactor,
Or maybe he was born for fame?
His silenced lyre might have been active
In thunderous and unbroken strains
For years to come. He could have risen
To occupy a high position
Within society's pantheon.
His martyred spirit, moving on,
Perhaps took with it something sacred
And secret, something now destroyed,
Creative words lost in the void,
Sent to the grave, and separated

For ever from the hymns of time
And praise from some dynastic line. [38] 39
Or maybe not. The poet's story
Might have been commonplace and trite,
His young years lost in a furore
Of early flames not long alight.
He would have greatly changed and hurried
To drop the poems and get married,
Live, cuckolded, far from the town,
Happy in quilted dressing gown.
He'd have known life's goodness and badness:
At forty gout, then food and drink,
Boredom and fatness, powers ashrink,
Only to die on his own mattress;
Amongst his children he would croak,
Doctors and weeping womenfolk. 40
But this is make-believe, dear reader.
Alas, poor Lensky, in the end,
Once poet, thinker and daydreamer,
Has been shot dead by his good friend.
There on the left, outside the village,
Where once he lived, where life was thrilling,
Two pines have intertwined their roots
Above meandering little brooks
That feed the stream down in the valley

Where shepherds love to halt and kip
And women reapers come to dip
The echoing pitchers that they carry,
There by the stream in deepest shade
A simple headstone has been laid. 41
Nearby, as April showers bespangle
The green fields, leaving them to soak,
A shepherd plaits his lime-bark sandals,
Singing of Volga fisherfolk.

And if a young girl, a newcomer
Down from the city for the summer
Gallops out as and when she feels,
Riding alone across the fields,
She may well halt her horse there, side on
Reining him in, and after that,
Raising a light veil from her hat,
She'll set her soft, swift-moving eyes on
Lensky's plain text, and they will brim
With tender, moving tears for him. 42
She'll amble on through open pasture
With many ideas to contemplate,
Crestfallen, sick at heart, long after
Because of Lensky and his fate.

“So, what did Olga do?” she wonders.
“How long did her poor heart stay sundered?”

Or did her tears abate somehow?
And where is Olga's sister now?
And he, who left the world behind him
(Of stylish belles the stylish foe),
Where did that gloomy oddball go?
The man who killed, where shall we find
him?"

These details I shall soon rehearse
For you, my friends, chapter and verse. 43
But not now. Though I am sincerely
Fond of my hero, and although
I shall return to him soon, really
I'm in no mood for him just now.
The years pass, and harsh prose is beckoning,
With giddy rhymes no longer reckoning,
And I (says he with a deep sigh)
Shall not pursue them—no, not I.
My quill has lost its old-time yearning
To spatter fleeting sheets with ink.
I now have colder thoughts to think
And concepts new, more brightly burning,
Which blight (in company or alone)
The gentle slumber of my soul. 44
I know new voices and new yearnings,
And sorrows new I also know,

But these desires are hopeless journeys,
And sorrows old—I miss them so.

O dreams, my dreams! Where is your sweetness?
ness?

Whence comes your (hackneyed rhyme!) your
fleetsness?

Must I at last confront the truth—

The faded garland of my youth?

Can it be true that in reality,

As fancy elegies might say,

My springtime days have flown away,

As I once said with jocularly?

Can those days never be resumed,

And am I to turn *thirty* soon? 45

And so my life has reached its zenith—

Something I cannot now deny.

Still, let us part as friends, not enemies,

My free-and-easy youth and I!

Thanks for the pleasures and enjoyment,

The disappointments and sweet torments.

For all the clamour, banquets, storms,

For all your gifts in each new form

I really must express my gratitude.

In all things, bringing storm or lull,

I have enjoyed you to the full.

Enough! With clear mind and new attitude
From my old life I take a rest
And set forth on another quest. 46
My favourite haunts I now look back on,
Where I spent long, sequestered days,
Days filled with idleness and passion,
My spirit in a wistful haze.
Young inspiration, do not soften,
Trouble my enterprise more often,
Fly to me when I sit apart
And agitate my sleeping heart,
Let not my poet's soul be captured
To end up atrophied and tough,
Steadily petrified, made rough
By the smart world and all its rapture,
In this sad slough wherein we lie
Wallowing, my friends, you and I.

* Where skies are overcast and days are short
/ Is born a race that feels no pain in death. (Italian.)

CHAPTER SEVEN

*Moscow, Russia's favourite daughter,
Where is your equal to be found?*

DMÍTRIYEV

How not to love our native Moscow?

BARATÝNSKY

Defaming Moscow? Worthless to see the world.

Where's better?

Where we're not.

GRIBOYÉDOV

1

Forced down by spring suns from the summits
Of nearby hills, the winter snows
Descend in turbid streams to plummet
Onto the flooded fields below.

With her bright smile, though still half-yawn-
ing,

Nature salutes the year's new morning,
The heavens radiate dark blue,
The limpid woodlands are shot through
With verdure, and their fluff grows fuller,
Bees wander from their cells of wax
To fly the fields and take their tax,

The drying flatlands gleam with colour,
Cows moo, and nightingales delight
In singing through the silent night. 2
What sadness comes with your emergence,
O time of love. Yes, spring is spring,
When the soul stirs and the blood surges!
But, oh, what anguished pains you bring!
Ah, how my heavy spirit lurches
When springtime breathes on me and bur-
geons,

Wafting its charms into my face
In some secluded country place,
When happiness can seem discordant
And all things joyous, all things quick
Turn out to be a shabby trick
Leading to disaffected boredom,
Taxing a spirit long extinct
That sees all things as black as ink. 3
We cannot welcome the renewal
Of autumn's dead leaves. It's no good:
The loss of them is no less cruel
Despite new whispers from the woods.
Perhaps we watch the rise of nature
With blurred ideas, and link it later
With the slow fading of our youth,

Not destined to return, in sooth.
Or it may be our minds remember
In a poetic, sleepy haze
Another spring in bygone days
Which stirs the heart, and with the tremor
Come dreams of places far from this...
The moonlight... and a night of bliss. 4
It's springtime. Come, you gentle idlers,
Epicureans, sages all,
You apathetic, smug insiders,
You armchair farmers, heed the call,
You Priams of the Russian country
You caring ladies, all and sundry,
The rural spring is calling you—
Warm weather, flowers, work to do,
With country rambles, oh, so bracing
Followed by long seductive nights...
Come to the fields, friends, now! Take flight
In laden carriages outpacing
Slow-trundling wagons and old crates.
Stream forth from every city gate. 5
Come, readers (loyally indulgent),
In coaches of the gaudy kind,
Come from your cities busy, bulging,
Leave all that winter fun behind.

Come with my wayward muse. Let's listen
Together as the oak trees whisper
Above a nameless little brook
Where my Yevgeny found a nook,
Living in idle, sad seclusion,
And saw the recent winter through,
Near to the place where she lived too—
Tanya, my meditative maiden.
He lives no longer in this place,
Where he has left so sad a trace. 6
You see those hills set in a crescent?
Let's go there, where a brooklet winds
Down to the river through those pleasant
Green meadows and that copse of limes.
Spring's friend, the nightingale, sings for us,
And all night long we hear his chorus;
Wild roses bloom, the brook purls by
Near where a tombstone meets the eye
Beneath two shady pines, now ageing,
Its epitaph open to view:
HERE LIES VLADIMIR LENSKY, WHO
WENT YOUNG FROM THIS LIFE, AND COUR-
AGEOUS.

(Age, years and details such as these)
YOUNG POET, MAY YOU REST IN PEACE. 7

On a low-hanging pine-tree twiglet,
Rocked gently by the morning breeze
O'er this mean funerary tribute,
There used to be an unsigned wreath.
Late in the evening, at their leisure,
Two girls would come out here together
By moonlight where the grave was dug
To shed warm tears and share a hug,
But now... the monument looks dismal,
Forgotten, and the path forlorn,
All overgrown. The wreath has gone.
Nearby, alone, withered and grizzled,
A shepherd warbles while he plaits
His wretched shoes, as in the past. [8, 9] 10
Poor Lensky! Olga did not languish
Or weep for very long. Alas,
This marriageable maiden's anguish
Was something that was soon to pass.
Another fellow won her favour,
Another came along to save her
And soothe her sorrow, someone who
Knew all the tricks of how to woo.
A lancer won her heart... The altar
Awaited them. Soon, looking down,
She blushed beneath her bridal crown,

Steadying as she shyly faltered.
Her downcast eyes were blazing, while
Her lips played with the faintest smile. 11
Poor Lensky! Could he somehow know it?
Facing the eternal void, could he
Have felt this hurt, the tragic poet,
This fateful form of treachery?
Or is he on the Lethe, stealing
Away now, blissfully unfeeling,
Untouched by us till kingdom come,
Our world closed off from him, and dumb?...
That's it—the cold void in attendance
Beyond the grave. We have no choice.
Foes, friends and lovers—every voice
Is stilled. Malevolent descendants,
A chorus of our angry heirs,
Will squabble over what is theirs. 12
And Olga's bright voice at the Larins'
Did not last long. Her time was spent.
Her lancer (whose fate was the army's)
Took her to join his regiment.
The mother, seeing off her daughter,
Her eyes an ocean of salt water,
Seemed to be less than half-alive.
But Tanya did not, could not cry.

Her saddened face was an array of
Pale shadows that resembled death,
Though when they walked out on the steps
To say goodbye, in all the chaos
Around their carriage, sure enough,
Tanya was there to see them off. 13
She stood and watched the misty drama
Of their departure. In the end
She stood there, lonely. Poor Tatyana—
Alas, her lifetime's bosom friend,
Her turtledove, her pal to hang on,
Her confidante and old companion,
Was seized by fate and whisked away,
Gone off for ever and a day.
Now she goes wandering like a shadow,
Inspecting their deserted plot.
Is there relief? No, there is not,
Nor consolation. She grows sadder,
In tears that she could scarce suppress.
Her heart is sundered in her breast. 14
Her passion burns with more insistence
Now she's alone, feeling apart.
Onegin, who is now so distant,
Speaks louder to her troubled heart.
They would now never see each other,

And he—the killer of her “brother”—
Was someone whom she ought to loathe.
But Lensky’s storybook is closed.
He’s not remembered. His fiancée
Has gone away with someone else,
And now the poet’s memory melts
Like smoke in a blue sky. Just fancy:
Perhaps the odd heart feels (or not?)
Some grief for him... But grief means... what?

15

Evening. A darkling sky. The waters
Go bubbling by, and beetles buzz.
Their dancing done, the peasants scatter.
Across the river, through the dusk,
Fires of the fishermen burn, plume-like,
While, lonesome in the silvery moonlight,
Tatyana strolls the fields and seems
Preoccupied, dreaming her dreams.
She wanders on. Then, with a shiver,
She spots a house down in a dell,
A village, copses down the hill,
And parkland by the gleaming river.
And one glance is enough to start
A faster frenzy in her heart. 16
She feels misgivings, sensing danger.

Go on? Go back? The choice is stark.
“He’s not here, and I am a stranger...
Just one glance at the house and park.”
And from the hilltop she walks down there,
Holding her breath. She looks around her,
Lost, apprehensive, on her guard,
And enters the deserted yard.
Some dogs rushed out to meet her, woofing.
She yelled in panic; as she did,
Some youngsters came out, servants’ kids,
And ran to her. After a scuffle,
They chased the mastiffs from the grounds,
Keeping the lady safe and sound. 17
“Could one ask where the big house keys are?”
Tatyana asked, and like a shot
The children rushed to find Anisya,
From whom the big keys could be got.
Anisya sped round in short order
To open up the big door for her,
And Tanya walked into the home
Where our hero had lived alone.
She looked around. A cue, unheeded,
Lay on the billiard-table top,
And she could see a riding crop
On a rough couch. Tanya, proceeding,

Was taken to the inglenook,
Where he'd sat on his own. "There, look. 18
And this is where our neighbour, Lensky,
Would come to dine last winter. See,
That's the big study through the entry.
If you would kindly follow me...
Here he took naps and drank his coffee,
Heard statements from the steward's office,
Or, in the mornings, read a tome.
This used to be the old squire's home.
On Sundays I would sometimes visit,
And by that window—him in specs—
We'd play tomfool with that there deck.
The Lord have mercy on his spirit,
And rest his bones. I knew his worth,
And now he's with damp Mother Earth." 19
Tanya looked round with heartfelt pleasure,
Casting her eyes on every side.
It all seemed infinitely precious
And her sad spirits were revived.
Half-agonized and half-excited,
She scanned the desk, its lamp not lighted,
Book-piles, the window and the bed
With a rug cover for a spread,
The view outside, dark, moonlit, solemn,

The half-light cast upon it all,
Lord Byron's portrait on the wall,
The cast-iron figure on his column,
His crowning hat, his scowling brow,
His arms crossed tightly—you know how. 20
Bewitched, she lingered in this prison,
This latter-day recluse's room.
But it is late. Cold winds have risen.
The woods sleep in their darkened coomb.
Across the steaming, misty river,
The moon goes down the hillside thither.
Far has the young girl-pilgrim roamed,
And it is time she went back home.
She stifles her disturbed condition,
Though she can't suppress a sigh,
And leaves for home now, not too shy
To ask permission to revisit
The lonely castle on her own
And read the books there all alone. 21
She took her leave of the housekeeper
Outside the gate, but came again,
First thing next day to go down deeper
Into his long-abandoned den,
And once inside his silent study,
Dead to all things and everybody,

She loitered there alone, inside,
And as time passed she cried and cried.
And as his books slipped through her fingers,
Quite unappealingly at first,
The choice of them seemed so perverse
And weird. But when she looked and lingered
Her eager spirit soon unfurled
An altogether different world. 22
We know Yevgeny had rejected
The reading business; all the same,
He did make one or two exceptions,
Exemptions from his hall of shame,
Such as the author of *Don Juan*,
And novels, even the odd new one
From our contemporary span
That represents the “modern man”,
Who is depicted most precisely
With his amoral attitude,
His arid soul, his selfish views,
His boundless taste for fantasizing,
His uselessly embittered mind
And actions of the futile kind. 23
And decorating many pages
Are thumbnail imprints deeply etched.
The girl’s sharp focus now engages

With these, her concentration stretched.
Her hands shake when she sees a passage
Containing some idea or message
That must have left Onegin moved
Or where he tacitly approved.
On many a page she found appended
Onegin's marginalia.

At every corner there they are,
Hints of his spirit (unintended),
A short phrase here, a small cross there,
A query hanging in the air. 24

And my Tatyana comes by stages
To understand the very man
(Depicted clearly as outrageous?)
Destined for her by some weird plan,
Sent to unsettle and derange her,
A maverick oddball bringing danger,
A child of heaven, of hell perchance,
Devil and god of arrogance.

What is he? A copy of mischances,
A ghost of nothingness, a joke,
A Russian in Childe Harold's cloak,
A ragbag of imported fancies,
A catchphrase-monger and a sham.
Is he more parody than man? 25

A parody? Does this expression
Give us the riddle's final clue?
The hours fly by. She's been forgetting
Her home, where she's long overdue.
Two visitors are there, two locals,
And Tanya is their present focus.
"Tanya's no child. This is no joke.
What can one do?" her mother croaks.
"Our Olga was the *younger* sister;
Now Tanya's turn is overdue.
She must wed, but what can I do?
We speak, but she is so insistent:
Not marriage! Then she'll mope and moan,
And go out in the woods alone." 26
"She's not in love, then?" "Who'd she fancy?
Buyánov made an offer—no!
Then Petushkóv, Iván—same answer.
Pykhtín the lancer stayed here—oh,
He fell for Tanya altogether,
All over her he was, young devil...
It looked good and I thought perhaps...
But, no. Again it all collapsed."
"My dear friend, you should wait no longer.
Get you to Moscow—the brides' fair—
Plenty of vacancies up there."

“Pity my income isn’t stronger...”

“You could just see one winter through.
And I could lend you something too.” 27

Old Madame Larina, delighted
By such a wise and friendly tip,
Added things up and soon decided:
Come winter, they would make the trip.

Tatyana sees all this as tricky,
Moving to people who are picky—
Their modes and manners still alive
With primitive provincial life:
Their dull, unfashionable clothing,
Their dull, unfashionable speech,
The Moscow toffs and beauties, each
Observing them with fun and loathing!
God save her! Better if she could
Just stay there wandering in the woods. 28

Up with the early sun, Tatyana
Would fly down to the fields and stay
To scan the beauteous panorama
With melting eyes, as if to say,
“Farewell, you valleys all sequestered,
You hilltops where my eyes have rested,
You woodlands that I know and prize,
Farewell, you gorgeous heavenly skies,

Farewell to you, this happy Eden.
I trade my lovely, quiet world
For a noisy, glittering, empty swirl.
And I bid you farewell, my freedom!
Where am I going, and what for?
What does my future hold in store?" 29
The walks she takes are lasting longer;
Those hills and streams take her aback,
Working their wondrous charms upon her,
Stopping Tatyana in her tracks.
Treating them like long-lost companions,
Down to the woods and fields she scrambles
To greet them, chattering on and on...
But soon short summer's day is gone,
And onward steals the golden autumn
To shiver the pale countryside,
Arraying it for sacrifice.
A north wind drives the storm clouds, awe-
some

In gusts and howls. Onto the scene
Comes winter like a fairy queen. 30
She came here, spreading wide, amassing
On every twig upon the oaks,
And carpeting the rolling grassland
Across the fields and down the slopes.

She levelled the still banks of rivers
In shrouds of dark mist densely driven.
Frost sparkled. We were all transfixed
By Mother Winter and her tricks.
And yet Tatyana felt unable
To celebrate; she did not care
To inhale the dusty, frosty air
Or use snow from the bathroom gable
To wash her shoulders, face and chest.
She feared the coming winter quest. 31
Departure times had been allotted,
Then come and gone. This was the last.
The old sleigh carriage, long forgotten,
Was reupholstered and made fast.
A caravan (three covered wagons)
Would haul the family household baggage;
Pans, chairs and trunks had all been crammed
With mattresses and jars and jams,
And feather beds, cockerels in cages,
Basins and pots, et cetera,
All their paraphernalia.
The servants' uproar is outrageous.
Across the courtyard someone drags—
Through tears and farewells—eighteen nags.

They're harnessed to the winter carriage,
The cooks get breakfast for them all,
The carts are mountains high with baggage,
The women and the drivers bawl.
Here's a thin, shaggy hack whose rider,
A bearded man, is the team-driver.
The servants gather in a horde.
"Goodbye, my lady! All aboard!"
The venerable carriage trundles
Off, gliding through the gate. "Goodbye,
Sweet spaces!" comes the cry.
"Farewell, the sheltered nook! I wonder
If I'll see you again." And streaks
Of tears run down Tatyana's cheeks. 33
When we've extended all the borders
Of our grand culture, gentlemen,
In time (our thinkers will reward us
With charts for calculating *when*—
Five hundred years hence?) our road system
Will have become completely different.
Then Russia's highways will appear,
Conjoining and criss-crossing her.
Across our waters iron bridges
Will stride with an enormous span.
Mountains will move, and, where we can,

We'll dig deep vaults beneath the rivers,
And at all Christian staging posts
We'll open inns with Russian hosts. 34
Today, our highways are outrageous.
Neglected bridges rot in heaps
While bugs and fleas at all the stages
Never give us a minute's sleep.
There are no inns. Ramshackle venues
Offer impressive-looking menus,
Showy but not to be believed,
Tempting but flattering to deceive,
And many a rural Russian Cyclops,
In smithies slow and clogged with ash,
With Russian tools will bang and bash
At Western workmanship, delighted
To bless their homegrown landscape, which
Is well supplied with rut and ditch. 35
But in the frozen winter it is
Much easier; it's fun to ride.
Like the crass lines of modern ditties,
The winter road's an easy slide.
The charioteers here do not loiter,
Untiring is the Russian troika!
You idly watch the mileposts hence
As they flash by in one long fence.

But, sad to say, the Larins laboured.
Post-horses were beyond her purse;
Her own were cheaper but much worse,
But Tanya actually savoured
The trek, however dull and bleak,
Which took them no less than a week. 36
But now they're nearly there. Before them
Stands Moscow chiselled in white stone,
The buildings topped with fiery glory,
A golden cross on every dome.
Brothers, I've always been delighted
By churches passed, and belfries sighted
With many a palace near a park,
Appearing in a sudden arc!
With all my contacts sadly broken
And travelling forth my destiny,
Moscow, I've often thought of thee!
Moscow! The very word when spoken
Blends many things in Russian hearts!
What resonances it imparts! 37
Petróvsky Castle stands here dourly
In its own oak grove to proclaim
Its recently acquired glory;
Napoleon stood here in vain,
Full of his fame with all its promise,

Expecting Moscow to pay homage
By giving up its Kremlin keys.
But Moscow was not on her knees,
And would not come to supplicate him.
The hasty hero got short shrift:
Instead of holidays and gifts
She met him with a conflagration.
Here he stood, brooding as he gazed
Upon the unpropitious blaze. 38
Goodbye Petróvsky, you who swallowed
Our humbled pride. We're on our way!
We rumble past white gates and columns
Down Tver Street in our trundling sleigh,
Where every rut and pothole rocks us,
Past peasant women, sentry boxes,
Boys, shops, lamp-posts along the street,
Convents, palaces, gardens neat,
Allotments, sleds, Bukhara traders,
Dealers and our poor people's shacks,
Avenues, towers and Cossacks,
Chemist's shops and boutiques for ladies,
Balconies, gates lion-embossed,
With jackdaws poised on every cross. [39] 40
This torment of a journey lasted
For rather more than two hours straight,

But then in Kharitónov passage
The ponderous sleigh came to a gate
And stopped. Here lived an ageing auntie
Who'd fought for four years valiantly
Against consumption. They'd arrived,
And the front door was opened wide
By an old, grizzled Kalmyk servant
Wearing a loose coat, specs on nose,
Stocking in hand. A cry arose
From the princess, couch-bound but fervent.
The old girls swooned in tears and hugs,
Loud greetings pouring forth in floods. 41
"Princess, *mon ange!*" "Pachette!" "Alina!"
"Incredible!" "At last we meet!
Astonishing!" "*Ma chère cousine!*
Will you stay long? Do take a seat.
It's like a novel... All this drama..."
"This is my daughter, dear Tatyana!"
"Oh. Tanya, come to me. This seems
Too much. It's like the stuff of dreams.
Remember Grandison? You must do."
"What Grandison? Oh, you mean *him!*
I do remember. Where's he been?"
"He's near St Simeon's here in Moscow.
Dropped in to see me Christmas Eve.

Married his son off, I believe. 42
And he... But let's save this till later,
Shall we? Tomorrow we must show
Tatyana off to her relations.
Sorry, I'm poorly. I can't go.
My feeble legs will barely serve me...
But you're exhausted from the journey.
Why don't we have a little rest?
I'm feeble. Oh, my tired old chest...
Now, even pleasure is a burden,
And not just sadness. Oh, my dear,
I'm pretty useless now, I fear.
Old age is dreadful, that's for certain.”
She was exhausted. That was it.
She wept and had a coughing fit. 43
The good cheer of her ailing auntie
Moves Tanya, although, truth to tell,
Her new rooms are not to her fancy
Compared with those she knew so well.
The drapes are of a silken sweetness,
But in her new bed she lies sleepless,
And then the early sound of bells,
Heralding morning work, propels
Her out of bed. Her chair is placed by
The window, where she now stays put.

The darkness thins, she looks out, but
Instead of her home fields she's faced by
A yard she doesn't know at all,
A stable, a kitchen and a wall. 44
To family dinner after dinner
Tanya is taken, to impress.
With grans and grandads she's a winner,
For all her dreamy idleness.
As kinfolk, come from distant places,
They're met with warmth and smiling faces,
With exclamations and nice meals.
"She's *grown!*..." "But yesterday—it feels!—
I stood for you when you were christened.
I held you in my arms, my dear.
I used to tweak your little ear.
I gave you sweeties." Tanya listens
To granny's age group and their cries
Of "How the years have gone. Time flies!" 45
They haven't changed. Depend upon it:
The old ways are their golden rule.
Thus Princess (Aunt) Yeléna's bonnet
Is of unfashionable tulle,
Ivan Petróvich is no wiser,
Semyón, his brother's still a miser,
Lukérya's face is all white paint.

Is Lyubóv truthful? No, she ain't.
You'll find that Auntie Pelagéya
Still friends with Finemouche (*gentilhomme*),
Still has a husband, and a pom.
He's still a clubman, a long-stayer,
Still henpecked, deaf and someone who
Still eats and drinks enough for two. 46
Their girls greet Tanya with embraces,
But, there being much they want to know,
Silently these young Moscow Graces
Examine her from top to toe.
They find her rather odd, provincial,
With mannerisms strangely mincing,
A little thin and pale withal—
Though otherwise not bad at all.
But nature will prevail—with passion
They make friends, entertain her, and
They kiss her often, squeezing hands,
Fluffing her curls in the new fashion.
With girlish giggles they impart
The secrets of their girlish hearts— 47
Details of conquests, theirs and others',
Their hopes and schemes, daydreams and
such,
Flowing in guileless chat that buzzes

With scandal (though not all that much).
Then in return for all this chatter
They lean on Tanya, getting at her
To tell the stories of her heart,
But dreamily she stands apart.
She hears things but forgets soon after,
For nothing heard makes any sense.
Her feelings, private and intense,
Her secret thoughts, her tears and laughter
She keeps unspoken, for herself
And shareable with no one else. 48
Tatyana is quite keen to listen
To what they're saying, but, alas,
The room is swamped with the transmission
Of incoherent, vulgar trash.
It's so banal and so insipid;
Even the scandal's far from gripping.
In the dry desert of their views,
Their queries, slurs and bits of news,
Days pass with nothing thought-provoking,
No twist of fate or happenstance
To set the weary mind a-dance,
Nothing heart-lifting, nothing jokey,
No silly fun to be enjoyed
Anywhere in this social void. 49

Young men with sinecures look at her
In priggish, condescending ways,
Then walk off to discuss the matter
With nothing very nice to say.
Among them one pathetic jester
Found her “ideal” as he assessed her,
And now he leans against the door
To pen an ode. Guess who it’s for.
Once Vyázemsky sat down beside her
When she was at a boring aunt’s
And captivated her, by chance.
An old man, looking on, espied her,
And curiously began to dig,
While neatly straightening his wig. 50
But in the halls, where raging Tragedy
Is still performed in one long wail,
With spangled mantles wielded, wagging,
At the full house (to no avail),
Where Comedy lies gently napping
And sleeps through even friendly clapping,
Where the young public is entranced
By nothing but the Muse of Dance—
That’s how it was in former ages
When you and I were in our prime—
Tanya was cut dead all the time

By the lorgnettes of jealous ladies
And the eye-tubes of strutting beaux
In boxes or the lower rows. 51
She's taken on to the Assembly,
With all its crowds, excitement, heat,
The blaring band, the candles trembling
As pairs sweep by with flashing feet.
The lovely girls arrayed in flimsy,
The galleries with their gaudy whimsy,
And nubile girls in one wide arc—
All this struck her and made its mark.
Made manifest by dazzling dandies,
Bravado gleams, and waistcoats too,
Eyeglasses spurned but kept in view,
Hussars on leave, fine and upstanding,
Leap to the fore, gallop and stamp,
Delight the eye, and then decamp. 52
The night has many stars, resplendent,
Moscow has lovely girls on view,
Yet of these friends the moon ascendant
Outshines them all in the deep blue.
And *she*... (I wouldn't dare upset her;
To mute my lyre would be far better...)
Gives off her splendour, casting shade
On every mother, every maid.

With heavenly poise and proud composure
She deigns to tread the earth, and breathes
Profound bliss as her bosom heaves.

Her eyes shine, wondrously ambrosial.

But stop, stop. That's enough from you.

To folly you have paid your due. 53

They shout, laugh, bow and charge through
dances—

Mazurka, gallop, waltz—all night,

But Tanya stands there with two aunties

Behind a pillar out of sight.

She watches things, uncomprehending,

Repelled by this world and its frenzy.

She cannot breathe... And, starry-eyed,

She floats back to the countryside,

Back to the poor folk in their hovels,

To distant parts, secluded nooks

Busy with sparkling, babbling brooks,

Back to her flowers and her novels,

To lines of lime trees dark and grim,

Where she had once encountered *him*. 54

But as her thoughts depart, dispersing

Beyond the guests, the noisy ball,

She is the target of one person,

A most impressive general.

The aunts wink at each other, touching
Tatyana with their elbows, nudging
Her, both of them, and hissing low,
“Look to your left... Quick... There you go.”
“*Where on my left? What’s all this bother?*”
“Oh, never mind... Across there, that’s
The one, leading that group. Two chaps
In uniform... and he’s the other...
He’s off... He stood there, sideways on.”
“That tubby general who’s just gone?” 55
Congratulations on your victory,
Lovely Tatyana, dear young thing!...
But we must change direction quickly
And turn to him of whom I sing...
A subject that’s worth going into:
*I sing an old friend, whom I cling to,
With all his idiosyncrasies.
Bless this, my work, long as it is,
O Muse, thou mother of the epic!
Entrust me with thy rod and staff,
And stand me steady on my path.*
Enough. My burden falls. I let it...
For every classic it seems fit
To pen a *Prologue*. This is it.

CHAPTER EIGHT

*Fare thee well! and if for ever—
Still for ever, fare thee well.*

BYRON

1

Long since, when young and at my gayest,
Through the school gardens I would go,
Lost in the lines of Apuleius,
Having no time for Cicero.

In spring I strolled secluded valleys,
Where swimming swans sang out their chal-
lenge

And waters glistened placidly.

'Twas then the Muse first came to me.

She lit my cell and made it precious,
Spreading before me one great feast
Of youthful fancies new-released,
Singing of boyhood and its pleasures,
Of Russia's glory, and the art

Of building dreams to thrill the heart. 2

The world smiled, finding her disarming.
We soared on wings of young success,
And pleased the elderly Derzhávin,

Who blessed us just before his death.

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Submitting to a special token—
The laws of passion and of whim—
I threw my feelings widely open,
And took my bright Muse where I'd been:
To rowdy feasts and noisy quarrels,
Midnight patrols enforcing morals—
And to these wild, outlandish dos
She brought her talents as a muse.
Revelling like a young bacchante,
She drank with us, sang with good cheer,
And the young bloods of yesteryear
Chased after her, raucous and frantic,
While I turned to my friends with pride,
With this bright mistress at my side. 4

But soon I called off all our meetings,
And fled afar... But she came too.
A ministering muse, she sweetened
The lonely journey I came through
With magic in her secret stories.
She was what Bürger's young Lenore is.
She galloped the Caucasian heights
Along with me in the moonlight.
On the Crimean seashore, roaming,
I knew with her the evening mist,
And heard the sea, the whispered hiss
Of nereids once known to Homer,
The waves with their eternal skirl,
Hymning the Father of the World. 5
The capital fell from her favour
(All glitz and raucous merriment)
And in the sadness of Moldavia
She visited the humble tents
Of wandering tribesmen close to nature,
Where she became a savage creature,
Leaving the language of the gods
For tongues that sounded poor and odd,
And songs the lovely steppe had taught her...
But all of this she soon forgot,
Becoming, in my garden plot,

A rural landowner's young daughter
With sadness in her eyes, intense,
Holding a novelette in French. 6
Now for the first time let us summon
My muse to a smart party. Here,
The charms of this wild-country woman
I watch with jealous pride and fear.
As diplomats crowd through the entry
With soldiers brave and landed gentry,
She glides in past proud party queens
And looks on, sitting there serene,
Enjoying all the crush and clamour,
The gorgeous clothes, the clever talk,
The shuffling guests, queueing to walk
By the young hostess in her glamour,
Ladies with men ranged at their back—
A pretty picture framed in black. 7
She loves the oligarchic order
Which fixes all the verbiage,
The cold conceit in every corner,
The blending in of rank and age.
But who is this among the chosen,
Standing in hazy silence, frozen?
He's like a stranger with no grasp
Of any faces that go past

Like tedious phantoms come to visit.
His face shows pained conceit, or *spleen*.
Which is it, and what does this mean?
Who's this? It's not Yevgeny, is it?
Yevgeny? You're not serious?
It is him, wafted back to us. 8
Is he the same man? Has he mellowed
Or is he the oddball of old?
What has he come back for, this fellow?
How will he play his future role?
Who will he be? Melmoth the wanderer?
Globetrotter? A pro-Russian thunderer?
Childe Harold? Quaker? Hypocrite?
What other likeness could he fit?
Or is he just a fine young person
Like all of us, and just as nice?
Well, anyway, here's my advice:
Old styles call out to be converted.
He's fooled us all since long ago.
So, do you know him? Yes and no. 9
Why are you so unsympathetic
Towards Onegin as a man?
Because we are so energetic
In criticizing all we can?
Charged minds are prone to indiscretion,

Which small, smug nobodies may question
As laughable, offensive smut.
Wit wanders, and will not stay put.
Small talk is cheap, and we too often
Take it for active interest.
Foolishness flaunts its silliness;
Top people thrive on what is rotten.
With mediocrity we blend,
Treating it as our closest friend. 10
Blest he who, as a youth, was youthful,
Blest he who in due time grows old
And steadily becomes more rueful
While finding out that life is cold,
Who entertains no idle fancies,
Who with the rabble takes his chances,
At twenty, dandified hothead,
At thirty profitably wed,
At fifty owing not a penny
To other people or the state,
And who has been prepared to wait
For reputation, rank and money,
Of whom they've said throughout his span
So-and-so's such a lovely man. 11
It's sad that youth turned out so useless,
So futile and perfidious.

How frequently we have traduced her,
And she has disappointed us.
To think we watched our strongest yearnings,
Our purest aspirations, turning
Successively to dark decay,
Like leaves on a wet autumn day.
Unbearable, the future beckons,
With life an endless dining club
With decent membership and grub,
Where others lead and we come second.
At odds with them, we tag along,
Though we share nothing with the throng. 12
Unbearable (you won't deny it)
To suffer many a jibe and slur
From decent folk, who, on the quiet,
Call one an oddball, a poseur,
Or maybe a pathetic madman,
Or a Satanic beast, a bad man,
Even the demon that I drew.
Onegin, to begin anew,
Took off after the fatal duel
With no clear plan, living for kicks,
Until the age of twenty-six—
An idle life with no renewal
Nor anything to which to cling,

Sans work, sans wife, sans everything. 13
He felt a jolt, a sudden flurry,
A longing for a change of air
(The kind of agonizing worry
That few of us would want to bear).
He quitted his estate, thus losing
The woods, the meadows, the seclusion,
The places where a bleeding shade
Arose before him every day,
And set off on sporadic travels,
With one idea to travel for,
But travel soon became a bore—
For travel, like all things, unravels.
He's back "like Chatsky" (someone wrote),
"Straight to the ballroom from the boat." 14
But then the throng was stirred and furrowed,
A whisper shimmered through the hall.
A lady neared the hostess, followed
By an imposing general.
Serenely she came, not stand-offish,
Not talkative, not cold or snobbish,
Devoid of hauteur, not too grand,
Devoid of self-importance, and
Without a trace of facial grimace
Or any ingratiating glance...

Easy and calm in her advance,
She showed herself the very image
Du comme il faut. (Shishkóv, forgive!
I can't translate the adjective.) 15
Ladies came up to her more closely,
The old ones smiled as she went by,
The men bowed lower to her, mostly
Endeavouring to catch her eye.
Girls up ahead lowered their voices.
Tallest of all, and much the haughtiest,
The general then followed her
With nose and shoulders in the air.
No one could say she was a beauty,
But nothing could have been applied
To her that might have been described,
Out of some fashionable duty,
By London's loftiest citizen
As *vulgar*. (Here we go again... 16
This is a favourite expression
That I'm unable to translate.
Because it is quite new in Russia
It hasn't taken—as of late.
In epigrams it could score greatly.)
But—let us go back to our lady.
Her charm was to be wondered at:

Gracing the table, there she sat
With lovely Nina Voronskáya,
Our Cleopatra of the north,
Whose sculpted beauty was not worth
Enough to set her any higher
Than her delightful vis-à-vis,
However stunning she might be. 17

“I don’t believe it,” thinks Yevgeny.

“Not her. Not *her*! It cannot be!

What, that girl from the backwoods?” Strain-
ing

With a voracious eyeglass, he
Homes in and out, keenly exploring
The sight of her, vaguely recalling
Features forgotten ages since.

“I say, who is that lady, Prince,

There in the raspberry-coloured beret,
Near the ambassador from Spain?”

The prince looks once, and looks again.

“You’ve been away from things. Don’t worry.
I’ll introduce you, on my life.”

“Who is she, though?” “She is my wife.” 18

“Married? I didn’t know. Such drama!

Since when?” “Two years back, more or less.”

“Who is she?” “Larina.” “Tatyana?”

“You know her?” “We were neighbours. Yes.”
“Come on then.” And the prince, engaging,
Goes to her and presents Onegin
As a relation and a pal.
She looks. Her eyes seem natural.
Whatever may have stirred her spirit,
However deeply she was shocked,
However wonderstruck or rocked,
Nothing has changed her yet, nor will it.
She kept her former tone somehow,
And gave the normal, formal bow. 19
Indeed, her movements were no quicker,
Her features neither blanched nor blushed,
Her eyelids failed to show a flicker,
Her lips showed not the slightest crush.
Although he gazed and sought to garner
Some vestige of the old Tatyana,
Onegin could see none. He fought
To speak with her—it came to naught;
He could not manage it. She asked him
When he’d arrived, whence had he come.
Could it be where they had come from?
She found her spouse by staring past him
With weary eyes—then she was gone.
Onegin stood there, looking on. 20

Could this have been the same Tatyana
Whom he had faced alone that time
At the beginning of our drama
In such a dead and distant clime,
When he had striven to direct her
In that warm, moralizing lecture?
The same young girl from whom he'd kept
That letter from her heartfelt depths,
So forthright and naively open?
The same girl—was it just a dream?—
He had rejected, who had been
Left lonely, downcast and heartbroken?
How could she have turned out so cold,
So independent and so bold? 21
But soon he leaves the crowded dancing
To drive home, wallowing in thoughts
(All hope of quick sleep being chancy)
Part beautiful but largely fraught.
He wakes... A letter... Oh, that writing...
It is the prince humbly inviting
Him to a soirée. "Her house. Oh!
I must accept, I will, I'll go!"
A nice response is quickly scribbled.
Is this a weird dream? So absurd!
What is this deep thing that has stirred

Within a soul grown old and shrivelled?
Pique? Vanity? Or—heavens above!—
That ailment of the young ones—*love*? 22
Onegin counts the minutes, harassed.
How sluggishly the day has crept!
The clock chimes ten—he's in his carriage,
Flying along, then at the steps.
He comes to see the princess, quaking.
Tatyana is alone and waiting.
They sit together some time, dumb.
Time passes, and the words won't come,
Not from Onegin. He looks awkward
And surly. All that he has said
Is not a real response. His head
Holds but a single thought. Still gawking,
He watches her. She, if you please,
Sits there serenely at her ease. 23
In comes her husband, nicely ending
A most unpleasant tête-à-tête.
Soon, with Onegin, he's remembering
Their jokes and tricks when they were mates.
There's laughter, and guests cut across it
With salty bits of social gossip,
Which lift a conversation that
Tatyana looked on as light chat,

Easy and sparkling, unpretentious,
Now and then turning, it would seem,
To measured thoughts on serious themes,
But not to deep truths or sharp censure.
It flowed on, causing no distress
With its unbridled joyfulness. 24
These talkers are top Petersburgers,
Quality people, *dernier cri*,
And recognizable. These others
Are fools from whom you cannot flee.
Here are some older dames, delightful
In caps and roses, and yet spiteful.
Here are some young girls, all equipped
With frigidly unsmiling lips.
Here, talking politics with passion,
Stands an ambassador. Here too
A greybeard strongly perfumed, who
Tells jokes; his manner is old-fashioned,
With witticisms dry as dust,
Subtle but, nowadays, ludicrous. 25
A man of aphoristic thinking
Says everything's deplorable:
The tea's too sweet, not fit for drinking,
The men are boorish, women dull,
Some novel is too vague and misty,

Some badge has gone to two young sisters.
He rails against the war, the strife,
Journals that lie, the snow, his wife...

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Here is Prolásov, labouring under
The weight of being known as mean;
In every album he has blunted
The pencils used by you, Saint-Priest.
Here stands another ball dictator,
A model for an illustrator,
A pussy-willow babe, pink-faced,
Mute, motionless, tight round the waist.
Here's someone who came unexpected,
An overstarched young blade. The guests,
Much taken by his prettiness,
Smile at behaviour so affected.
The wordless glances slyly cast
Show the shared sentence on him passed. 27
But all that evening my Onegin
Was transfixed by Tatyana, though

He followed not the lovelorn maiden,
Poor, plain and shy, of long ago;
He saw the princess, independent,
A goddess out of reach, resplendent
In royal Russia. As for you,
Good people, you are like unto
Ancestral Eve, our first relation:
What's granted you don't like at all,
You want the serpent's ceaseless call,
The mystic tree that brings temptation...
You must have the forbidden fruit
Or paradise will never suit. 28

This is a deeply changed Tatyana,
Who knows her role from first to last.
She's mastered the constraining manner,
The tight routine of rank and class.
Is that young girl, once sweet and tender,
This paragon of grace and splendour,
This legislatrix of the ball?
And he had held her heart in thrall!
It was for him that, in night's darkness,
Waiting for Morpheus and relief,
She used to grieve her young girl's grief,
Her moonstruck eyes gone dull and sparkless,
Believing in some future dream—

A humble life lived out with him. 29
Love is the master of all ages.
To pure young hearts it is revealed
In little sudden, wholesome rages,
Like spring storms watering the fields;
In streams of passion the fields freshen,
Renewed and ripening. The blessing
Of life's strength germinates new shoots,
Luxuriant growth and sugared fruits.
But in the late and barren season
When life is in decline for us
Dead signs of love are fatuous.
Our autumn tempests, nearly freezing,
Turn meadows into liquid mud
And strip bare the surrounding woods. 30
Alas, there is no doubt: Yevgeny
Loves our Tatyana like a child,
His days and nights devoted mainly
To lovelorn dreams. He is beguiled.
Against the call of reason, gently
Each day he drives up to the entry
Of her house, the glass doors. He woos her,
And like a shadow he pursues her,
Happy to drape around her shoulders
A fluffy boa, or place his warm

Fingers upon her passing arm,
Or ease her forward and control her
Through motley flunkies, or retrieve
Her soft, discarded handkerchief. 31
Tatyana doesn't even notice
His desperate efforts. Neat and prim,
At home she plays the perfect hostess;
When out, she scarcely speaks to him.
A single nod she might award him,
But otherwise she just ignores him.
(Flirtation is now at a stop,
Condemned by people at the top.)
Onegin withers, weak and pallid;
She doesn't see, or doesn't care.
Onegin wastes away. Beware:
Is this consumption? Question valid.
They send him where the doctors are;
The doctors recommend a spa. 32
But he won't go. No, he would rather
Commune with ancestors and plead
For union with them soon. Tatyana,
True to her sex, pays little heed,
While he stands firm and unrelenting.
He hopes, he harasses. If anything,
He gains new strength from weakness, and

Manages with a feeble hand
To pen a heartfelt missive to her
(Though letters, rightly, he esteemed
As meaningless in the extreme).
He was, and played, the anxious wooer,
Agonized, lovelorn and disturbed.

Here is his letter word for word: ONEGIN'S
LETTER TO TATYANA

*I know you're certain to resent
The secret sadness in this message.
I see the bile in your expression,
Your proud eyes brimming with contempt!
What do I want? What is my purpose
In coming to you to confess?
Does this allow you to feel virtuous
While revelling in vindictiveness?*

*We met by chance one day, and Venus
Lit up a spark of warmth between us,
Though I could not believe in it,
Spurning good sense for no good reason,
Obsessed by loathsome thoughts of freedom
In which I would not yield one bit.
Another thing that separates us
Is Lensky, wretched victim, dead...
From everything the heart holds sacred*

*I tore myself away, and fled,
From each and everybody running,
Thinking that being calm and free
Would pass for happiness. Dear me,
How wrong I was, how harshly punished!*

*Now, minutes spent with you I prize,
The merest chance to trail behind you,
To see you smile and watch your eyes,
To launch a loving glance and find you,
To listen to your voice, to see
Fulfilment in your perfect spirit,
To faint and fade in agony—
This is my pain; my bliss lies in it.*

*But I'm denied that. All I do
Is shamble after you at random,
Pledging dear hours, dear days to you.
To futile tedium I abandon
Days measured out to me by Fate;
They cloy and oversatiate.
My day is done—time gives due warning—
But, yearning to prolong my stay,
I must be certain every morning
That I'll see you during the day.*

*I fear this humble supplication
Will strike your dark, discerning eye*

*As shabby, sly and calculating,
And I can hear your angry cry.
If you but knew my ghastly torment,
My weary heart, my thirst for love,
My hope that reason, one fine moment,
Might cool the boiling of my blood...
I would fall down before you, choking
And sobbing, while I hug your knees,
Outpouring all that could be spoken—
Reproaches, declarations, pleas...
But, no, with simulated froideur
I gird my gaze and speech, and try
To chat and look you in the eye,
Like one who goes from glad to gladder.*

*That's it. I cannot fight myself;
I have no stomach for the battle.
The die is cast. Now nothing matters.
My fate's with you, and no one else. 33*
No answer comes. In swift resumption
He sends a second note, a third.
No answer... One day, at some function
He enters... and runs into... *her*,
Straight opposite. She, strict and sombre,
Ignores him. Not a word comes from her.
Oh dear, she has been crystallized

In January's coldest ice.
As if to stifle indignation,
She stands with tightness in her lips.
Onegin gawps. His eyes are gripped—
Where is her sympathy, her patience?
Where are the tear stains? Not a trace.
Only annoyance on that face, 34
And possibly a secret worry
That her spouse, or the world, might guess
Her bygone lapse, her youthful folly,
All that Onegin knows... Oh, yes,
His hopes are dashed! He sets off, cursing
The dark, demented disconcertion
Which leaves him now so deeply hurt...
And, once again, he shuns the world.
Back in his silent study, brooding,
He called to mind how things had been
In those days when a kind of spleen
Had stalked the brash world and pursued him,
Collaring him, locking him in hell,
Abandoned in an unlit cell. 35
He now reads anything: not only
The works of Gibbon and Rousseau,
Herder and Chamfort and Manzoni,
Madame de Staël, Bichat, Tissot,

But also, keeping things eclectic,
Of Fontenelle and Bayle, the sceptic,
And Russians, specially perhaps,
Rejecting nothing by our chaps,
As well as almanacs and journals
All sermonizing, smart and slick,
In which today *I* get some stick
In bits and pieces, fancy-worded,
About me, published now and then.

E sempre bene, gentlemen. 36

So what? His eyes may have been reading,
But he was miles away in thought;
Daydreams, desires and hapless pleadings
Rendered him soul-destroyed, distraught.
He read between the lines as printed;
In spirit, though, his eyes were glimpsing
Some other lines; he was immersed
Deeply in these lines from the first.
These were the stuff of myth and legend
With age-old, well-loved, secret themes,
Of random, unconnected dreams,
And threats, tales, promises and pledges,
Or letters that had been conveyed
To his hands from a sweet young maid. 37
But gradually his thoughts and feelings

Were lulled to sleep, and from afar
Imagination came forth, dealing
Him images like playing cards.
First, melting snow... Then something odder,
A figure like a sleeping lodger,
A rigid youth resting his head.
And then a voice... “Let’s look... He’s dead.”
Now he sees enemies forgotten,
Vile gossips, even viler rats,
A swarm of women, faithless cats,
Companions altogether rotten,
And then the house, the window sill,
And always *her*... She stands there still. 38
Soon this was so familiar to him
He almost lost his mind. He seemed
Almost inclined to write some poems.
(Oh what a thrill that would have been!)
Yes, moved by forces called “galvanic”,
He’d gone through Russian verse mechanics
And almost mastered form and line—
A student (uninspired) of mine.
He looked a poet to the letter
When he sat in his corner seat
And, by the hearth in all the heat,
Hummed ‘Idol Mio’... ‘Benedetta’...

And in the fire he sometimes dropped
Slipper or journal with a plop. 39
The days raced by, and frozen winter
Found warmer air was to be had.
He wrote no poems for the printer,
He did not die, did not go mad.
Spring energized him. One clear morning
He left his closed rooms without warning,
Abandoning the places where
He'd hibernated like a bear.
Fleeing the hearth and double windows,
He speeds the Neva in a sleigh.
The sunlight aims its dancing rays
At blocks of blue ice, slabs and splinters,
At streets of dirty, churned-up snow.
But racing on, where will he go, 40
Onegin? Your guess, incidentally,
Is right—you see this as it is.
My unreformable eccentric
Rushed to Tatyana's—she was his.
Once in (looking like a dead body),
He meets with no one in the lobby,
The hall, or further in—there's not
A soul. On through the next door. What
Now stops him in his tracks? He's met her—

Here is the princess, much distressed,
Sitting there, pallid and half-dressed,
Engrossed in what looks like a letter.
Tears tumble down her face in streaks,
And one hand underpins her cheek. 41
Who could have failed to see Tatyana
In that quick spell of mute distress,
The former girl in a new drama,
Poor Tanya, in the new princess?
Oozing regret, half-crazed and straining,
Before her feet he fell, Yevgeny.
She shuddered, speechless, but her eyes
Glared at Onegin, unsurprised
And not vindictively, not raging...
His eyes, so lifeless and careworn,
His pleading pose, his silent scorn—
She sees it all. The country maiden
Felt dreams and thoughts of yesteryear
Restored to life again in her. 42
Tatyana leaves Onegin kneeling.
She stares; her focus never slips,
Her hand is cold, devoid of feeling;
She leaves it on his hungry lips...
Where are her dreams? Are they inspiring?...
Time passes in the lonely silence.

And then she speaks in a low hiss.
“Enough. Stand up. Listen to this.
I need to speak to you directly.
Do you recall that garden walk
Destined for us to meet and talk,
Where I endured your moral lecture
Because I was so young and meek?
Well now it’s my turn. I shall speak. 43
Back then, Onegin, I was younger,
And no doubt better-looking too.
I loved you with a young girl’s hunger,
And what did I receive from you?
An answer grim and supercilious.
Isn’t that true? You were familiar
With love from shy girls none too old.
And still today my blood runs cold
When I recall that dreadful sermon
And your cold eyes... But I don’t say
You did me wrong that awful day.
No, you did well. You were determined
To treat me nicely from the start.
I thank you now with all my heart. 44
In those days, hidden in the country,
Far from cheap gossip, you felt cold
Towards me. Now you have the effrontery

To persecute me and make bold!
Why have you picked me for a target?
Am I now such a better bargain
At this new social level, which
Makes me well known as well as rich?
Is it my husband, a war hero
With court connections and some fame?
Or would you just enjoy my shame,
To make sure you got noticed, merely
To stand out in the world of style,
And bask in glory for a while? 45
Excuse these tears... Let me direct you
To memories within our reach...
I'd sooner bear your stinging lecture,
The chilling tenor of your speech
(If I had some choice in this matter,)
Than all of your impassioned patter,
Your longing letters and your tears.
I'd keep the dreams of my young years—
In those days you displayed some pity,
Consideration for my youth.
But now! What brings you here to stoop
Beneath my feet? What jot or tittle?
How could *your* heart and mind somehow
Become slaves to emotion now? 46

For me this world of pomp and glamour,
These trappings of a life I loathe,
Social success with all its clamour,
Fine house, the soirées that I hold—
What do they mean to me, Onegin?
I'd give up this mean masquerading,
The blare, the glitter and the fumes,
And go back to our humble rooms,
A shelf of books, the rambling garden,
Those country places that I knew,
Where for the first time I met you,
The graveyard of our dear departed...
Where there's a cross, and branches shade
My poor beloved Nanny's grave. 47
But happiness was standing next to us,
So very close! Now everything
Is fixed for me. I've been impetuous,
Or maybe that's what people think.
My mother wept, begged and besought me,
I didn't care what fortune brought me;
It made no difference, yes or no.
I married. Now, I beg you, go.
Please leave me. Do as you are bidden.
I know your heart will be your guide
With all its honour and its pride.

I do love you—that can't be hidden—
But now that I'm another's wife,
I shall stay faithful all my life." 48
She left the room. Yevgeny, reeling,
Stands thunderstruck before the burst
Of tumult and tempestuous feeling
In which his heart is now immersed.
But what is this? Spurs jingling gently,
Tatyana's husband makes his entry...
Acute embarrassment is nigh.
But here, dear reader, you and I
Shall leave him, and our separation
Will last... for ever. Far have we
Meandered in close company,
But that's enough. Congratulations—
We're home at last! Let's shout, "Hooray!"
Not before time, I hear you say. 49
Dear reader, be you friend or foeman,
My feeling now is that we ought
To part in friendship and good odour.
Goodbye. Whatever you have sought
In reading through these trivial stanzas—
Memory's wild extravaganzas,
A break from work, artistic strokes,
Or silly little witty jokes,

Or, it may be, mistakes of grammar—
God grant within this book you find
For love, fun or a dreaming mind,
Or for the journalistic hammer,
Some crumb at least. Now you and I
Must go our separate ways. Goodbye! 50
And you, my wayfaring companion,
Goodbye. Goodbye, the vision pure.
Goodbye, my small work of long standing.
Along with you I've kept secure
All things that could delight a poet.
Flight from the stormy world—I know it;
Good conversation—it is mine.
The days have flown... It's a long time
Since Tanya, youthful and reflective,
With my Onegin next to her,
Came to me in a dreamy blur.
My novel had a free perspective;
Hard though I scanned my crystal ball,
I couldn't make it out at all. 51
And what of those good friends who listened
To my first stanzas freshly made?
"Some are no more, and some are distant,"
As Sadi said. Without their aid
Onegin's portrait has been painted.

What of the girl who first acquainted
Me with Tatyana, perfect, pure?...
Fate steals things from us, that's for sure!...
Blest he who leaves a little early
Life's banquet without eating up
Or seeing the bottom of his cup,
Who drops his novel prematurely,
Bidding it suddenly adieu,
As I Yevgeny Onegin do.
THE END

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