**Eugene Onegin–Canto the First**

**Introduction**

**Note from the Waiter at the Red Square Café**

My name is Alan D. Corré:
I'll be your dragoman today.
If “dragoman” is hard for you,
The word “interpreter” will do.
“Translator” would not be quite right,
Because I have retained the right \*
At times to be a little free,
Just out of bear necessity,
Because the Russian language rhyme
Will not work out most of the time.
A. Pushkin is so very clever,
I’m well aware that my endeavor
Will only give the merest taste
Of his great work. But what a waste
You didn’t spend the last ten years
In learning Russian (mid some tears.)
So if my effort fails to please,
Pray harken to my earnest pleas
And study Russian. It’s worthwhile.
Read the original and smile!
Oh, by the way, I am a Brit.
I wouldn’t think to mention it,
But if my rhymes are sometimes odd
Call on a nearby British bod
To read it to you. You will see
In his clipped speech it rhymes–nicely.

\*(This rhyme is good enough for me
’Cause Pushkin uses it, you see.)

**Canto the First**

I

“My uncle, long a prince among
The upright, got so very ill.
But honors of the highest rung
He asked for, and he got his fill.
His model men came to adore.
But, oh my goodness! what a bore
To sit with uncle night and day,
And never from his bedside stray!
What an awful, low-down scene
His half-dead person to amuse,
Arrange his pillows, and to choose
Lugubriously his medicine,
While sighing in sad undertones:
‘When will old Nick consume your bones?’”

II

Thus thought this scamp, the patent heir
Of all his forbears, by decree
Of Zeus, as through the dusty air
He rode a stagecoach for a fee.
O friends of Ruslan and Ludmilla![[1]](#footnote-1)
Be pleased to meet this gallant feller,
The hero of my humble tale
Without ado and without fail:
Eugene Onegin, my good friend,
Came to this world on Neva's bank,
Where maybe one time you too sank
Your roots, or bright refulgence send.
There formerly I also strolled,
But cannot bear that northern cold.

III

His father lived in debt, you see,
And threw three grand balls every year.
He served extremely nobly,
But bankruptcy at last came near.
Eugene was saved by kindly Fate,
*Madame[[2]](#footnote-2)* watched o’er him, soon and late.
*Monsieur* then took the tutor's seat–
The child was sharp, but very sweet.
*Monsieur l'Abbé,* a Frenchman halt,[[3]](#footnote-3)
Did not much care to tire the child,
His way with him was always mild,
Reproved in him no moral fault,
His youthful pranks he'd overlook,
And take him to a pleasure nook.[[4]](#footnote-4)

IV

To Eugene, now a stylish lad,
There came his young, rebellious years,
His time of hopes and longings sad.
*Monsieur* they threw out on his ears.
Onegin now is fully free!
His locks are styled so modishly!
He entered high society,
A London toff for all to see.
His language was the tongue of France;
He spoke and wrote it as one should.
The gracious bow he understood.
A light mazurka he could dance.
What more to say? Society said
That he was smart, and *so* well-bred.

V

We all of us have set our mind
To study something or another.
In erudition, God being kind,
To seem to shine is no great bother.
Of many people it’s the view–
Of judgment strict, decisive too–
Onegin’s brain is nothing great,
But he can freely spew a spate
Of learned words (he knows a lot)
Anent whatever thing you please–
Parades opinions like a breeze,
Stays quiet when things get really hot–
Delights the women with a flow
Of unexpected, sharp bons mots.

VI

The day of Latin has now passed.
So if it's truth we want to tell,
His Latin reached the point at last
To parse the epigraphs quite well.
He finished letters up with “Vale!”[[5]](#footnote-5)
Discussed a Juvenalian[[6]](#footnote-6) sally;
And could repeat a verse or two
Of Virgil (with mistakes.) He knew
He had no love for research notes,
To rummage in the trash of time
To get a backward glimpse sublime
Of history. But anecdotes
From Romulus to our own day
He kept in mind and could relay.

VII

Onegin saw no reason why
He should give life for poetry.
He could not tell, though he might try,
An iambus from a trochee.
He brushed off Homer, Theocrit,[[7]](#footnote-7)
Preferred to study Adam Smith,[[8]](#footnote-8)
Became a scholar deep and sage
In economics. He could gauge
The reason nations great wealth found,
On what they lived, the answer why
They need no gold to multiply
When simple products are around.
His father could not understand
Him; took a mortgage on his land.

VIII

The other things which Eugene knew
I have no time to tell you here.
But one hard science he could do,
And in that one he had no peer.
For him it was, from youngest days,
A labor, torture, cause for praise–
For every day it would possess
Onegin’s dreary idleness–
The science that I mean was fond,
Strong passion of which Naso[[9]](#footnote-9) sang,
And came to end his Sturm und Drang
A suffering rebel held in bond
In Moldau’s steppes, not Italy,
Far from the place he longed to see.

IX
…

X

He early learned hypocrisy,
Disbelieved and made believe,
Concealed a hope, felt jealousy,
Appeared indifferent or attentive.
Now somber, sad, or bored to death,
Now proud, now humbly holding breath,
He could be silent languidly,
Or eloquent most ardently.
To billets doux he would not render
Homage; liked this, savored that,
And took with them a little nap.
His gaze was sometimes quick, now tender,
Now shy, now bold. Once in a while
A docile tear would chase his smile.

XI

Contemporary man is he!
His grim despair could terrify.
He jokes about virginity,
Amuses with fine flattery,
Emotion senses, straightway clears
The prejudice of virgin years;
By sense and passion ardently
Demands attention instantly.
He overhears the heart’s first cry,
Then love pursues, and with a sigh
A rendezvous gets presently;
And after that a darkling date,
While giving lessons tête-à-tête!

XII

Young as he was, he troubled sore
The hearts of regular coquettes.
His rival he would swiftly floor
With bitter venom; and he gets
The meed of spiteful words and snares
Gainst any man who rashly dares
Oppose him. Husbands, unaware,
Remained his friends without a care.
A crafty spouse would fondle him–
A longtime student of Faublas[[10]](#footnote-10)–
Or yet a hoary head grandpa–
A cuckold with his horns so trim–
Were all quite ready (’pon my life!)
To offer dinner–and the wife!

XIII XIV

…

XV

Behold our Eugene yet abed.
The invitations come apace.
“What, who’s inviting now?” he said.
Three missives summon to their place.
A soirée there, a party here–
So childish, but he must appear.
Where shall he start? Unhappy he!
To take them all just cannot be.
Meantime, he dons his morning coat;
A high hat places on his head.
His horse the boulevard will tread,
And freely range till Eugene note
(Helped by his vigilant bréguet[[11]](#footnote-11))
That time has come for lunch today.

XVI

Night fell. He climbs into the sleigh.
“Gee up!” The driver’s cry rings out.
His beaver collar’s silver-gray
With icy dust from winter's clout.
He hastes to Talon’s dining rooms;
Kaverin’s presence there assumes.
He enters: corks to ceiling fly
Like comets with a tail they hie
Of bubbly. Roast beef, bloody, hot–
Luxurious truffles for young years–
The best of French cuisine appears!
And Strasbourg pies which never rot,
Sharp Limburger, a living[[12]](#footnote-12) cheese,
And golden pineapples that please.

XVII

His thirst demands another cup
To cut the steaks’ and chops’ hot fat.
His bréguet, though, now wakes him up:
The new ballet is where it’s at!
Onegin runs to see the show:
His word there’s law, or yes or no.
They know all his inconstancies:
He loves and leaves the actresses,
A denizen of each backstage.
The audience will shout: Hurrah!
Be quick to cheer an entrechat,[[13]](#footnote-13)
Heckle Phaedra,[[14]](#footnote-14) show their rage
At Cleopatra; Moëna call
Just to hear his voice; that’s all.

XVIII

Land of enchantment! Years ago,
Bold lord of satire Fonvizin[[15]](#footnote-15)
Shone forth in quest of freedom so
Likewise too did Knyazhnin.
There Ozerov shared plaudits wild
(As people wept while yet they smiled).
Young Semenova also thrived.
There's our Katenin who revived
The glorious talent of Corneille;[[16]](#footnote-16)
There’s Shakhovskóy with biting wit
Played comedies and made a hit.
There Didelot[[17]](#footnote-17) was distingué.
And I too frequented the plays,
And in the wings spent my best days.

XIX

My goddesses! What's up? Where are you?
To my despondent voice give heed.
Are you still there? Do others bar you,
Replace you, to your throne succeed?
Your choruses I long to hear–
I long to see a dancer near
Perform with Russian soul ablaze
Her flights. Or will my saddened gaze
Familiar sights see nevermore?
Shall I then raise a tart lorgnette,
A joyless viewer of this set
That's little other than a bore?
A wordless yawn can I suppress,
When I recall long gone success?

XX

The theater’s full! Its boxes glitter,
The pit and stalls resound with bustle,
The gallery is all a-twitter.
They raise the curtain with a rustle.
There half-above and half-below
Obedient to the magic bow
Stands splendid Istomina. Lo!
Her nymphs around her nimbly go.
With one sure foot she touches ground,
And now she leaps and now she flies,
As down flies up when Aeol[[18]](#footnote-18) sighs.
Her other foot then spins around,
Her body twists and then unwinds,
As one swift leg its fellow finds.

XXI

They all applaud. Here comes Eugene:
Thwart patrons’ knees he pushes by.
His glass surveys askance the scene,
For dames unknown now meet his eye.
The circles all next bear his gaze:
Their raiment, faces, vile displays
Displease him. To the men he bows
Around, and then his eyes allows
Distractedly to view the stage.
He turns aside, begins to yawn
And says: “’Tis time for a new dawn,
Ere boring ballet make me rage.
’Tis far too long! I’ve had enough!
E’en Didelot I would rebuff!”

XXII

And while the Cupids, devils, snakes
Upon the stage cavort and roar,
The fur-wrapt lackey slily takes
His forty winks at entrance door.
The servants keep on stamping, flapping,
Coughing, shushing, blowing, clapping;
The lanterns shine out everywhere,
Outside, inside, and here and there.
The horses, frozen in such weather,
Are frantic, champing at the bit;
The coachmen round a bright fire sit,
And curse their lords, clap hands together.
Onegin leaves all this behind–
He hurries home, fresh clothes to find.

XXIII

Will you permit me to display
The solitary easement lieu,
Wherein my model protegé
Is dressed, undressed, and dressed anew?
Behold the whims on every side
Punctilious London can provide,
All sent to us through forests lush
And Baltic waves and northern slush.
Behold all things so à la mode
From Paris, tasteful, comforting,
De luxe and languid, disporting,
Contrived to furnish this abode.
Such beauty as is seldom seen,
All for our hero, age eighteen.

XXIV

Lo, ambered pipes from Tsaregrad,
And china, bronze too, on a table;
Of coddled sense the comfort glad–
Perfumes enclosèd in cut crystal;
Some little combs and little clippers,
And straight and crooked little scissors;
And tiny brushes to the tale
Of thirty, for the tooth and nail.
Oh, by the way, our good Rousseau
Could not conceive how pompous Grimm[[19]](#footnote-19)
Durst clean his nails in front of him!
(Grimm’s eloquent and mad, you know.)
In this Rousseau who loved the right,
I’m sad to say just wasn’t right.[[20]](#footnote-20)

XXV

You can be fully sensible,
Yet think about your lovely nails.
Why fight the times, though risible?
Among mankind *the rule* prevails.
Like Chadaev, my friend Eugene
By jealous eyes might well be seen.
He greatly feared his neighbor’s gaze,
So was a dandy in his ways.
Three hours daily he would spend
With looking-glasses, more or less;
Immaculate went out in dress,
Like vesperal Venus at the end,
When, putting on her male array,
She gives a heavenly display.

XXVI

I have just drawn your nosey gaze
To toilets of the latest rage.
And clothing of the newest craze
I might describe upon this page.
But I’ve a problem. Pray forgive–
I have no good alternative–
The words *gilet, froc, pantalon*,[[21]](#footnote-21)
Are absent from my Russian tongue.[[22]](#footnote-22)
My style, already poor enough,
Will be yet worse, if I should use
These foreign words to state my views,
And you would surely think it rough.
The dictionaries I might search,
But still they leave me in the lurch.

XXVII

Is that our subject? Not at all.
So let’s grab too a hired coach,
Like Eugene, rushing to the ball,
All headlong, hurrying, abroach.
We pass the sleepy houses dark,
Along the street, so silent, stark.
The lanterns of the carriage bright
Pour out a cheerful, happy light,
And make small rainbows on the snow.
Look, see right there a splendid home,
Strewn with lampions in the gloam.
Past solid windows profiles go;
We get a hasty aperçu
Of dolled-up cranks, and ladies too.

XXVIII

Our hero in the entrance hall
Flew like an arrow past the guard,
Ran up the steps marmoreal.
His hand ensured his locks weren't marred.
A dance floor full of folk he found;
The music had begun to sound.
A Polish dance engaged the crowd;
The throng was huge, the music, loud.
The horse guards’ spurs made merry ring.
Dear women threw their legs around,
As–not to their surprise–they found
The men were frankly ogling.
The modish women’s jealous hum
By violins was rendered dumb.

XXIX

In my young days of love and fun,
I went bananas for a ball.
But memoirs here must stay undone–
So seek no notes amatorial.
O venerable married folk!
Your gratitude I shall evoke.
Pray listen to my caution wise;
Indulge me while I sermonize.
You mothers, watch your daughters well,
And to their steps direct your eyes.
Binoculars do not despise!
*Me* don't suspect; no harm befell.
To think like *that* would be absurd.
It's been a long time since I erred.

XXX

Alas, amusements manifold
Took up the large part of my time.
Were I by custom uncontrolled,
For me the ball would still be prime.
I love the joy of youthfulness,
The crowd, the shout of happiness,
And women’s well thought-out attire.
I love their legs. You might aspire
To find in Mother Russia three
Pairs of shapely legs. You won't.
Despite the passing time, I don't
Forget *one* pair; they trouble me.
Now chilled and sad, I lose my sleep;
I think of them–and I must weep.

XXXI

Ah when, and past what Rubicon,
O crazy man, will you forget?
Those lovely limbs–where have they gone?
Are last spring’s flowers with us yet?
By eastern luxury possessed,
Your sole wish was to be caressed
By carpets soft. You left no trace
On northern snows to bring your face
Before me. Oh, how long ago
For you I might forget the thirst
For praise and glory. And I durst
Both liberty and home[[23]](#footnote-23) forgo.
Did young joy vanish undeplored,
Like your light footprint on the sward?

XXXII

Diana’s breast, the cheeks of Flora,
Dear friends, are wonderful for me.
But yet, the leg of Terpsichóre[[24]](#footnote-24)
Is just the best that there can be.
It promises untold reward
For him who holds it in regard.
A wilful swarm of hot desire
Flies in, its beauty to admire.
Elvina, friend, I love it both
In spring, on meadows gaily prancing,
And to the winter hearth advancing,
Or even ’neath a tablecloth–
On shiny parquet let it be,
Or on the crags beside the sea.

XXXIII

Before a storm I saw that sea,
Whose waves were lapping at her feet.
Those undulations running free
I envied as they rushed to greet
Her. How I wanted with my lips
To touch her dear legs at their tips!
Never, mid the ardent days
Of my excited youth ablaze
Did I so long with such great pain
To kiss the lips of a young maid–
Or roses on her cheeks displayed–
Or breast held back with coy disdain–
For never did a burst of passion
Enkindle me in such a fashion.

XXXIV

And this event occurs to me–
In my most cherished, secret dreams,
I hold a stirrup, joyful, happy,
To place her foot. To me it seems
My fevered fancy boils again.
Her touch ignites my heart, and then,
Though it be drooping, heavy, sad,
I feel again those pangs I had.
Yet to exalt a haughty dame
With tuneful lyre and poems sweet,
It does not pay! It is not meet!
She is not worth your passion's flame!
Let not her words or legs entice–
She'll captivate you in a trice.

XXXV

What of Eugene? Why, half asleep,
He leaves the ball to seek his bed.
But Petersburg can no more sleep,
The drum roll rouses it instead.
The merchant wakes, the peddler plies,
To stock exchange the cabby hies.
The milkmaid[[25]](#footnote-25) with her pitcher goes,
Her feet crunch in auroral snows.
The pleasant noise of morning hums,
The shutters open, chimney smoke
Rises blue, as fires they stoke.
In cotton cap a baker comes,
A German stickler to his bones,
Who *Was ist das?[[26]](#footnote-26)* now oft intones.

XXXVI

But by that noisy ball undone,
And dawn as midnight having made,
This child of pleasure and of fun
Sleeps peacefully in blissful shade,
To wake up shortly after noon,
Resume his routine all too soon–
A life monotonous though gay;
Tomorrow’s just like yesterday!
Yes, in the flower of his youth,
Was my Eugene rejoicing, free,
A lord of splendid victory,
Of daily pleasure rounds, in truth?
Amid the feasts was he content,
And carefree, when on revels bent?

XXXVII

No. Early on his feelings cooled.
Society's din disgusted him.
The thought of women no more ruled
Him. Beauties were not now his whim.
Adultery was bothersome;
Friends, yea friendship, troublesome.
And soon he came e’en to despise
The beefsteaks and the Strasbourg pies,
And cracking bottles of champagne
Or uttering delightful darts
Whenas in truth his poor head smarts.
Though so adept at raising Cain
He only wished he could forget
The duel,[[27]](#footnote-27) the sword, the pistolet.

XXXVIII

Now let’s decide just what we mean–
And let’s agree that we must wonder–
Why Eugene got the English “spleen“,
Or what, in Russian, we call “khandra.”[[28]](#footnote-28)
It overtook him bit by bit–
Thank God, he was not killed by it–
Nor did he try to shoot himself,
But he lost hope in life itself.
Like Byron’s Harold,[[29]](#footnote-29) he was sad.
When he came to the drawing room,
Nothing moved him, full of gloom.
No waltz or gossip made him glad,
No loving glance, endearing sigh
Could now suffice to catch his eye.

XXXIX XL XLI
…
…

XLII

Strange ladies of the upper crust!
He left you first of everyone.
For in our day we surely must
Agree there’s boredom in high tone.
Once in a while a special lady
Expounding [[30]](#footnote-30), de-
Lights him. As a general rule,
Their small talk’s only for a fool.
Moreover, they’re so very chaste,
Immaculate, and oh so lofty,
So prudent, full of piety,
So circumspect, with wisdom graced.
A man's approach they find obscene–
Just look at them and get the spleen!

XLIII

And you young beauties, who, of late,
Were driving in a droshky bold
With my Eugene to have a date
Along the cobbled streets of old
St. Petersburg–he left, and fled,
A convert from the ardent bed.
Onegin, closeted at home,
Yawned, and set about a tome.
He fain would write, but has no clue
How irksome work can be. So then
Just nothing issued from his pen.
Nor did he join the favored few,
To judge whose work I must decline
Because their fate is linked with mine.

XLIV

Anew consigned to idleness,
He set himself the worthy aim

(Beset by mental emptiness)
To grasp the thought of men of fame.
He bought up every work on sale,
And read and read, to no avail.
All’s boredom and deceit and raving–
And lack of conscience, bad behaving.
Replete were books with different views,
The old was obsolete. The new
Raved in just the same way too.
Books, like women, he can't use…
And so his books (now food for moth)
He covered with funereal cloth.

XLV

I made friends with him at that time;
Society’s yoke I tossed like him.
The fuss just wasn’t worth a dime.
I liked his type, his every whim,
So willy-nilly dreaming free,
Of strange originality–
A sharp and quite cool-headed guy.
Though *he* was sad, frustrated I.
The game of passion we both know;
We both have felt life’s torturous bite.
Our hearts’ fires both are burning low;
And both of us await the spite
Of people, and of blindfold Fate
All from the very earliest date.

XLVI

Who ponders life must needs despise
The human race within his heart.
And if he feels, the shades arise
Of days which hastened to depart.
His charm has left him–oh, how fast!
A reverie remains at last.
Regret, repentance gnaw at him,
A fact which well may add some vim
To conversation. Yet, at first,
Onegin’s talk confused me, nursed
Acceptance of his very worst
Aggresiveness, as when he cursed
His rival with a half-wry joke–
Or sadly lampooned various folk!

XLVII

How often of a summer’s day
We shared a contemplative drink,
As clear and bright the night sky lay
O’er Neva,[[31]](#footnote-31) shining like a rink,
A merry mirror unreflecting,
The pale moon's visage not deflecting.
Our youthful pranks long left behind
And puppy love we called to mind,
Passionately, of dull care free
Again. O breath of happy nights!
Just like a convict granted sights
Of leafy dale somnolently,
So were we carried in our dream
Right to the start of our life’s stream.

XLVIII

Onegin, moved, plagued by regret,
“He stands as on a slab of granite”
Wrapped up in thought, he stays there yet,
As told us by a famous poet.[[32]](#footnote-32)
Now all was still, save for the chime
Of clocks which counted out the time;
Or, list! a droshky’s distant blare
Is heard on a main thoroughfare;
Or save the oars’ swish, as a boat
Sails boldly thru the slumberous stream,
And from afar to hear we seem
Of sailor’s horn the startling note.
Yet sweeter, mid nocturnal joys
Was Torkvatov’s melodious noise.

XLIX

The Adriatic’s surf and shore–
O Brenta![[33]](#footnote-33) *you* I shall yet see.
And filled with inspiration more
Your magic voice will come to me,
So sacred to Apollo’s[[34]](#footnote-34) seed
Through the proud lyre of Albion’s[[35]](#footnote-35) breed,
Yet known to me; it is my own.
Italian nights of golden tone
I'll yet enjoy, at will, at large,
With a Venetian sweet and young,
Now talkative, now holding tongue,
As we float on a secret barge.
With her my lips will seek to prove
The tongue of Petrarch[[36]](#footnote-36) and of love.

L

When will my hour bring liberty?
Its time has come, it must not fail.
Fair days awaiting by the sea,
I beckon to each passing sail.
Beneath the storms’ bright canopy,
Athwart the parting of the sea,
When shall I start my easy race?
’Tis time to leave this boring place
With traits unfriendly to my eye;
So, washed by ripples of the south,
My Afric[[37]](#footnote-37) skies will slake my drouth.
For gloomy Russia then I’ll sigh.
For there I loved and there I bled;
And there my heart lies burièd.

LI

Eugene and I prepared to see
Together foreign wonderlands;
But we were destined soon to be
Long parted, and not see those strands.
For then his father passed away.
A pack of greedy debtors say:
“Pay up!” Each one of them had cause
To get some money by the laws.
Onegin hated legal suits
And was accepting of his lot.
He gave the creditors all what
He had. He didn't give two hoots.
His uncle’s death–perhaps he thought–
Would leave him, one day, quite unfraught.

LII

To him, in fact, there swiftly came
A steward’s notice telling him
His uncle’s dying–what a shame!–
And would be happy seeing him.
On reading of this sad event
Onegin hurried up and went,
And started right away to yawn
At all the boredom it would spawn,
Prepared himself for sighs, deceit,
And tedium (please see verse one.)
His voyage to his uncle done
He found him just about to meet
His savior, lying on a slab,
For Mother Earth a victim drab.

LIII

He found a courtyard brimming full
Of servants. Friend and foe alike
Came flocking to the funeral
From every side without mislike.
The dear deceased they swiftly sank.
The priests and guests all ate and drank,
And after gravely took their leave,
Content with what they could achieve.
Now, our Eugene, a city lad,
Holds, in fee simple, forests, streams,
Lands, factories–although he seems
A feckless squanderer quite bad;
He's well contented that his trip
Has placed such prospects in his grip.

LIV

The lonely fields and gloomy chill
Of oaken forests seemed quite new
Two days. But soon the quiet rill
Murmured pointless in his view.
The third day, grove and land and hill
No longer could engage or thrill.
Already, they evoked a yawn,
And on him it began to dawn
That boredom you could find here too;
Nor palaces nor streets you'll see,
No cards, no balls, no poetry.
Miss Spleen awaited him anew,
Ran after him just like a shade
Or like a real-life clinging maid.

LV

Oh, I was born for calmer life
For rural peace, tranquillity.
In country verse there is less strife,
And dreams have creativity.
I pass a solitary lake;
Amusements my diversions make,
For *far niente[[38]](#footnote-38)* is my saw.
Each morning early 'tis my law
To wake betimes to liberty,
Read but a little–or sleep late–
Care naught for glory–let men prate!
In early years (do you not see?)
I spent in shaded idleness
Those happiest days which I still bless.

LVI

O Flowers, Cupid, Idleness!
O Country Fields, my soul is thine!
A difference, I must express
Between Onegin’s traits and mine.
So, reader dear, should you deride–
Or should some publisher provide
A libel of complexity–
By checking my identity,
Devoid of shame, you'll not repeat
That he “wrote down his own portrait,
Like Byron, prideful and ornate,
Since he cannot achieve the feat
To write his verse about another–
Himself he sings, and no one other!”

LVII

All poets, I confide to you,
Are best of friends with dreamy love.
Those darlings, whom I fain would woo,
I dreamed of, and each precious dove
Was stored in spirit in my mind,
And later would my muse unbind
Her memory. I sang of both
Girls from the hills and was not loth
To mention those of Salhyr’s[[39]](#footnote-39) shore.
Dear friends, you often question me:
“To whom refers your poetry?
Of whom are you the servitor?
Among your jealous little friends?
To which of them your fancy tends?

LVIII

“Whose ardent glance gave impetus
Unto your sad and pensive song?
Did she give you a fond caress?
To whom does all your verse belong?”
The answer: “None, in very truth.”
Alarms insane and without ruth
Of love assaulted me. How blessed
Who adds to love within his breast
A fevered rhyme to magnify
By sacred poetry his rave!
So Petrarch did, and he could save
The tortures of his heart thereby.
Great glory to his Muse would come.
But I was stupid, foolish–dumb!

LIX

My Muse appeared when love passed by;
My darkened mind was free again.
By wizardry I sought to tie
Sounds, feelings, thoughts in one refrain.
I write: my heart is now so light.
My sleeping pen cannot indite
Unfinished lines poetical
Of women's legs, heads–not at all.
Can burned out ashes blaze once more?
I grieve, but have no room for tears.
The tempest’s trace now disappears
And is extinguished at my core.
That’s how I started to contrive
A song in cantos twenty-five.

LX

I thought about a good outline,
And how to call my paragon.
My novel's really going fine–
I've finished canto number one!
I looked it over with great care–
So many contradictions there!
To rectify them I'm not keen;
The censor gets his due, I ween.
My handiwork I'll put before
The tender mercies of the press.
Go then, my newborn work, express
My thoughts at the celestial shore.
A guerdon for me please produce–
Misunderstandings, screams, abuse!

**Eugene Onegin–Canto the Second**

I

The countryside which bored Eugene
Was quite a charming little spot,
There friends of gaiety pristine
Might bless their Maker for their lot.
The manor-house, secluded, lone,
Stood by a streamlet on its own,
Protected from the wind by hills.
A distant magic picture fills
The landscape with the meadows, fields,
And you see hamlets here and there;
Herds roam the meadows everywhere.
The view an unkempt garden yields,
Which spreads out with its canopies,
A shield for minor deities.

II

The noble castle was constructed,
As castles should indeed be made;
With smart old taste it was conducted,
In strength and peacefulness arrayed.
High-ceilinged rooms throughout abounded;
The parlor’s damasked walls astounded.
Just see the stoves with colored tile,
And likenesses of Czars erstwhile.
Today it is all so decrepit,
I hardly know the reason why,
But Eugene had no wish to try,
Because he had no use for it.
Halls out of date or in high fashion–
He yawned at both without compassion.

III

He settled in the very room,
In which his rustic relative
Fought two-score years the lady whom
He hired; looked out; squished fugitive
Small flies. A simple oaken floor,
A table, closets, couch, what's more,
Nowhere a speck of ink he found.
He opened cupboards, looked around,
And saw a book to calculate
Expenses; liqueurs quite a few,
And several jugs of cider too,
A calendar for eighteen-eight.
The old man’s world for him was prime.
For reading books he had no time.

IV

Alone amid his great domains–
But just to pass the time of course–
Our Eugene started to take pains
A novus ordo[[40]](#footnote-40) to enforce.
In his backwoods this country sage,
The yokes of corvee[[41]](#footnote-41) to assuage,
Brought in a moderate quit-rent
His slaves were mightily content!
Just see the stingy neighbor pout!
He views therein the greatest harm
There in his corner in alarm.
Some archly smile, and figure out
He's mad. They all come to agree:
“A dangerous eccentric he!”

V

At first they came to call on him
But he would from the rearward stoop
Bring on a steed[[42]](#footnote-42) alive with vim
While all of them just as a group
Would bring their homely dray horse carts–
Along the roads their rumble starts.
Offended by such churlish deeds,
Their friendship for him fast recedes.
“How ignorant! He flouts the bans!
No doubt a mason,[[43]](#footnote-43) who drinks red
Wine by the cup and so misled
He will not kiss the women's hands,
And simply answers ‘no’ or ‘yes’
Without respect[[44]](#footnote-44) or politesse!”

VI

A new landlord had driven down
Just at that time to his estate.
His views were over all the town,
The same exam he seemed to rate.
From Gottingen his spirit came;
Vladímir Lenski was his name.
A handsome guy just in his prime;
He studied Kant, knew how to rhyme.
His German views would surely clash.
A fund of knowledge thence he brought,
There dreams of liberty he caught.
Strange was his spirit, somewhat rash.
His black curls on his shoulders fell.
With verve he spoke, and always well.

VII

The world with all its hard, cold vice
Had yet to fade his youthfulness.
His soul was comforted by nice
And friendly greetings, girls’ caress.
An ignoramus dear at heart
By hope was cherished. For a start
This noisy world, all shiny, bright,
Held captive his young mind with might.
With a sweet dream he tries to foil
The doubts felt by his heart. The aim
Of this our life upon him came
As puzzling, alluring toil.
And over it he racks his brains
And doubts of wonders entertains.

VIII

A kindred spirit,[[45]](#footnote-45) he believed,
In him was sure to find her mate;
Unhappily she sate and grieved
Expecting aye their meeting date.
He held his friends would not delay,
By honor bound, his bonds to stay;
Nor would they spare a quick retort
To kill a slanderous report.
The fates have chosen some, he thought,
To be devoted friends of men.
Their everlasting regimen
Rays irresistible e’er wrought
To light us up just sometime soon,
Of wordly bliss give us the boon.

IX

Full early was his blood disturbed
By love of good, and great compassion;
But glory's torment yet perturbed
Him, yea, and righteous indignation.
Throughout the world his lyre he’d ply
Beneath a Schiller-Goethe sky.
His soul was truly set aflame
By their poetic fire and fame.
His verses did not shame the high
Exalted muses of the art;
He proudly ever played his part
With feelings that might edify:
The uprush of a virgin dream,
Of weighty thoughts a simple stream.

X

Obedient to love, he sang
Of love. His song was ever clear;
Like simple maiden’s thoughts it rang,
Like children’s dreams, or lunar sphere,
In placid deserts of the skies,
Goddess of secrets, tender sighs.
He sang of parting and of sadness
And something like the misty distance.
Of roses and romance his song,
And of those lands so distant, far,
Where flowed his living tears which are
To stillness headed all-along.
At barely eighteen years of age
He sang of faded flowerage.

XI

In this dry land Eugene alone
Could truly estimate his gift.
He did not like the parties thrown
By neighbors; gave them all short shrift.
From their loud, noisy talk he ran,
For sensibly they always can
Discuss haymaking, and their wine,
Discuss the kennel or their line
Of relatives. They did not glitter
With feeling or poetic fire,
To smartness they did not aspire;
For high life they were hardly fitter.
And what their dear wives had to say
Had even less sense to convey.

XII

Now Lenski, very handsome, rich,
Their son-in-law they fain would make;
Such is the country custom which
Impels them all to undertake
Betrothal for their daughters to
This but half-Russian parvenu.
Of single boredom, right away
They speak–but in a cunning way.
They call him to their samovar–
None but Dunya will pour the tea;
They whisper to her: “Dunya, see!”
And then produce her sweet guitar.
O Christ! She then begins to cheep:
“Come see me[[46]](#footnote-46) in my golden keep!”

XIII

But Lenski had no great desire
To bind himself with nuptials. So
A bosom friend he would acquire,
And our Onegin fain would know.
Soon they were friends. But prose and verse,
And wave and stone were less diverse–
Yea, ice and flame. And thus, at first,
The two of them were truly cursed
With boredom through disparities.
But this they later overcame,
And liked each other, pals became,
Found–horseback–similarities.
I’ll be the first one to confess:
Men find their friends through idleness!

XIV

No more such friendship for the hero!
Our prejudices[[47]](#footnote-47) all being done,
We hold all others but a zero,
And we alone are number one.
Napoleons are we–truebreds;
The other millions of bipeds
Are but for us a single tool,
And *feelings* we all ridicule.
Than this Eugene was much more fair.
He knew what people were, of course;
Despised the bulk of them perforce–
“Exceptions prove the rule!” he dare
Say–singled out some special folk,
Respected feelings they awoke.

XV

He heard out Lenski with a smile–
His ardent, fervid, conversation–
His vacillation all the while–
His eterne look of inspiration.
All this to Eugene was quite new.
A cooling word he oft withdrew,
Although it teetered on his lips,
“How foolish I, to come to grips
With grim reality.” His bliss
A little moment he’ll enjoy.
So let him live, this naif boy,
The world’s perfection soon he'll miss.
Forgive the fever of young years–
The heat–the ardor–ravings–tears.

XVI

All topics gave room for disputes,
And for reflections, as they should–
Of tribes long gone the institutes,
The fruits of science, Evil, Good,
Prejudgments made in ancient times,
Deep secrets that the grave begrimes,
Now destiny, and later, life–
All things were open to their strife.
The poet, judging, hot and keen,
Forgets himself as he recites
Poetic scraps by northern wights,
While easy, tolerant Eugene,
Scarce understanding what he heard,
Still listened to his young friend’s word.

XVII

My desert dwellers, most of all,
Discussed their youthful passions' peak.
And having shed their rebel call,
Onegin aye of them would speak
With an unwilling mournful sigh.
Happy he who can descry
Their agitation, and forgo!
And happier he who does not know
Them; cools off love by separation,
His enmity, by speaking ill,
Yawns at his wife and friends. He will
Ne’er feel a jealous desperation,
Nor share his forbears’ capital
With one who merits not at all.

XVIII

When we run up beneath the flag
Of prudent calm, and peace, and silence–
When passions’ flame is but a drag,
Just self-will and resilience–
They are for us a simple joke;
Yet later on we feel their yoke
And need some strength to persevere.
And sometimes then we like to hear
The unquiet tales of others’ heat,
Because it stirs our aging hearts;
Aye, aye,[[48]](#footnote-48) the aging brave imparts
All gladly his attentive ear–
He listens in his wretched shed
To tales of youths high-spirited.

XIX

But ardent youth, as it appears,
Its deepest secrets would reveal,
Its enmity, love, joy, and tears
Yea, none of them can it conceal.
Onegin listened with rapt mien,
(A veteran of love he's been)
As Lenski, anxious to confess,
His heartfelt feelings would express.
With trust his conscience he laid bare,
And so Onegin got to know
Sans work his tale of love and woe
So simply told with youthful care–
A story, plentiful in feeling,
To you and me not so revealing.

XX

Alas, he loved, as in our day,
A man no longer loves. Alone
A crazy poet’s soul yet may
Be destined thus to breathe love's moan.
In every place and every time–
One dream, one customary prime
Desire, and a habitual woe.[[49]](#footnote-49)
Nor cooling distance, even so,
Nor the long years of separation,
Nor on the Muses hours spent,
Nor foreign beauties’ dire torment,
Nor happy noise, nor lucubration,
Could change in him a temperament,
Whose virgin fire was heaven sent.

XXI

Olga-intrigued, while yet a boy,
By longings of the heart unfazed,
Affectionate, he watched her joy,
As at her childish play he gazed.
He shared, protected by a grove,
The little games she interwove.
Their fathers, who were neighbors, friends,
To wed them, haste to recommend.
She grew up ’neath her humble roof
Embued with virginal, sweet charm,
Her parents saving her from harm,
Like tender plant she stood aloof,
Amid the jungly grass unknown
To bee or butterfly–fresh blown.

XXII

The budding poet she’d endow
With his first dream of young delight.
And thinking of her, he somehow
Would with his pipe a moan indite.
To golden games “Farewell!” he said,
And came to like dense groves instead,
And solitary stillness. Soon
He welcomed night and stars and moon,
That moon, celestial luminant,
Under whose light our steps we bent,
And shed our tears beneficent,
From torture the resuscitant.
Yet now in her we only see
Of lanterns dim the legatee.

XXIII

She’s ever modest and submissive,
Like morning full of laughter, bright,
Of poet’s life evocative,
As simple as love’s kiss and quite
As blue as heaven’s vault her eyes–
Blonde hair, a smile to idolize,
Sweet movement, slender figure, voice,
She had it all. But take your choice
Of any novel. You will find
Her picture. It’s so very sweet,
I used to find it hard to beat.
But I have left all that behind.
Now, pray permit, my reader dear,
Her elder sister to appear.

XXIV

“Tatiana” was her sister’s name.
For the first time a name like this
My tender novel’s pages claim.
We want it. Take it not amiss.
So what? It’s sonorous and nice.
I must admit, I pay a price
For using something so antique,
A common name, not very chic.
In names we now have such poor taste[[50]](#footnote-50)
(And verses too–that's by the way)
Enlightenment can lead astray,
For most of us it’s just a waste.
What we get from it I abhor–
Just prudery, and nothing more.

XXV

And so, “Tatiana” was her name.
She did not draw the viewer’s eye
(As did her sister’s cheek aflame
With beauty fresh all might espy)
Wild, sad, and taciturn, and sere,
As timid as a forest deer.
Yea, in her very family
A stranger she appeared to be.
While yet a child she turned away
From pampering mother, and her dad.
She turned aside from what she had,
Had no desire to jump and play.
She often sat all day alone,
Just by the window, on her own.

XXVI

The urge to dream befriended her,
While yet she lay upon her cot–
Of rural peace the embellisher,
It lulled her when she was a tot.
Her pampered fingers did not know
The needle; sewed no calico
To place thereon a silken thread,
And with a pattern overspread.
With her submissive doll now she
Prepares herself by means of play
To learn the rules she must obey
To live in high society;
Her mother’s lessons to her doll
Repeats–and shows her protocol.

XXVII

A doll in these most tender years
She did not take into her hand.
She would not whisper in its ears,
On modes or local news expand.
All childish pranks were strange to her.
But frightful stories would bestir
Her spirit on dark winter nights;
Such talk her interest ignites.
And when the nanny gathered all
Young Olga's friends to play with her
On the broad meadow, she’d prefer
To shun their games. Their caterwaul,
Loud laughter, and their flippant fun,
Just bored her to oblivion.

XXVIII [[51]](#footnote-51)

She fondly would anticipate
Daybreak upon her balcony,
When stars in their round dance abate,
And leave the skyline orderly.
The edge of earth, behold, how bright!
The wind blows, morning’s acolyte.
And day just bit by bit ascends.
In winter, when night’s shade extends
Its longer rule o’er half the world,
And longer in the aimless quiet,
The sluggish east is dozing yet
Beneath the misted moon bepearled:
Awakened at her usual hour,
By candlelight she leaves her bower.

XXIX

She loved books very early on.
Yes, novels filled her every void.
She snapped up Rousseau, Richardson,[[52]](#footnote-52)
By their deceptions overjoyed.
Her father was a good old guy
(Though stuck in the last century)
In books he saw no detriment;
To read them he had no intent.
Of such vain toys he had no dread,
And did not care what secret tome
His daughter would peruse at home,
And hide at night beneath her head.
As for his wife, why, Richardson
Of writers was the paragon.

XXX

Now Richardson she did not love
Because she read his books forsooth,
Nor placed she Grandison[[53]](#footnote-53) above
The character Lovelace in truth.
Princess Alina, years ago,
Her cousin who lived in Moscow,
Spoke constantly about these men.
Her husband was her boyfriend then–
Not that she loved him (God forbid)
She sighed for quite another kind,
Whom she admired in soul and mind,
Whose love her husband’s could outbid.
A sergeant in the Guards was he,
A gambler and a great dandy.

XXXI

Like him, she always dressed aright,
In fashion and with goodly taste.
They dragged her to the church despite
A lack of concert unshamefaced.
So to assuage her grief and grame,
Her canny husband promptly came
Back to his village, as her groom.
Surrounded there by God knows whom,
At first she struggled, wept, and cried,
And longed for a prompt, quick, divorce,
But occupied herself, of course,
With household chores; was satisfied.
In habitude we acquiesce–
A fair exchange for happiness.

XXXII

Her sorrow was by habit charmed,
Which other things could not allay,
And soon expertly she was armed
With comfort that none could gainsay.
Between sparetime, activity,
She found a mystery. And she
Discovered paths to get her way,
And o’er her husband have her say.
And so, it all turned out just great.
She daily drove to view the farm
And mushrooms made a counter-charm

’Gainst winter; had a weekend date
With bath-house; kept the maids in check;
Her man's opinion did not reck.

XXXIII

In blood she oft would write her name
In young girls’ books of autographs.
A *Polly* “Pauline” she would name,
And with a lilt she talks and laughs.
Her stays were very, very tight,
A Russian N she could indite
Just like a French N in her nose–
But all this soon came to a close.
Princess Alina she forgot,
The corset and the book of rhymes
So full of sentiment. At times
The name of “Frankie” she’d allot
To Frances; finally she wore
The cap and housecoat evermore.

XXXIV

Her husband’s love of her was true
Her plans without him she’d fulfil.
He trusted her without ado,
In dressing gown drinks, eats his fill.
All peaceably his life rolled on;
By even sometimes had begun
A group of neighbors who stopped by
To visit quite informally.
They came to grieve, or tell a tale,
To giggle over this or that.
Time passes with a pleasant chat.
Now Olga tea must bring, and they'll
Take supper. Soon it’s time for bed.
The neighbors from the court are sped.

XXXV

The customs of the dear old time
They followed in their peaceful life.
And during carnival, meantime,
The Russian blintz was ever rife.
They all must fast but twice a year
And roundabouts they all held dear,
Loved the round dance and table songs.
At Whitsun when the people throngs
And goes to service with a yawn,
Affectingly they shed three tears
On a dawn bundle with compeers.
From them no drink could be withdrawn.
And to their guests they brought their food
By rank at board in plenitude.

XXXVI

And so in time they both grew old,
And at long last the silent grave
Oped to the man its doors acold,
And unto him a new crown gave.
He died the hour just ere dinner,
Bewailed alike by friend and neighbor,
His children and his true helpmeet,
Who mourned him quite without deceit.
He was a simple, goodly barin,
And in that place where he finds rest
These graveside words his deeds attest:
*The humble sinner, Dmitri Larin,
God's servant, and a brigadier,
Eternal peace enjoyeth here.*

XXXVII

Returning to his hearth and home,
Vladimir solemnly passed by
His neighbor’s corse beneath the loam,
And at his grave gave out a sigh.
His heart was sad for many days.
“Poor Yorick!” dolefully he says.
“How often in his arms I’d stay,
And as a child I used to play
With his Ochakov medal bright.
He wished for Olga as my bride;
‘Oh, may I see that day!’ he cried.”
And with much sadness, true, forthright,
Vladimir then and there traced out
A tombstone madrigal devout.

XXXVIII

A sad inscription there he placed,
Thus honoring familial dust
Of father, mother, interlaced
With tears. We all rise, ripen, rust
By Providence’s secret will
In a brief harvest, good or ill
Upon the furrows made by life.
Soon, others enter on this strife,
And in this way our windy race
Grows, moves about, with passion boils,
And drives its forbears to the toils
Of earth. Our time will come apace,
And at some right auspicious time
Will send us from this mortal clime.

XXXIX

Meanwhile, please get blind drunk, my friends,
Upon this flimsy, trivial life.
Without much meaning it soon ends,
And little do I love its strife.
To phantoms I have closed my eyes.
But still a faint hope sometimes tries
To move my heart. And then I know
I should be sad to die and go
Nor leave behind the slightest trace.
I do not live or write for praise,
But it appears that I should raise
A hope my sad lot to begrace,
So that one syllable I’ve penned
May call me up like a true friend.

XL

That sound may touch somebody’s heart!
Kept safe by an auspicious fate,
My verse from mem’ry won’t depart,
And sad oblivion will not rate.
I dare to hope (so may it be!)
Some future dunce will look at me,
See my famed portrait and declare:
Behold a **poet** posing there!
Accept my gracious thanks, then, please,
You fans of the Aonian maids;
Your recollection surely aids
To spare my fleeting syntheses.
The gracious hand, with which you bless,
This old man’s laurels will caress.

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1. *Ruslan and Ludmila* (1820): a romantic poem by Pushkin which secured his reputation thirteen years before *Onegin*. It tells how Ruslan rescued his bride, daughter of the Grand Prince of Kiev, from a wicked magician who kidnapped her on her wedding night. The Russian composer Mikail Glinka wrote an influential opera on this theme (1842.) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. His governess [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Halt: an archaic meaning of the Russian word, which I have translated by an archaic English word (=lame). The word may also mean “wretched.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. i.e. the summer park in St. Petersburg. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Goodbye. (Latin.) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Juvenal: Roman satirical poet, 60−140 C.E. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Theocritus: Greek pastoral poet, third century, B.C.E. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Adam Smith: Scottish political economist, 1723−1790, author of *The Wealth of Nations.* [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Publius Ovidius Naso, (43 B.C.E.−17 C.E.), known in English as Ovid, was the great Roman love poet, known for his *Ars Amatoria* and *Metamorphoses.* In the year 8 C.E., the Emperor Augustus relegated him to Tomis, near modern Constanta, Romania, for an unknown offense, although it is thought to be related to the adultery of the Emperor’s granddaughter. His exile was very bitter, but he was never allowed to return to Rome, despite his pleas. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. A novel *Les Amours du Chevalier de Faublas* (Paris, 1787-1793) by the Girondist Jean-Baptiste Louvet de Couvrai, three volumes. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. A watch made by Abraham-Louis Bréguet (d. 1823) the greatest French horologist of his time. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. living: because the more worms it had, the better. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. A complex leap in ballet. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Phèdre, the great tragedy by Racine (1677.)The reference to Cleopatra is probably Shakespeare's “Antony and Cleopatra.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Denis Ivanovich Fonvizin (1745--1792): wrote comedies ridiculing the inept aping of French manners and speech; author of *Negros’ “*The Young Oaf.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Pierre Corneille (1606--1684): great French dramatist, author of *Le Cid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Didelot;He worked many years in St. Petersburg, and produced numerous notable ballets. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Aeol:In Greek mythology the god Aeolus is ruler of the winds. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Grimm Friedrich Melchior, Freiherr von Grimm (1723-1807): Swedish-born French critic, who edited a cultural newsletter for foreign sovereigns. He was well known to Diderot and Rousseau. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Pushkin rhymes *prav*, the genitive plural of *pravo* “rights” with *prav*, the short form of the adjective *pravyj*, “right.” [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. i.e. vest, tail-coat, pantaloons (French.) [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. The Russian language, devoid of French purism, borrowed many French, German, Dutch, and English words to cover all kinds of new-fangled inventions. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Pushkin suffered both banishment and confinement. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Diana: the goddess of the moon and hunting; Flora: the goddess of flowers; Terpsichore: the goddess of the dance. It may be noted here that the Russian word for the lower limb beneath the knee covers both English “foot” and “leg“. I prefer to use “leg” in most cases, as this avoids the fetishistic overtones of “foot” which are far from Pushkin’s mentality in my view. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. milkmaid: The Russian text tells us that she is from Okhta, one of the poorer quarters of St. Petersburg. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. What is that? (German) [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Pushkin died as the result of a duel. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Both the English and Russian terms quoted by Pushkin connote what nowadays we call clinical depression. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788−1824), wrote *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, (1812−18), which describes a young man disillusioned with a life of pleasure. Byron’s influence on Pushkin is apparent, yet Pushkin excels his model, perhaps because Byron truly believed in the aristocratic mystique, while Pushkin did not. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Jeremy Bentham (1748−1832): English philosopher and economist, the expounder of the theory of Utilitarianism; Jean-Baptiste Say (1767−1832): French economist who theorized that the capitalist system is self-regulating. Recall that Onegin liked economics. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. The city of St. Petersburg stands at the mouth of the River Neva. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Pushkin explains that he is thinking of Murayov’s poem *To the goddess of the Neva:* The enthusiastic poet saw/ the favorable goddess with his own eyes/ so that he spends the night sleepless/ supporting himself on granite. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. The River Brenta rises in the Alps, passes close to the city of Padua, and empties into the Adriatic Sea, which separates the east coast of Italy from the Balkan peninsulas. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Apollo: son of Zeus, one of the chief Greek gods. He is usually shown holding a bow or a lyre. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Albion: a name for Great Britain. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Petrarch: (1304−1374): great Italian poet famous for love lyrics. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. In a lengthy biographical footnote, Pushkin stresses his pride in his African heritage. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. (Dolce) far niente (Italian): (Sweet) doing nothing [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. .e. girls from where he used to live and those who like him have been moved to the Crimea. The Salhyr is the longest river in the Crimea. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Onegin’s *novyj poryadok* recalls the “novus ordo seclorum” found on the Great Seal of the United States, and hence on the dollar bill. The significance and revolutionary character of this passage should not be underestimated, despite the disclaimer that it is “just to pass the time”−no doubt a sop to the censor. Eugene had effectively converted his serfs to tenant farmers, and released (“quit”) them from bondage to the soil and their feudal lord. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Corvee: unpaid labour that a European vassal owed a lord or that a citizen in latertimes owed the state, either in addition to or in lieu of taxes. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Steed: Russian “Don stallion.” The Cossacks who lived on the Don were great horse fanciers. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Mason: The Christian Church generally disapproved of freemasonry. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Without respect: his neighbors expected to have *-s* (short for “sudar”, *sir*) appended to his “yea” and “nay” since he was the new kid on the block. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. The kindred spirit is referred to in the feminine, since the word *dushá* is feminine in Russian; but the reference is to a male soulmate. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. A snatch of a popular song--with an obvious message. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Prejudices: a cynical comment. We are naturally quite unprejudiced in rating ourselves over everyone else! Zero (nul’) and one (yedinitsa) are a curiously prophetic prefiguration of digitization and its discontents. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Aye, aye: *tak tochno* means literally “just so”, but is used in military parlance as the equivalent of “aye, aye, sir” addressed to a superior officer. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. The line including the phrase “habitual woe” is missing in the text I have been using. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Poor taste: Pushkin is here attacking mimicry of French mores in names, verse, and almost everything else. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Stanza XXVIII is perhaps the most beautiful in the entire poem, and displays magnificently the poet's gift, equalled only by Shakespeare's, *lefi aniyyat da'áti* as we say in Hebrew, “according to the poverty of my knowledge.” Note how he follows this flight of fancy by a very matter-of-fact stanza. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778): His novel *Julie: ou la nouvelle Héloise* (1761) dealing with a doomed love was an immense success.
Samuel Richardson (1689-1761): popular novelist, author of *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748) [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
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