*Poems of Pushkin (2)*

Excerpts from

EUGENE ONIEGIN

Selected verses in Pushkin’s own

rhythm and rhyme pattern with

a connecting narrative in prose

By

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Published by

Henry Jones, Riding Mill, Northumberland

*CHAPTER ONE*

The thoughts of a young man as he rides along dusty roads to take up his heritage from a dying uncle. We have also a light-hearted account of his childhood, adolescence and social accomplishments, giving a clue to his later behaviour as the story develops …

*I − 1 Pushkin introduces his hero*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

‘MY UNCLE, honouring tradition

When ill, from active life withdrew,

Compelled respect for his position;

’Twas quite the best that he could do.

Example worthy emulating,

But, bless my soul! How irritating

To play nursemaid night and day

And never stir a step a away!

How mean and low, in posture humble,

To entertain the half-alive,

To straighten pillows, and contrive

To bring his physic, never grumble,

And, sighing, think but never say:

The devil fly with you away!’

*I − 2 Oniegin rides to take*

*up his legacy*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

THUS RAN the youthful meditations

Of one who rode, by Fate’s decree,

In clouds of dust through posting stations,

The heir to all his familu.

Ye partisans of Russlan’s glory,[[1]](#footnote-1)

The hero of my latest story

This very hour without ado,

Permit me to present to you:

Oniegin, worthy friend and neighbour,

On Neva’s shores beheld the light,

Where you, maybe, with prospects bright

Were also born to live and labour.

I once was there and wandered free,

But now the north is bad for me.[[2]](#footnote-2)

*I − 3 Eugene’s childhood and adolescence*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

HIS FATHER, having served with honour,

Survived on credit, living fast;

Of dances (yearly three), the donor,

He gambled out his life at last.

A kindly Fate Eugene preserving,

A French madame as nana serving

A Frenchman followed in her place;

The child was playful, full of grace;

Monsieur l’Abbé, with scarce a penny,

Unwilling to fatigue the child,

Prescribed a course of study mild,

With moral training hardly any;

For boyish pranks would gently scold

As through the Summer Park they strolled.

*I − 4 His adolescence*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

BUT WHEN of youth’s rebellious folly

The time arrived for our Eugene,

The time of tender melancholy,

They dropped the Frenchman from the scene.

See now, Oniegin liberated,

Like London dandy titivated,

His hair in latest fashion curled,

And free, at last, to see the world;

In perfect French his thoughts explaining

− He spoke the language, wrote it, too −

Could dance the gay mazurka through

And bow with grace, his poise maintaining.

What more was needed? People said:

A clever fellow, *and* well-bred.

*I − 5 His social graces*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

WE ALL acquire, somehow or other,

Some sort of skill, however small,

And so, thank goodness, ’tis no bother

If one should want to shine at all.

Oniegin, in the vire of many,

Whose judgement as as strict as any,

Was well-informed but not a bore;

He had the happy knack to score

In any given conversation,

Whatever topic might befall

As if he really knew it all,

Could hold his tongue from altercation

But win a smile from ladies’ lips

With sparkling, unexpected quips.

*I − 6 and achievements*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

SINCE LATIN now is out of fashion,

Our friend retained without a doubt

Of Latin just sufficient ration

An epigraph to figure out,

Complete a latter, writing “vale”

Discuss the works of Juvenale,

A verse or two of Vergil quote −

Not quite the words the poet wrote;

He had no wish to scan the pages

Or probe the pre-historic dust

For secrets of our cosmic crust,

But anecdotes of bygone ages,

From present days to Romulus,

He memorised for future use.

*I − 7 His leanings*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

DEVOID of any lofty passion,

No love for rhythmic sounds had he,

Quite unaware in any fashion

That iambus differs from trochee.

Of Homer’s teaching disapproving

To Adam Smith we find him moving −

A young economist profound!

I mean, the fellow could expound

On how a nation’s wealth advances

And why it has no need of gold

If raw material it hold,

Foundation of the world’s finances.

His father wondered what he meant

And let his lands for simple rent.

*I − 8 His obsession*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

THE TIME will not suffice me ever

To tell you all Oniegin knew;

In one respect the boy was clever,

Surpassing all he else could do.

From boyhood years his recreation,

His toil, his pain, his consolation,

The subject of his thoughts by dat,

His sole obsession while at play,

The grammar of the tender passion,

That Ovid long ago compiled,

For which, to Moldavy exiled,

The poet closed in painful fashion

His bright but turbulent career,

Afar from his Italia dear.

*I − 10*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

HOW EARLY could our friend dissemble,

Conceal his hopes, his envy hide,

Persuade,

Dissuade, or seem to tremble

With righteous anger, proper pride,

Appear submissive, or unruly,

To care, o not to care unduly,

Or pine in deep unspoken grief,

Or shine with wit beyond belief;

How selflessly his heart surrender

In simple, careless, artless prose,

That single-minded passion shows!

How soft his rapid glance, and tender,

How shy or bold he could appear,

And, when required, produce a tear.

*I − 11*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

WITH POSES new and postures charming,

The innocent he could delight,

Or jest, with flattery disarming,

Or feign despair a maid to fright;

Or seize the precious moment fleeting,

With youth and ignorance competing,

By skill and passion win the day

And start his victim on her way,

Demand or beg a declaration,

Alert to hear the merest cheep

Of love’s awakening: then to leap

And make a secret assignation,

And later, in some quiet glade,

Give private lessons in the shade.

*I − 12*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How soon the hearts of maids flirtations

He sent a-fluttering with joy,

And when he wished what yarns mendacious

Could spin, his rivals to destroy.

What slander venomous, unsparing,

What clever snares for them preparing!

But you, my lucky wedded wight,

Remained with him in friendship tight,

And husbands sly who praise and flatter,

Disciples of the gay Faublas,[[3]](#footnote-3)

And old suspicious grandpapa,

And cuckold smug with pompous chatter,

For ever satisfied with life,

Himself, his dinner and his wife.

CHAPTER ONE (continued)

Having introduced his hero, Pushkin gives an amusing account of Oniegin’s gay life in St. Petersburg (not included in these excerpts) and lifts the curtain on his own youth …

*I − 29 Pushkin remembers his*

*own youth*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

IN DAYS of youthful joys and passions

To ballrooms I would madly fly;

No safer place for fond confessions

And swapping letters on the sly.

You wedded couples, well respected,

To you my warning is directed;

Take careful note of what I say;

Be on your guard both night and day.

You matrons, too, should close observe us;

Keep rein upon your daughters tight

And never let them out of sight,

Or else, or else… may heaven preserve us.

I write this only, as you know,

I finished sinning long ago.

*I − 30*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

ALAS, IN sundry ways amusing

So much of life I ran to waste,

And even now, my age abusing,

To dance were greatly to my taste.

I love the surge of youthful folly,

The crowded ballroom, bright and jolly,

The ladies’ calculated dress.

I love their feet, though I should guess,

Of shapely pairs a man could hardly,

In all of Russia hope to see

At any times as much as three.

Ah! I recall, albeit sadly,

A certain pair! Though old and chill,

My dreaming heart can see them still.

*I −31*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

IN WHAT deserted clime and season,

O foolish heart, forget wilt thou

Those feet that robbed thee of thy reason?

What blossoms are they bruising now?

Enured to oriental graces,

No more they leave their dainty traces

Impressed on mournful northern snow.

No other touch they cared to know

Than soft, caressing carpets only.

For them I lost my precious days,

My hope of fame, my thirst for praise,

Forgot my home, my exile lonely…

The joys of youth have vanished quite,

As from the green thy footprints light.

*I − 32*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

DIANA’S BREASTS, the cheeks of Flora

Are fair to view, my gentle friends;

For me the foot of Terpsichoré

Somehow their loneliness transcends,

Sweet promises to the eye according,

A prize of priceless joy awarding,

It fans to flame the secret fire

Of wilful, wanton, wild desire.

I love it, dear Elvina, showing

The table’s drooping cloth beneath

Or tripping on the vernal heath,

Or by the winter fireside glowing,

Or dancing on the mirrored floor,

Or roving by the rocky shore.

*I − 33*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

’TWAS by the sea, a storm impending

I watched with envy every wave

That an to meet her, humbly bending

To lie before her like a slave.

Ah! How I longed to share the blessing

With them my lips her feet caressing.

Ah! Never in my wildest days

Of youthful passions’ fiercest blaze

Can I recall such fervent yearning

The lips to meet in fond embrace

Of maiden fair of form and face,

Nor ere nor since such passion burning;

Not since the day when I was born

Was heart so sore with anguish torn.

*I − 49 Pushkin’s nostalgia for Italy*

*and freedom*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

O, WAVES of Adriatic Ocean!

O, Brenta! I shall soon rejoice

To see, inspired with new emotion,

They shores, and hear they magic voice.

Revered by sonse of proud Apollo

They song through Albion’s lyre[[4]](#footnote-4) I follow;

My heart its every note doth know3.

To golden Italy I go,

In freedom all delights combining;

My guide a maid of Venice fair,

Now garrulous, now silent there

In mystic gondola reclining.

My lips from hers may learn to move

In tune with Petrach’s songs of love.

*I − 50*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

O FREEDOM! Thou art so long in coming.

’Tis time, ’tis time! My soul doth cry.

I scan the skies in anxious roaming,

And trim my sails, prepare to fly;

To brave the storm, with wave contending,

My fairway o’er the main extending;

O, when shall I begin my flight,

The hostile element defying?

For southern seas my course is set,

My Africa[[5]](#footnote-5) the goal, and yet

My soul for gloomy Russia sighing,

Where I have loved and learned to weep

And where my heart lies buried deep.

CHAPTER TWO

Oniegin takes up residence on his inheritance but his ignorance of country ways and his lack of courtesy towards his neighbours offend them and they cease calling on him.

He is saved from complete loneliness by the arrival of a new neighbour, Vladimir Lenski, straight from Heidelberg University, A poet and idealist, for whom all the world is good, honest and loyal. Oniegin is a cynic and an opportunist, so they quarrel but get on famously all the same.

Lenski becomes a regular visitor at another neighbouring house, where there are two nubile daughters. He promptly falls in love with the younger of these, Olga, a cheerful, healthy girl who puts up with his poetry and idealism and leaves him with his illusions.

Tatiana, the elder girl is serious and not at all playful, yet incurably romantic. In childhood her nurse had filled her mind with old songs, fairy tales and folklore of Russia and in girlhood she shared with her mother a taste for the romantic novels of Richardson and Rousseau.

The death of the father of Tatiana and Olga provides the poet Lenski with a subject for an epitaph and the poet Pushkin with the material for some gloomy but prophetic stanzas of his own.…

*II − 38 Thoughts in a churchyard*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

AND THERE an epitaph composes

To honoured sire and mother dear,

Whose sacred dust in peace reposes,

He mourns the lives that ended here.

Alas, for Nature’s dispensation,

Requiring every generation

To rise, to ripen and to fall,

By others followed, reaping all;

And we, succeeding to their places,

In vain excitement, empty strife,

Displacing those who gave us life,

Our time is coming: younger faces,

Our sons and grandsons in their turn

Will crowd us out with unconcern.

*II − 39 Pushkin’s nodest aspirations*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

THEN MEANTIME let us take our pleasure,

Enjoying life while yet we may,

My friends, its worthlessness I measure;

I have, in truth, no wish to stay.

My eyes are closed to dreams and visions,

Though distant hopes and vague ambitions

Disturb my spirit now and then.

I live and write; not heart nor pen

To present praise or fame aspiring,

To die unnoticed I would grieve;

I would my pen might yet achieve

One single line of verse inspiring

That, like a friend when all is done,

May speak of me when I am done.

*II − 40*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

SOME PHRASE, maybe, of my contriving

Some heart may touch and move to tears;

Some word, in Lethe’s deep surviving,

May sound again across the years.

Maybe − a hopeful thought, and pleasant −

Some future rude, untutored peasant,

My portrait viewing, may declare:

A poet! That one over there!

My thanks for thy appreciation,

O poet’s friend, whose mind retains

The Muse’s sweet and peaceful strains

And random thoughts of my creation,

Whose kindly hand is touching now

The laurels on an aging brow.

CHAPTER THREE

Oniegin is introduced to the Larin household by Lenski and he makes the acquaintance of Tatiana. Our here has certain social graces and accomplishments and Tatiana, emotionally ready to fall in love, promptly does so. She goes to the length of writing him a very earnest and moving letter, in which she makes a frank confession of her feelings and throws herself on his honour.

Since Russian ladies are unable to write in any language other than French, Pushkin is constrained to offer a Russian version of the letter with due apology for its inadequacy, likening his effort ti that of an amateur performer trying to play the composition of a master.

*II − 15 Pushkin grieves for Tatiana*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

MY DEAR Tatiana, sweet and tender,

With you I sigh and weep today;

I see your maiden heart surrender:

A tyrant holds you in his sway.

You’re ruined, child, but hope will blind you

With thoughts that happiness may find you,

And Fortune, in some way obscure,

Will bring a blessing to your door.

The poisoned cup of love’s desiring

You’ll drain unto its bitter end,

Obsessive dreams their concourse lend

For joyous trysts with him conspiring.

Where’er you look you’re tempter’s there

Before, beside you − everywhere!

*III − 31 The poet holds Tatiana’s letter*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

BEFORE ME Tanya’s letter lying;

In sacred trust I hold it true.

With grieving heart and secret sighing

Again, again I read it through.

But who inspired these phrases tender,

These artless words of soul’s surrender,

This flowing stream of foolish thought,

Sweet nonsense from a mind distraught;

Endearing now, and now repelling.

’Tis past my ken. I bring you here

A transcript feeble, though sincere,

Pale shadow of a plea compelling,

A solo from an opus grand

Ill-rendered by a learner’s hand.

*III − 31 Tatiana’s Letter*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

I WRITE to you. What need you more?

What further words can make it plain

That I have given you the power

To punish me with your disdain?

But you, in this unhappy hour

Some spark of sympathy may show:

You will not leave me now and go!

At first I thought my tender feeling

From you at any cost to hide;

No word from me should be your guide

The secret of my heart revealing

If I could hope, say, once a week

To see your face and hear you speak;

A simple phrase, a friendly greeting;

To speak to you myself and then

To think and think of this again

By night and day till further meeting.

*The Letter (continued)*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

BUT YOU, they say, are not at ease

In company outside your choosing,

And we, though glad enough to please,

Are neither clever nor amusing.

So why, then, did you visit here,

This place outlandish and forsaken?

I had not ver known you, dear;

Our tranquil life had not been shaken,

My peace of mind had not been taken,

In time, who knows, a mate for life

I might have found some day or other

And made a good and loving mother,

A dutiful and faithful wife?

Another? No! In all creation

No man shall have this heart of mine,

In highest heaven’s proclamation.

*The Letter (continued)*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

IT IS decreed that I am thine.

My life till now has been a token

That you and I would meet some day;

The fateful word in heaven was spoken:

God sent you here to guard my way.

In dreams your form to me appearing,

Unseen to me you still were dear;

Long years before you found me here

Your voice resounded in my hearing;

Your magic glance no dream to me;

When you appeared at once I knew you,

My fainting heart impelled me to you:

A voice within me cried: ’Tis he!

Is it not so? I felt you near me,

You spoke to me in silent night;

*The Letter (continued)*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

I PRAYED to God that you might hear me

And soothe my troubled heart and cheer me

My darkness turning into light.

Was it not you, beloved vision,

The sweet and fleeting apparition,

That flashed that moment through the gloom,

Above my pillow softly bending

And words of hope and comfort sending

In whispers through the darkened room?

What are you? Angel, sent to save me,

Or tempter, scheming to enslave me?

Resolve these doubts within a mind

Unschooled, a prey to fond illusion,

The truth may be another kind;

All this may be a vain delusion.

*The Letter (continued)*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

SO LET IT BE! If this be true

My life, my fate, my fond affection

With tears I trust them now to you

And humbly beg for your protection.

Just think of this: I am alone,

With no-one here who understands me;

Not reason, but my heart commands me;

I face ruin on my own.

I wait for you: a single look

My fading hopes may yet revive

Or give to those that still survive

A last, and well deserved rebuke.

My letter ends. I read it through

In shame and terror of dishonour,

But, daring all, I trust in you

And throw myself upon your honour.

CHAPTER FOUR

Tatiana’s letter is taken to Oniegin by her nurse’s grandson. Days go by but there is no reply. Then Oniegin visit’s the house again. He and Tatiana meet alone in the garden. Oneiegin speaks of the letter, which he says moved him profoundly by its earnestness. Had he been the kind that could make a success of marriage he would not look further for a mate. But he has an unhappy nature and believes that a marriage between them would be a disaster for her.

He loves her sincerely, but as a brother. She should find happiness in another direction. He finishes his lecture by advising her to learn to control her feelings. Not everyone would be as understanding as he and she might come to grief.

Tatiana is deeply hurt, makes no answer and, for the sake of appearances, they return to the house together.

*IV − 18 Pushkin’s thoughts on friends*

*and friendship*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

DEAR READER, are you with me, deeming

Our friend’s behaviour good and kind

To mournful Tanya, well beseeming

The noble temper of his mind?

No new departure this, revealing

Our hero’s straight and honest dealing,

Though some were quite disposed to blame.

His foew, his friends − they’re much the same,

So closely do they both observe us −

Discussed him, called him this and that.

We know our foes oppose us flat,

But from our friends may God preserve us.

My friends, of friends I’ll talk to you;

Of friends I know a thing or two.

*IV − 19*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

WELL NOW.… but no! Pay no attention

To gloomy thoughts that cross my mind,

I merely, and in brackets, mention

There’s not a slander you could find

Concocted of some childish babble,

Supported by the gutter’s rabble,

No tale so stupid, weak and frail,

No jest so hackneyed, worn and stale

A friend will not as gospel treat it

And pass it on with stupid smile

And not the slightest hint of guile,

A hundred times and more repeat it,

Yet stand for you through thick and thin

And loving you as kith and kin.

*IV − 20*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

AH, YES, dear reader: your relations!

How are they all? Now tell me, pray!

Allow me, too, some observations

That may be useful by the way,

The varied qualities combining,

The genus relative defining:

Our relatives are those we love,

Or else, at least, all else above,

And whom for well-established reasons

We visit every Christmas time,

Or send them cards in simple rhyme,

Ensuring thus at other seasons

No further sign of life they give.

God bless them all! Long may they live!

*IV − 22*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

THEN WHOM to love? Our trust reposing

In one who never could betray,

Who, faithfully our cause espousing

Approves of all we do or say;

No word of lying slander spreading,

With loving care our comfort heeding,

Our faults refusing to decry,

Nor pester us with sermons dry!

Then lose no labour, vainly seeking

A phantom image all your own,

But love, my friend, yourself alone.

Dear reader, ’tis of you I’m speaking.

No object worthier you’ll find,

Nor one more lovable and kind.

CHAPTER FOUR (*continued*)

Following her encounter with Oniegin in the garden Tatiana becomes pale, listless, silent, depressed. Her relatives shake their heads: Time she was married!

From this sad spectacle Pushkin turns for relief to the topic to the topic of Lenski and Olga, their happy meetings together, their wanderings about the garden, everywhere and always together.

And Oniegin? Lives like a hermit. Rises early, swims in the river, takes long walks, watching the animals, reading, passing the time in pleasant idling.

The summer fades.…

*IV − 40 Approach of Winter*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

OUR NORTHERN summer! What a season!

Our winter, says the southern wit.

’Tis here! ’Tis gone! And that’s the reason

We never care to mention it.

Already Autumn winds are blowing,

The shrinking sun more rarely showing,

And shorter, shorter grows the day.

The forests sing a mournful lay,

Their garb discarding, secrets baring,

The mists descend on fields around

And screaming flocks of geese are bound

For southern lands; the time is nearing,

The dreary time we all await:

November standing at the gate.

*IV − 41*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

THE DAWN becoming darker, colder,

The fields fall silent, tools are stowed,

The wolf and wolverine grow bolder

And hungrily patrol the road.

The horse, their presence scenting, fearful,

With terror snorts; the rider careful

Ascends the hill; at dawning red

The cattle, still in byre and shed,

Unharried by the driving cowman,

No longer hear the wonted horn

That calls them round his every morn,

And, in her hut, the sewing woman

Doth sing and spin, as winter’s friend,

The sparkling log, Burns to its end.

*IV − 42*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

AND NOW the crackling frost imposes

Its seal upon the silvered ground.

(The rhyme you now expect is ‘roses’;

Then take it since you like the sound.)

And, neater than your parquet flooring,

The river gleams with ice enduring

And skating children − happy throng −

Cut patterns as they chase along.

A weighty goose, with waddle clumsy,

Descends the bank, intends to swim,

Mistaking ice for flowing stream,

She slips and stumbles; snowflakes flimsy,

The first of winter, whirl around

And falling, like flashing stars, to ground.

*IV − 43*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

WHAT CAN one do in such a season?

A country walk? There’s nought to see!

The landscape’s bare. It stands to reason,

There’s not a leaf upon a tree.

A ride on horseback o’er the prairie?

With muffled hooves your pony wary,

Mistrustful, ventures on the ice.

Look out! She’ll toss you in a trice|

Or, in your desert hut abiding,

You read, say, Pradt, or Walter Scott,

Or check the household bills − why not?

Or mope…or drink… and, slowly gliding,

The evening goes, tomorrow too.

You somehow live the winter through.

CHAPTER FOUR (*concluded*)

Lenski visits Oniegin and they chat and drink together. Oniegin enquires about the Larins and Lenski tells him he is invited to Tatiana’s birthday party. Oniegin objects: Crowds of people! No! Family only. Do come! Agreed!

Lenski is happy. His wedding is in a fortnight. …

*IV − 51 Love’s Illusion*

*(Lenski, Oniegin’s friend in love)*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

HE WAS BELOVED! A sweet delusion,

Contentment bringing to his heart;

For blest is he, by faith’s illusion,

Cold reason tamed, who lives apart

In peace and joy and blissful feeling,

A happy toper, homeward reeling,

A butterfly on tender wing

That sips the honeyed flower of Spring.

But wretched he, who, all discerning,

Had ne’er the luck to lose his head,

Who sees in all that’s done or said

The seeming good to evil turning,

Whose heart is cold with chill regret,

Whose mind forbids him to forget.

CHAPTER FIVE

In this chapter we hear much of Tatiana’s belief in the old superstitions, bad omens, good omens, signs of impending visits or disasters. She has a strange nightmare in which she is pursued across the snow by an immense bear. She is caught by the bear and carried to a wretched hut and placed on the threshold. Inside the hut noise and clamour, horrible monsters, devils, malformed, unnatural creatures and, in command of them all − Oniegin.

He comes forward to claim her, seizes her and throws her on to a broken-down bench when suddenly Olga appears, followed by Lenski. Oniegin abuses the intruders, seizes a long knife and strikes Lenski to the ground. There is a dreadful cry and Tatiana awakes. The room becomes light. Olga rushes to her: What have you seen?

Tatiana gets her dream-book and tries to interpret her dream.

We come now to Tatiana’s birthday party. Contrary to Lenski’s assurance there are many guests and Oniegin is annoyed. The two young men arrive late and are seated opposite to Tatiana, to her great confusion. Tears come to her eyes and she seems ready to faint. This angers Oniegin even more. He has seen women’s tears before and does not like them. To this end he starts a flirtation with Olga, dances several times with her in succession and even forestalls Lenski who wishes to partner her in a cotillon.

Lenski cannot believe his eyes. Outraged he leaves the house, determined to challenge Oniegin to a duel.

CHAPTER SIX

Now we have a superb description of the preparation for the duel, Oniegin’s strange choice of a rascally type as his second, the thoughts and reactions of the two antagonists, Pushkin’s sentiments on the whole subject of duelling, the duel itself.…

*VI − 30 The duel. Death of Lenski*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

THE TIME is .…now! Calmly, coldly,

Not taking aim, the two began,

Each striding silently and boldly

Four paces nearer to his man.

Four fateful steps, each other facing,

Oniegin firmly forward pacing

His pistol first begins to raise,

No hint of hesitance displays;

Five paces more, his course completing

As Lenski, closing half an eye,

To aim begins, when suddenly

Oniegin fires. The moments fleeting

Are fraught with doom; the poet stops

And from his grasp the pistol drops.

*VI − 32*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

SO STILL he lay, and strange and eerie

The peaceful pallor of his brow,

And from his breast, as seeming weary,

The streaming blood began to flow.

A moment ere this transformation

This heart beat high with inspiration,

With love and hope and seething hate

And surging life’s ambitious spate,

But now, as in a house deserted,

’Tis silent, dark and cold within,

For ever stilled the busy din,

The shutters drawn, the windows boarded,

No sign of life about the place,

The tenant gone without a trace.

*VI − 33*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

’TIS PLEASANT, with a quip offensive

To maddens someone you dislike,

To see him in a stance defensive

With lowered head, prepared to strike,

To see him in the mirror glancing,

His own embarrassment enhancing;

More pleasant still, if he should cry

In baffled rage: So this is I!

But best of all your secret pleasure

To meet him somewhere out of town

And quietly shoot him down

With strict regard for rule and masure,

But when he’s gone from you for good

You won’t enjoy it as you should.

*VI − 34*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

CONSIDER, through your skilful aiming

A youthful friend is lying dead;

Some insult, scarcely worth the naming,

Some stupid thing the fellow said

In heat of argument or liquor,

When wits are dull and tempers flicker;

Maybe ’twas he who called you out

To honour’s field, but who can doubt

Your feelings when you see him lying

In pose grotesque upon the ground,

Deprived of sense and sight and sound,

Slowly, inevitably dying,

He cannot hear your anguished call

Nor see, nor speak, nor feel at all.

*VI − 36*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

MY FRIENDS, you sorrow for our poet;

His budding flower of hope and joy,

Was yet to bloom, the world would show it,

Though he himself was still a boy,

‘’Tis gone! Where now the exaltation,

The noble urge and inspiration,

The thoughts and feelings of the young,

Exalted, tender, brave and strong,

And where the storms of love’s desiring,

The thirst for knowledge, work and fame,

The dread of vice and sordid shame,

The soaring hope, the dream aspiring,

The vision of a life above

Of sacred, pure, poetic love?

*VI − 37*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

MAYBE our man was born for glory

Or for the good of all mankind;

His silenced lyre’s unfinished story

May yet eternal echoes find.

Perhaps in worldly competition

He might have gained a proud position

And laurels of the highest grade;

Perhaps his poor, tormented shade

Absconded with some secret holy

At present and for ever lost,

The while his soul the border crossed

That marks his simple graveyard lowly

Where songs of praise from bygone years

Are lost in silence. No-one hears.

*VI − 38*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

AND THEN again, maybe our poet

Was destined for a common fate;

His youth would pass − too well we know it,

His spirit’s fire would soon abate.

The Muse for wife and home exchanging,

His life would mean some re-arranging

And, in the country settled down,

He’d wear a quilted dressing-gown

And learn to live like normal fellows.

At forty he would get the gout,  
Eat, drink and mope, grow ill and stout

And end his days among the pillows

Surrounded by a tearful crew

Of women, children, doctors too.

CHAPTER SEVEN

As the period of the story moves into spring, we find that Olga’s mourning for her dead lover is short-lived. An officer of hussars has taken her fancy and before long she is standing with him at the altar with downcast eyes and a smile on her lips.

The coming of spring brings melancholy thoughts into Pushkin’s mind.…

*VII − 1 Spring melancholy (Pushkin’s thoughts)*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

BY VERNAL rays pursued, receding

From circular hills, escapes the snow,

In turbid torrents earthward speeding

To flooded meadowland below.

The dawning year and Nature meeting

Exchange a sleepy, smiling greeting;

The azure sky is bright and clear,

Transparent still the woods appear

As clad in verdant, downy feather;

The bee abandons waxen cell

For tribute of the field and dell,

The valley’s colours blend together;

The herds give tongue, the bird of night,

His anthem sung, is silent quite.

*VII − 2*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

HOW SAD for me thy contemplation,

O time of love, thou gentle Spring!

What troubling thoughts, what trepidation,

My soul disturbing, thou dost bring!

Thy breezes cool, my brow caressing,

No lightness bring to gloom depressing,

In vain inviting me to rest

On Nature’s tranquil breast;

Or shall enjoyment find me never?

Must all that quickens and excites

And all that brightens and delights

To weariness condemn for ever

A heart that perished long ago

And only darkness now doth know?

*VII −3*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

OR, JOYLESS as we see appearing

The leaves that vanished in the Fall,

We mourn, the forest murmur hearing,

The bitter loss alone recall.

Or, seeing Nature all renewing,

With pirpose firm her course pursuing,

We weep, with sad, nostalgic tears

For faded, non-returning years.

Perchance, a random thought occurring

In dream poetical, may bring

The vision of a former Spring,

Our hearts with past emotions stirring,

The echo of a lost delight,

A distant, magic, moonlit night.

CHAPTER SEVEN (*continued*)

The fate of Lenski, the brevity of Olga’s memory of him, prompt our poet to think of the similar fate that awaits all of us.…

*VII − 7 The forgotten poet*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

UNLUCKY LENSKI! Are you grieving

Within the grave that holds you fast?

And were you sad, the news receiving

Of faithless love that did not last?

Or, softly lulled, in Lethe’s keeping,

In blessed, dreamless, painless sleeping,

Of sound and vision unaware,

Unconscious are you lying there?

For us in turn the grave is waiting,

Negelct, oblivion − the end

That stills the voice of foe and friend,

Though not the fierce and shrill debating,

The angry chorus of our heirs

In hot dispute for what is theirs.

CHAPTER SEVEN (*concluded*)

Tatiana’s relatives want to see her safely married, but sehe rejects every suitor they bring to the house, so they decide on a visit to Moscow to see what a season in the capital will do for her.

The journey by coach will take some seven days on the frozen roads, a thought which prompts Pushkin to devote a couple of stanzas of his poem to a description of the roads of Russia.…

*VII − 33 Roads of Russia*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

ENLIGHTENMENT and education!

When bars to these we brush aside,

In time − a simple calculation −

Five centuries or so, we’ll ride

On roads, in aspect and condition

Transformed beyond our recognition,

With highways crossing here and there,

Uniting Russia everywhere,

And iron bridges streams bestriding

And hills will wholly disappear

And tunnels under lake and mere

We’ll boldly build for better riding;

At every station, halt or stop

A restaurant or eating shop.

*VII − 34*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

OUR ROADS today are unattractive,

Forgotten bridges rot away,

The station fleas and bugs are active;

You cannot stop by night or day.

No restaurant; in cabin chilly

A notice hangs, pretentious, silly,

With prices done in black and white

To mock your thirst and appetite,

The while, with leisured clang and clamour

The rustic cyclops at his fire

Repairs the broken shaft or tyre

Of Western make with Russian hammer

While blessing in his secret heart

The Russian roads that wrecked the cart.

CHAPTER EIGHT (*The end of the story*)

The Larin family arrives safely in Moscow and Tatiana is taken the rounds of her relations, attends various receptions and functions, at one of which she is noticed by a distinguished general, whom she eventually marries. She fits perfectly into her new milieu and is greatly liked for her natural grace and kindliness to all around her. She is the perfect hostess and many distinguished persons attend her receptions.

Meanwhile Oniegin has been travelling abroad to escape the loneliness and melancholy of his estate and the memory of a friend lying dead in the snow. Returning from one of these journeys he finds himself at a reception where the hostess looks remarkably like a girl he once knew. He enquires of man standing near him and learns that it is indeed Tatiana and the man he addressed is her husband! He is amazed at the change in her.

He is taken and presented to Tataiana, who meets him calmly, giving not the slightes sign of emotion. Oniegin eagerly scans her face but can find no trace of interest, agitation or fear. After all, he does know something of her past which she would want to keep hidden from these others!

The following day he is delighted to receive an invitation from her husband to visit them. He gladly accepts and, when he calls, is received by Tatiana alone. To his own surprise he finds himself completely tongue-tied and continues so until rescued by the arrival of her husband. From this moment he is violently in love and haunts every reception where he can see her, even at a distance.

In the end he can hold out no longer and writes her as passionate, yet humble, letter in which he confesses his feeling for her and throws himself on her mercy.

Their positions are now reversed. He receives no reply, neither to this nor to a second and third letter. He turns to reading − anything and everything − to distract his mind, but in vain. His eyes scan the pages but his mind sees the words of a letter written long since, the faces of forgotten enemies, a quiet country house with someone sitting at a window − her!

Now we see him speeding in his sledge along the Neva. He stops at her house, leaps up the stairway, rushes through the rooms till he finds her − alone, simply dressed, reading a letter with tears in her eyes, no longer the elegant society woman but the true Tatiana he knew. He throws himself at her feet.

She rejects him completely. She reminded him of his coldness when she was a country girl. She loved him then and what answer did she get? A lecture! Je had acted honourably enough and she was grateful for that. But why is he pursuing her now? Is it because she now had wealth, position, a husband wounded in the war and honoured at court? What a triumph for him if he could dishonour her! How could a man of his quality allow his feelings to bring him so low?

And so she left him!

*VIII − 48 Closing stanzas*

*(Farewell to Oniegin)*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

AND SO she left him; stunned, astonished,

As from a sudden thunderstroke.

Oniegin stood, rebuked, astonished,

Bewildered by the words she spoke.

And now the sound of footsteps nearing,

Tatiana’s husband re-appearing.…

No happy moment this, I fear,

Our hero to abandon here,

And yet, methinks, ’tis time, dear reader,

To part for ever from our friend

And say: This is our journey’s end

Who wandered long and far together.

A last embrace and then − away!

We’ll call it (shall we not?) a day)!

*VIII − 49*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

WHOE’ER YOU BE, my page perusing.

My friend, or critic, let me say

Your friendship were my earnest choosing

On this, our final parting day.

Whate’er you sought within these pages,

Excitement that the heart engages,

Or soft repose from labour hard,

Or vivid scene, or witty word,

Mistakes in grammar, faulty rhyming,

God grant that somewhere you may find

Some tiny crumbs to feed your mind

Or help your journalistic climbing;

You’ll surely find it if you try

And on this note, I’ll say goodbye!

*VIII − 50*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

GOODBYE. My starnge eccentric neighbour!

Goodbye, the maid I most admire!

And you, my small but constant labour.

For all a poet could desire

I found with you, the Muse abetting,

In welcome toil the world forgetting,

And sweet converse with cherished friend.

How many days have run to end

Since first in my imagination

The young Tatiana I descried,

Oniegin standing by her side,

Dim phantoms of a dream’s creation,

Obscured, as in a crystal glass,

Where shadows form and swiftly pass.

*VIII −51*

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

BUT SOME, who saw my early pages,

The first to hear my tale unfold,

Themselves have passed to join the ages,

As Sadi used to say of old.

Oniegin’s portrait found completion

And she, my novel’s inspiration,

Tatiana virtuous and pure,

What blows of fate must she endure!

For blest are they, the banquet leaving

Before the wine has soured the tongue,

Who close the book while they are young

Of whom they read, the call receiving

To lay it down and rise and go

And leave it all, as I do now.

THE END

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Henry Jones, Riding Mill, Northumberland

Printed by

J. & P. Bealls Limited

Gallowgate,

Newcastle upon Tyne

NE1 4SA

1972

1. The hero of Russlan & Lyudmila (an earlier novel). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Pushkin was in trouble for his liberal ideas. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Le Chevalier de Faublas −an amorous character in French literature. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Pushkin was familiar with the works of Lord Byron. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Pushkin’s grandfather on his mother’s side was an Ethiopian. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)