**[On Translating Eugene Onegin](C:\\Users\\pml\\Documents\\onegin\\ \\ On Translating <I)**

1  
What is translation? On a platter  
A poet’s pale and glaring head,  
A parrot’s screech, a monkey’s chatter,  
And profanation of the dead.  
The parasites you were so hard on  
Are pardoned if I have your pardon,  
O, Pushkin, for my stratagem:  
I traveled down your secret stem,  
And reached the root, and fed upon it;  
Then, in a language newly learned,  
I grew another stalk and turned  
Your stanza patterned on a sonnet,  
Into my honest roadside prose⎯  
All thorn, but cousin to your rose.

2  
Reflected words can only shiver  
Like elongated lights that twist  
In the black mirror of a river  
Between the city and the mist.  
Elusive Pushkin! Persevering,  
I still pick up Tatiana’s earring,  
Still travel with your sullen rake.  
I find another man’s mistake,  
I analyze alliterations  
That grace your feasts and haunt the great  
Fourth stanza of your Canto Eight.  
This is my task⎯a poet’s patience  
And scholastic passion blent:  
Dove-droppings on your monument.

⎯Vladimir Nabokov, *The New Yorker* (1955 January 8)

Nabokov ironically uses tetrameter sonnets like those of Pushkin’s Eugene Onegin to defend his choice of translating Pushkin’s work into free verse.