EXTRACTS FROM "EUGENE ONEGIN."

The poem *Eugene Onegin*, perhaps the best-known work of A. S. Pushkin, and one of the most notable of Russian classics, is a novel in verse. When. dismissed by Imperial order from St. Petersburg for verses winch he had written on Liberty and against the favourite Arakcheyev and later expelled from the State service, Pushkin lived in his country house in the province of Pskov, during which time he studied deeply the Bible, Shakespeare, and Byron; and this period did more to develop his genius than any other time in his life. The hero of the poem, Onegin makes friends with a family of simple country gentry, the Larins. Onegin, clever and *blasé*, regards his visits as a pleasant diversion; but the younger daughter of the family, Tatyana, who is perhaps one of the most distinctive and sympathetic of all Russian heroines, falls in love with him. Tatyana, in her simplicity, after many restless days and nights, writes to Onegin

*Tatyana’s Letter to Onegin.* [Chapter Three, after XXXI]

“I write to you. What else, what more can I say? Now I know it is in your power to punish me with contempt. But you, if you still have a drop of pity for my unhappy lot, you will not betray me. At first I wanted to keep silence; believe me, you would never know my shame if I had the hope of sometimes⎯only seldom⎯only once a week⎯seeing you in our house, of only listening to you talking; to say a word to you, and then to go on thinking, thinking of one thing flay and night till we met again. But they say you are unsociable. Here in the wilds, in the country everything bores you, and we . . . well, we are not brilliant people, though we have a hearty welcome for you.

“Why did you visit us ? In the wilds of an out-of-the-way village I might never have known you, not have known bitter torment. With time, calming the stirrings of an untrained nature⎯how do I know ?⎯I might have found a friend after my heart, have been a faithful wife and a virtuous mother:

“Another ? . . . To no one else in the world would I have given my heart. That was settled in the councils on high; that is the will of Heaven; I am yours. My whole life has been a pledge of my certain meeting with you; I know you were sent me by God; you are my guardian to the grave. . . . In my dreams I used to see you; before we had met, you were already dear to me. Your face went to my heart; your voice had found the echo in my soul long ago. . . . No, it was no dream! The moment that you came, I recognised you at once; I was struck down I flushed; and in my thoughts I said: It is he. I used to hear you, didn’t I? You used to speak with me alone when I was helping the poor, or when I was easing the unrest of my troubled soul in prayer; and at that very minute wasn’t it you, kind vision, that I caught a glimpse of in the transparent darkness⎯that came softy up to my pillow? Wasn’t it you, who with comfort and love whispered words of hope to me?

“Who are you ? My guardian angel or a cunning tempter? Settle my doubts. Perhaps this is all emptiness, the delusion of an inexperienced heart, and this is not for me. But there it is! From now on, I trust my fate to you. I weep before you; I beg your protection. Imagine: I am alone here; no one understands me. My thought grows feeble, and I must spoil in silence. I wait for you: with one glance revive the hopes of my heart or else break this heavy dream, alas with deserved reproach!

“I end! It is awful to read it through; I am dying with shame and fear. But my pledge is your honour, and I trust myself boldly to it.”

*Onegin meets Tatyana in the Garden.* [Chapter Four, XII−XVI]

XII “You wrote to me. Do not be afraid. I have read the Confessions of your trusting heart, the outpourings of an innocent love; I liked your openness; it stirred in me feelings long since silenced; but I do not want to praise you; I will repay your frankness by speaking⎯like you, without art. Hear my concession: I ask you to judge me.

XIII “If I wanted to bound my life by the circle of home, if a pleasing destiny bade me be father and husband, if I were for a single minute captivated with the domestic picture, then really I would not have looked for any other wife than only you. I will say without any flashes of madrigal, having found my old ideal I would really have chosen you alone for the friend of my melancholy days to give me all that is beautiful, and would have been happy . . . as far as I could.

XIV “But I am not made for felicity; my heart is foreign to it. In vain are your perfections; I am altogether unworthy of them. Believe me, on my conscience, married life will be for us a torment. I, however much I love you, when I had got used to you shall then cease to love you; you will begin to cry; your tears will not touch nay heart, and will only niche me angry. Judge yourself what roses Hymen prepares for us, and perhaps for many days.

XV “What in the world can be worse than a home where the poor wife grieves over an unworthy husband, and is alone from morning to evening; where the tiresome husband, though he knows her worth, all the same cursing his fate, is always frowning, silent, angry, and coldly jealous? That is what I am like. And is that what you were looking for, with your pure and ardent heart, when you wrote to me and showed me all your self, all your mind? Can a stern destiny have cast for you such a lot?

XVI “Dreams and years cannot return; I shall not renew my heart. . . . I love you with the love of a brother, and perhaps more tenderly still; listen to me without anger : a young girl will more than once change her light dreams for others; so the tree changes its leaves with each spring; so, it is clear, Heaven means it to do. You will love again, but learn to control yourself; not every one will understand you as I do; inexperience leads to misfortune.”

Eugene stays at home and becomes very irritable. His young poet friend Lensky is deeply in love with Tatyana’s shallow sister Olga. Eugene starts a cynical kind of flirtation with Olga which leads to a duel, in which he kills Lensky. He is horrified at this, and travels for months in the country to forget everything. Returning to Moscow, he finds that Tatyana has, at the urgent wish of her mother, married an old and honourable soldier, a prince, and is one of the foremost figures in Moscow society. He now feels for her a strong passion. He follows her aimlessly, writes to her, and at last, finding himself alone with her, throws himself at her feet and presses her hand to his lips. After a pause she speaks as follows :−

*Tatyana and Onegin in Moscow.* [Chapter Eight, XLII.8−XLVIII]

XLII.8 “Enough; stand up. I must explain myself to you frankly. Onegin, do you remember that hour when in the garden on the walk fate brought us together and I so humbly listened to your lesson? To-day it is my turn.

XLIII “Onegin, then I was younger; I think I was better, and I loved you. And what came of it? What did I find in your heart? What answer? Only sternness, wasn’t it? It was no novelty to you, the love of a meek little country girl, and now⎯heavens!⎯my blood runs cold when I remember your chilling look and that sermon. . . . But I do not blame you: in that awful hour you behaved. like a gentleman; you did rightly by me and I thank you with all my heart.

XLIV “In those days, you remember, out in the wilds there, far from the world. of gossip, you did not care for me. . . . Then why do you now pursue me? Why should you now single me out? Isn’t it because now I must be seen in society, that I have wealth and name, that my husband was crippled in the wars, that the court is therefore kind to us? Isn’t it because my disgrace would now be noticed by every one and might in society seem for you a flattering conquest?

XLV “You see I am crying. If you have not yet forgotten your Tanya, then know: I would rather have the prick of your rebuke, your cold, stern talk, if it were only in my power, than your insulting passion and these letters and tears; then you at least had pity for my childish dreams, at least respect for my girlhood . . . and now !⎯what has brought you to my feet? How petty! How, with your heart and mind, can you be the slave of some trivial mood?

XLVI “But for me, Onegin, all this show, the falseness of this sickening life, my successes in the whirl of society, my fashionable house and evening parties-what is there in them I would gladly give up this minute all this frippery of masquerade, all this glamour and fuss, for my bookshelf, for the tangled garden, for our tumbledown house, for the places where first, Onegin, I saw you; yes, for the humble churchyard where now the cross and the shadow of branches overhang the grave of my poor old nurse

XLVII “And happiness was so possible, so near! . . . but my fate is settled now; perhaps I behaved recklessly; my mother implored and adjured me with tears; for poor Tanya all lots were alike. . . . I married. You must, I beg you, leave me. I know: in your heart there is pride and honour too. I love you. Why hide it? But I am given to another ; I shall always be faithful to him.”

At this point the author breaks off the story.

XLVIII She is gone. Eugene stands as though thunderstruck. In what a storm of feelings his heart is now plunged! But as a sudden spur, a bell rang, and the husband of Tatyana came in; and here, reader, at this moment so cruel for him, we will now leave my hero, for long . . . for ever. Long enough have we been following him together over the world. Our journey is over; let us say good-bye. Hurrah! And we might have done that earlier, mightn’t we?

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