**THE ONEGIN STANZA IN ENGLISH**

**(All except the two by Nabokov are short extracts)**

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**Jim Blyth**

**Kim and Jim: The Length of Love Street**

1.1

It’s Easter Friday and it’s raining

They think, when will it ever end?

No point in sitting here complaining.

Driving Each other round the ebnd.

We should have gone to Barcelona,

To see our old friends, Pete and Shona.

How often have thet phoned and said

‘Jump on a plane. You’ll have a bed?’

Not that their home is such displeasure,

Just empty now the kids have flown

The nest. How suddenly they’d grown,

And now, with too much time for leisure,

And too young to be laid to rest.

They don’t know what to do for best.

1.2

It caused no little consternation.

On reaching this point in their life,

To realise their appellation

Was father, mother, husband, wife;

Defined not by themselves but others:

Their son and daughter; sisters, brothers;

Defined not by themselves, but those

They gave birth to, and fed and clothed.

‘What were the names with which we’re christened?

If I remember, mine was Jim.

My lifetime partner’s? Hers was Kim.’

However hard you might have listened,

They’d not been heard round here of laste;

The names of Jim and his best mate.

**Ben Borek**

**Donjong Heights**

**Norwich: Egg Box Publishing**

**ISBN 978-0954392-02-4**

**Chapter 1**

So what, my faulty, lame aorta.

My crushed left ventricle? My heart

Continues ticking as it ought to,

Does not impinge upon the art

Of human form in mortal, glorious

Lithe grace. Though prone to wax censorious

(“Twin Devils grog and Old Holborn!”)

Dear Doc, it’s none of your concern.

And, noted as your warnings are,

I’ll leave my fate in casual sway

To thrust itself into my way

(I could be hit by bus or car).

So; ‘Excess, Wisdow’, pace Blake

I’ll sup delight for its own sake.

So here you have my manifesto

A sketch of my philosophy,

And Reader, now it’s time, you’d best know

My situation, mode de vie.

My dwellings: brick, London SE,

Where bourgeois neighbours *cockerney*

And darlings mingle with old mates

In opulence and rough estates.

My tower block alone: Japan,

Mauritius, Chad, the Sikhs, the Moors,

All post their envoys to its floors.

The requisite lone Rastaman

Completes this Commonwealth, of sorts,

Of *haute couture* and raucous sports.

**Diana Lewis Burgin,**

***Richard Burgin: A Life in Verse***

**Slavica Publishers Inc., 1988**

 CHAPTER ONE: CHILDHOOD

 *And the echo stayed inside the violin: . .*

 *- Annensky*

I.

‘My father, full of marvelous stories,

at eighty-seven had a stroke,

and left untold the joys and worries

he’d lived, of which he rarely spoke.

His reticence evoked adorement,

but, oh, my goodness, what a torment

to realize I would never know

the life he played pianissimo.

What unbelievable frustration -

to guess at what was left unsaid,

to learn most relatives were dead

who might confirm my inspiration,

to muse and question in remorse:

How could I fail to ask my source!’

II.

Thus railed a Slavist and professor,

when starting her biography,

by Fantasy’s mirage possessor

of papa’s Russian legacy.

Friends of Nastásya and Myshkin!\*

With thumping heart I take the risk in

offering my *Life* to you;

its hero is a Russian Jew

named Burgin, my beloved father;

in Petersburg he spent his youth,

a period I’ve tried to sleuth

or re-image, as you’ll gather.

(I wanted to be scholarly,

but facts, alas, eluded me.)

**Andy Croft**

***Ghost Writer: A Novel in Verse***

**Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications 2008.**

**ISBN 978 1 905512 38 6.**

**Chapter 1:** A dead man interviews a Lifer.

 A pot of glue, a puff of smoke.

’Tis now struck twelve, the world is sleeping, **Tod**

There’s nothing stirring, not a mouse; **Prince**

The only sound’s the sodden weeping **at his**

That shudders, ghost-like, through the house; **desk**

And as the sobbing slowly passes

Among the ashtrays, plates and glasses,

The blinking minutes of the night

Are counted by computer-light.

The scene is set, the mood is mostly

Suggestive of the tragic art.

Our hero, Tod, is sick at heart,

His candle-life now flickers, ghostly,

Pursued by phantoms which, it seems,

Must haunt him even in his dreams.

Where others dream of sex and money, **Tod’s**

Of life as one long endless cruise, **Life**

Tod’s dreams consist of darker honey ―

Of Sunday Supplement reviews,

The Book at Bedtime, Libby Purves,

The South Bank Show, the old World Service.

Ten years ago Tod said that he

Would turn his useless PhD

Into a Waterstone’s best-seller.

But in the disappointments since,

Our author ― whose full name’s Tod Prince ―

Has watched his green hopes turn to yellow,

Just like the bills upon the mat

Inside this weary, stale, old flat.

**Andy Croft**

**Andy Croft, W N Herbert and Paul Summers**

***Three Men on the Metro***

**Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications 2009**

**ISBN 978 1 905512 84 3**

**The Dog’s Bollock**

Though cowards flinch and traitors snigger,

We cannot help but stand and stare

Before each touching, crouching figure

Deep down in Revolution Square.

Who could not love such noble creatures?

Their kindly but heroic features

Suggest a race of Myrmidons,

The rational Future cast in bronze.

For luck ― or else to ward off failure ―

Commuters rub the guard-dog’s nose,

Till you could even say it glows;

They also stroked its genitalia

But higher organs disapproved

And now he’s had his balls removed.

*ЭК*

**Mayakovskaya I**

We’re staring at the sky’s mosaic

Three hundred feet below the ground,

Where poetry becomes prosaic

And heaven is the wrong way round.

This monument to Soviet flyers

Conspires with our earth-bound desires

To soar above the rush-our crowds

And join the stars behind the clouds.

Like Tantalus’ fruits, they shimmer

Above our heads, each juicy peach

Within our grasp but out of reach.

The future fades, the stars grow dimmer.

But when the carriage doors slide to,

The sky beyond is just as blue.

*ЭК*

**Andy Croft**

***1948: A Novel in Verse*,**

**Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications 2012.**

**ISBN 978-1907869327.**

**Chapter 1**

A dockland scene, late Forties *Noir*-ish.

A journalist who makes a splash.

It was a bright cold day in April.

Oh no it wasn’t ― for a start

I cannot find a rhyme for April, **A slow**

And anyway, prosodic art **start**

Demands a rather tighter meter

(I always think iambic’s neater).

But if it isn’t April, when?

September? March? Let’s try again.

It was a bright ― but does it matter?

How relevant’s the time of year?

The clock was striking ― dear, oh dear ―

Though you may like descriptive chatter,

I’d rather cut out these delays

And start at once *in medias res.*

It was a bright ― oh sod the weather ―

Who cares what kind of day it was?

I’m going to drop this altogether,

Or we’ll be here all day because

I’ll need to introduce some debris

If we’re to start this side of February,

Or rhapsodize about the moon

If we begin in flaming June

(Which won’t do justice to the idiom

I’m after here). Look, I know what ―

Let’s make it Summer. Make it hot.

The time? Just make it pm.

No ― make it night. But make it quick ―

This intro’s getting on my wick.

**John Fuller**

***The Illusionists: A Tale***

**London: Secker and Warburg 1980**

**SBN: 436 16810 3**

CHAPTER ONE

1

Experience is an easy master,

Easy to stall−though not to fool:

However fast you go, he’s faster.

He’s there in front of you. Each rule

Is made by him. Relax! For living

On terms like this needs no forgiving.

Once we received with open hands

The *faits accomplis* of our glands,

And that’s why no one ever changes:

The choice of being shy or wild

Is forced upon you as a child.

It’s something that the womb arranges

(if not the womb, the family−

At least before the age of three.

2

Does mathematics make you weary?

I can’t resist a simile

Drawn from a fairly useful theory

(Since similes should make you see

What otherwise is just asserted,

So that your judgement is exerted).

The gnomon is a constant: where

L shapes are added to a square

That square remains the same. A Roman

Is always more or less at home,

A Celt is still a Celt at Rome,

And all experience a gnomon.

From character there’s no escape:

Experience can’t change it’s shape.

**W N Herbert**

**Andy Croft, W N Herbert and Paul Summer**

***Three Men on the Metro***

**Nottingham: Five Leaves Publications 2009**

**ISBN 978 1 905512 84 3**

**Notes from the Undermind 2**

Near May Day on the Sparrow Hills

it’s time to mash the ages, churn

the Metro’s myths with H.G.Wells,

like Pushkin mished till kin with Burns;

then add Jerome, his jug-head trio,

and Fyodor, for fevered brio ―

till Moscow sees a Sphinx’s mouth,

cloacal, O-shaped, blaring out

this bummer of a song, that progress

is just a train, sent underground,

its won’t-stay-buried shrieking sound

the mating cry of some mad ogress

or else her baby, needing fed

a bloody star in human bread

Since Metro’s from the Greek for ‘mother’,

something fallopian’s in the Tube:

each city egging on each other,

to build Dystopia in its pubes.

Therefore three rubes went on the bummel

and scavenged verse in every tunnel

each *stantsia* a stanza, till

their book of rails had drunk its fill

of chandelier, mosaic and marble,

stained glass and swag and bas-relief:

all those imperial motifs

that make a very Marxist garble,

where cornfield and cannon still contest

their place at Mother Russia’s breast.

*stantsia* (станция) ― station

*ВНХ*

**H.R.F. Keating**

***Jack the Lady Killer***

**Hexham: Flambard Press 1999**

**ISBN 1 873226 36 5**

**PART ONE**

The place? Punjab, its dusty plains.

The time our story comes alive?

A time gone by, a day’s remains,

India, 1935. Jack Steele

Our hero? He’s a lad called Jack. an innocent

Just that. Not John. Alas, alack, abroad, arrives

that single name will be a weight in the India of

around his neck, a heavy fate. the British Raj.

Before we reach our final word

he’ll curse this name that is his own.

A name, he thinks, not his alone

but a killer’s, though unheard.

A killer Jack − it’s much to ask −

will find its duty to unmask.

But there’s another boy who’ll play

a major part in this our tale.

A very different lad. Let’s say

a pole apart. Yes, he’s male,

but that is all that links the two.

Our Jack is one who’s going to

rule the land where he’s arrived.

The other’s one who hasn’t thrived

in any way, not half Jack’s age,

an orphan gift with just one gift,

one talent, one, that just will lift

the little boy onto our page.

But there he’ll have a major part.

You’ll find him at the story’s heart.

**Vladimir Nabokov**

***From Pushkin’s “Eugene Onegin”***

Chapter I

xxxii

Diana’s bosom, Flora’s dimple

are very charming, I agree⎯

but there’s a greater charm, less simple,

⎯the instep of Terpsichore.

By prophesying to the eye

a prize with which no prize can vie

’tis a fair token and a snare

for swarms of daydreams. Everywhere

its grace, sweet reader, I admire:

at long-hemmed tables, half-concealed,

in spring, upon a velvet field,

in winter, at a grated fire,

in ballrooms, on a glossy floor,

on the bleak boulders of a shore.

xxxiii

I see the surf, the storm-rack flying. . . . .

Oh, how I wanted to compete

with the tremulous breakers dying

in adoration at her feet!

Together with those waves⎯

I wished to kiss what they could touch!

No⎯even when my youth would burn

its fiercest⎯never did I yearn

with such a torturing sensation

to kiss the lips of nymphs, the rose

that on the cheek of beauty grows

or breasts in mellow palpitation⎯

no, never did a passion roll

such billows in my bursting soul.

xxxiv

Sometimes I dream of other minutes

by hidden memory retold⎯

and feel her little ankle in its

contented stirrup which I hold;

again to build mad builders start;

again within a withered heart

one touch engenders fire; again

⎯the same old love, the same old pain. . . .

But really, my loquacious lyre

has lauded haughty belles too long

⎯for they deserve neither the song,

nor the emotions they inspire:

eyes, words⎯all their enchantments cheat

as much as do their pretty feet.

From: *Russian Review* **4** (2) (1945), 38-39.

**Vladimir Nabokov**

***On Translating Eugene Onegin***

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.

[**Matt Rubinstein**](http://www.mattrubinstein.com/)

***Equinox***

November 16, 2004

[1] 22/9

A harbour city lies becalmed
at midday on the equinox.
City and citizens are charmed
to silence by a paradox:
that time’s unending arc, which flows
between eternal highs and lows,
is built of fragments so discrete
that their extremities don’t meet.
Between these bounds, the air is warm
as blood. The sky, half-cloud, half-clear,
shows equal parts of hope and fear.
The times and tides reflect the norm:
an average day of average days
proceeding on its means and ways.

[2] 23/9

Today the Sydney Morning Herald
has very little to report:
no wars, no coups, no lives imperilled,
and just a smattering of sport.
Fortune has beamed upon the city,
removing it from care and pity
(no lives disrupted, no blood spilt),
but makes a fairly meagre quilt
for Arthur as he tries to sleep
beneath the much-depleted paper.
Watching the daylight dim and taper,
watching the pinholed curtain creep
across the sky, he knots his scarf
and adds a sheet of Telegraph.

*Sydney Morning Herald* from 22/092004 to 21/09/05**Vikram Seth**

***The Golden Gate***

**London and Boston: Faber and Faber 1986**

**ISBN 0-571-13967-1 (pbk 0-571-14827-1)**

1.1

To make a start more swift than weighty,

Hail Muse, Dear Reader, once upon

A time, say circa 1980,

There lived a man. His name was John.

Successful in his field though only

Twenty-six, respected, lonely,

One evening as he walked across

Golden Gate Park, the ill-judged toss

Of a red frisbee almost brained him.

He thought, “If he died, who’d be sad?

Who’d weep? Who’d gloat? Who would be glad?

Would anybody?” As it pained him,

He turned from this dispiriting theme

To ruminations less extreme.

1.2

He turned his thoughts to electronic

Circuitry. This soothed his mind.

He left irregular (moronic)

Sentimentality behind.

He thought of or-gates and of and-gates,

Of ROMs, of nor-gates, and of nand-gates,

Of nanoseconds, megabytes,

And bits and nibbles . . . but as flights

Of silhouetted birds move cawing

Across the pine serrated sky,

Dragged from his cove, not knowing why,

He feels an urgent riptide drawing

Him far out, where, caught in the kelp

Of loneliness, he cries for help.

**Jon Stallworthy**

***The Nutcracker***

*for Isaiah Berlin*

My story? Yes, I got my story

though not the one I was assigned.

It was a Voyage of Discovery

all right, but of another kind.

The latest Russian Revolution

was no sooner known than it– *whoosh*– un-

corked Moscow like shaken champagne,

filled Red Square to the brim again

with chanting thousands. When Apollo

appeared on the balcony, they

let out a shout heard miles away.

He made a speech I couldn’t follow

but knew would be a press release

before I had to write my piece.

A theme for Shostakovich: Russia’s

Columbus, orbiting the earth

alone for 90 minutes, ushers

the space-age in. At such a birth

Siberian stars should sing hosannas,

not children with *Gagarin* banners.

Flags licked his face all afternoon.

Later, beneath a carnival moon,

I went to someone’s celebration

and there, at the turn of a head,

a whisper, I was rocketed

beyond hope– dread– imagination–

I’m telling this the wrong way. I’m

afraid I must go back in time.

*London Review of Books* **9** (16) (1987)