



Alexsander Pushkin

**EUGENE
ONEGIN:**

A ROMANCE
OF RUSSIAN LIFE
IN VERSE



CANTO

THE

FIRST

THE SPLEEN

“HE RUSHES
AT LIFE
AND EXHAUSTS
THE PASSIONS.”

Prince Viazemski

I

“My uncle’s goodness is extreme,
If seriously he hath disease;
He hath acquired the world’s esteem
And nothing more important sees;
A paragon of virtue he!
But what a nuisance it will be,
Chained to his bedside night and day
Without a chance to slip away.
Ye need dissimulation base
A dying man with art to soothe,
Beneath his head the pillow smooth,
And physic bring with mournful face,
To sigh and meditate alone:
When will the devil take his own!”

II

Thus mused a madcap young, who drove
Through clouds of dust at postal pace,
By the decree of Mighty Jove,
Inheritor of all his race.
Friends of Liudmila and Ruslan,¹
Let me present ye to the man,
Who without more prevarication
The hero is of my narration!
Onéguine, O my gentle readers,
Was born beside the Neva, where



It may be ye were born, or there
Have shone as one of fashion's leaders.
I also wandered there of old,
But cannot stand the northern cold.²



Having performed his service truly,
Deep into debt his father ran;
Three balls a year he gave ye duly,
At last became a ruined man.
But Eugene was by fate preserved,
For first "madame" his wants observed,
And then "monsieur" supplied her place;³
The boy was wild but full of grace.
"Monsieur l'Abbé" a starving Gaul,
Fearing his pupil to annoy,
Instructed jestingly the boy,
Morality taught scarce at all;
Gently for pranks he would reprove
And in the Summer Garden rove.

IV

When youth's rebellious hour drew near
And my Eugene the path must trace—
The path of hope and tender fear—
Monsieur clean out of doors they chase.
Lo! my Onéguine free as air,
Cropped in the latest style his hair,
Dressed like a London dandy he
The giddy world at last shall see.
He wrote and spoke, so all allowed,
In the French language perfectly,
Danced the mazurka gracefully,
Without the least constraint he bowed.
What more's required? The world replies,
He is a charming youth and wise.

V

We all of us of education
A something somehow have obtained,
Thus, praised be God! a reputation
With us is easily attained.
Onéguine was—so many deemed
[Unerring critics self-esteemed],
Pedantic although scholar like,
In truth he had the happy trick
Without constraint in conversation
Of touching lightly every theme.
Silent, oracular ye'd see him
Amid a serious disputation,
Then suddenly discharge a joke
The ladies' laughter to provoke.

VI

Latin is just now not in vogue,
But if the truth I must relate,
Onéguine knew enough, the rogue
A mild quotation to translate,
A little Juvenal to spout,
With “vale” finish off a note;
Two verses he could recollect
Of the *Æneid*, but incorrect.
In history he took no pleasure,
The dusty chronicles of earth
For him were but of little worth,
Yet still of anecdotes a treasure
Within his memory there lay,
From Romulus unto our day.

VII

For empty sound the rascal swore he
Existence would not make a curse,
Knew not an iamb from a choree,
Although we read him heaps of verse.
Homer, Theocritus, he jeered,
But Adam Smith to read appeared,
And at economy was great;
That is, he could elucidate
How empires store of wealth unfold,
How flourish, why and wherefore less
If the raw product they possess
The medium is required of gold.
The father scarcely understands
His son and mortgages his lands.

VIII

But upon all that Eugene knew
I have no leisure here to dwell,
But say he was a genius who
In one thing really did excel.
It occupied him from a boy,
A labour, torment, yet a joy,
It whiled his idle hours away
And wholly occupied his day—
The amatory science warm,
Which Ovid once immortalized,
For which the poet agonized
Laid down his life of sun and storm
On the steppes of Moldavia lone,
Far from his Italy—his own.⁴

IX

How soon he learnt deception's art,
Hope to conceal and jealousy,
False confidence or doubt to impart,
Sombre or glad in turn to be,
Haughty appear, subservient,
Obsequious or indifferent!
What languor would his silence show,
How full of fire his speech would glow!
How artless was the note which spoke
Of love again, and yet again;
How deftly could he transport feign!
How bright and tender was his look,
Modest yet daring! And a tear
Would at the proper time appear.

X

How well he played the greenhorn's part
To cheat the inexperienced fair,
Sometimes by pleasing flattery's art,
Sometimes by ready-made despair;
The feeble moment would espy
Of tender years the modesty
Conquer by passion and address,
Await the long-delayed caress.
Avowal then 'twas time to pray,
Attentive to the heart's first beating,
Follow up love—a secret meeting
Arrange without the least delay—
Then, then—well, in some solitude
Lessons to give he understood!

XI

How soon he learnt to titillate
The heart of the inveterate flirt!
Desirous to annihilate
His own antagonists expert,
How bitterly he would malign,
With many a snare their pathway line!
But ye, O happy husbands, ye
With him were friends eternally:
The crafty spouse caressed him, who
By Faublas in his youth was schooled,⁵
And the suspicious veteran old,
The pompous, swaggering cuckold too,
Who floats contentedly through life,
Proud of his dinners and his wife!

XII

One morn whilst yet in bed he lay,
His valet brings him letters three.
What, invitations? The same day
As many entertainments be!
A ball here, there a children's treat,
Whither shall my rascalion flit?
Whither shall he go first? He'll see,
Perchance he will to all the three.
Meantime in matutinal dress
And hat surnamed a "Bolivar"⁶
He hies unto the "Boulevard,"
To loiter there in idleness
Until the sleepless Bréguet chime⁷
Announcing to him dinner-time.

XIII

'Tis dark. He seats him in a sleigh,
"Drive on!" the cheerful cry goes forth,
His furs are powdered on the way
By the fine silver of the north.
He bends his course to Talon's, where⁸
He knows Kaverine will repair.⁹
He enters. High the cork arose
And Comet champagne foaming flows.
Before him red roast beef is seen
And truffles, dear to youthful eyes,
Flanked by immortal Strasbourg pies,
The choicest flowers of French cuisine,
And Limburg cheese alive and old
Is seen next pine-apples of gold.

XIV

Still thirst fresh draughts of wine compels
To cool the cutlets' seething grease,
When the sonorous Bréguet tells
Of the commencement of the piece.
A critic of the stage malicious,
A slave of actresses capricious,
Onéguine was a citizen
Of the domains of the side-scene.
To the theatre he repairs
Where each young critic ready stands,
Capers applauds with clap of hands,
With hisses Cleopatra scares,
Moina recalls for this alone
That all may hear his voice's tone.

XV

Thou fairy-land! Where formerly
Shone pungent Satire's dauntless king,
Von Wisine, friend of liberty,
And Kniajnine, apt at copying.
The young Simeonova too there
With Ozeroff was wont to share
Applause, the people's donative.
There our Katénine did revive
Corneille's majestic genius,
Sarcastic Shakhovskoi brought out
His comedies, a noisy rout,
There Didelot became glorious,
There, there, beneath the side-scene's shade
The drama of my youth was played.¹⁰

XVI

My goddesses, where are your shades?
Do ye not hear my mournful sighs?
Are ye replaced by other maids
Who cannot conjure former joys?
Shall I your chorus hear anew,
Russia's Terpsichore review
Again in her ethereal dance?
Or will my melancholy glance
On the dull stage find all things changed,
The disenchanting glass direct
Where I can no more recollect?—
A careless looker-on estranged
In silence shall I sit and yawn
And dream of life's delightful dawn?

XVII

The house is crammed. A thousand lamps
On pit, stalls, boxes, brightly blaze,
Impatiently the gallery stamps,
The curtain now they slowly raise.
Obedient to the magic strings,
Brilliant, ethereal, there springs
Forth from the crowd of nymphs surrounding
Istomina¹¹ the nimbly-bounding;
With one foot resting on its tip
Slow circling round its fellow swings
And now she skips and now she springs
Like down from Aeolus's lip,
Now her lithe form she arches o'er
And beats with rapid foot the floor.

XVIII

Shouts of applause! Onéguine passes
Between the stalls, along the toes;
Seated, a curious look with glasses
On unknown female forms he throws.
Free scope he yields unto his glance,
Reviews both dress and countenance,
With all dissatisfaction shows.
To male acquaintances he bows,
And finally he deigns let fall
Upon the stage his weary glance.
He yawns, averts his countenance,
Exclaiming, "We must change 'em all!
I long by ballets have been bored,
Now Didelot scarce can be endured!"

XIX

Snakes, satyrs, loves with many a shout
Across the stage still madly sweep,
Whilst the tired serving-men without
Wrapped in their sheepskins soundly sleep.
Still the loud stamping doth not cease,
Still they blow noses, cough, and sneeze,
Still everywhere, without, within,
The lamps illuminating shine;
The steed benumbed still pawing stands
And of the irksome harness tires,
And still the coachmen round the fires¹²
Abuse their masters, rub their hands:
But Eugene long hath left the press
To array himself in evening dress.