

PREFACE

EUGENE ONEGIN, Pushkin's own favorite and central in his poetic output, is one of the outstanding and seminal works of Russian literature. It is a brilliant evocation of its own time and place, inaugurating realism in the Russian novel, yet it is also intimately related to eighteenth-century French literature and to Byronism. Extending to nearly 400 stanzas of sonnet length with an original and unvarying rhyme pattern, it is made up in about equal parts of plot, of delicate descriptions of nature and milieu, and of digressions in the Byronic manner.

The novel is concerned, as Vladimir Nabokov has put it, with "the afflictions, affections, and fortunes of three young men – Onegin, the bitter lean fop; Lensky, the temperamental minor poet; and Pushkin, their friend – and of three young ladies – Tatyana, Olga, and Pushkin's Muse." The setting is Russia in the 1820's; the scene shifts from the capital to the country, to Moscow, and back to St. Petersburg, with the author, by way of comment and excursus, subtly moving in and out of the focus of interest. There are superb vignettes of nature in various seasons and moods and of the precocious hedonist's cycle of pleasures and dissipations, ending in disenchantment and emotional aridity; there are the authentic physical and mental settings of rustic squirearchy and metropolitan society; a dream, a duel, and two climactic epistles celebrated in Russian literature; and a wealth of autobiographical asides and varied digressions – literary, philosophical, romantic, and satirical – which add to the multiplicity of moods, levels of discourse, and themes.

Four English verse translations have preceded this one in the 125 years since Pushkin's death. Three appeared in or near the centenary year, 1937; only one, that by Babette Deutsch printed in Avrahm Yarmolinsky's voluminous Pushkin anthology, is still in print. For the present new translation, no elaborate exegesis was intended, and only enough footnoting has been provided to clarify references to literary and cultural matters, private allusions, etc. It is not aimed primarily at the academic and literary expert, but at a public of English-speaking students and others interested in a central work of world literature in compact and readable form.

I have consulted a variety of editions and used some arbitrary discretion in including or omitting stanzas and fragments variously treated there. The original Chapter VIII, dealing with Onegin's travels in Russia, is not included despite its many felicities, as I believe that in the interest of the harmony of the whole, Pushkin was wise in omitting it from later editions. This is even more true of the scattered and uncertain fragments of the original Chapter IX concerning Eugene's supposed involvement with the Decembrists. I am indebted to several previous

PREFACE

commentators and editions, English and Russian, especially those by Professor Oliver Elton and Professor Dmitry Ciževsky, for footnote material.

Acute accents are used to indicate stress in Russian names that might otherwise be misread; elsewhere the iambic meter should be the reader's guide.

Reference: Alexander Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin. A Novel in Verse*. A new translation in the *Onegin* stanza with an introduction and notes by Walter Arndt, New York, E. P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1963, p. v-vi.