

occupations. What is one to think? There are examples of everything, since we are speaking of History. . . .

*

Virgil cannot stand disorder and exactions. He sees himself plundered, torn from his home, deprived of his means of existence by measures of political expediency. He sees a threat to his leisure to be himself and to become what he dreams of—that most precious possession, that treasure of free time, rich in latent beauties that he is sure of bringing forth. He sees no further. How should one expect him not to welcome the favors of a tyrant, not to sing of the man who assures him peaceful days and thus restores his reason for living?

Ludere quae vellem calamo permisit agresti

Virgil did not hesitate between the independence of the citizen and that of the creator of poems. Perhaps he did not even think that he was sacrificing anything in professing to praise Caesar, even to deifying him:

Erit ille semper deus . . .

Just imagine all the sentences that could be written for or against that attitude, according as one judged as a modern or took account of the relativity of feelings and circumstances. In those days there was yet no question of the Rights of Man.

The problem of conscience that might be introduced here, insoluble though it is, becomes particularly interesting if it is transformed into a problem of values. If the submission to a despot, the acceptance of his favors, which degenerates into, or reveals itself in, expressions of gratitude and praise, is a condition of the production of works of the first order, what is one to decide, to do, to think? This problem is hardly introduced before it develops into endless arguments. I shall take care not to enter upon them.

THIRTEEN

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Problems of Translation: *Onegin* in English

I constantly find in reviews of verse translations the following kind of thing that sends me into spasms of helpless fury: "Mr. (or Miss) So-and-so's translation reads smoothly." In other words, the reviewer of the "translation," who neither has, nor would be able to have, without special study, any knowledge whatsoever of the original, praises as "readable" an imitation only because the drudge or the rhymster has substituted easy platitudes for the breathtaking intricacies of the text. "Readable," indeed! A schoolboy's boner is less of a mockery in regard to the ancient masterpiece than its commercial interpretation or poetization. "Rhyme" rhymes with "crime," when Homer or *Hamlet* are rhymed. The term "free translation" smacks of knavery and tyranny. It is when the translator sets out to render the "spirit"—not the textual sense—that he begins to traduce his author. The clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase.

For the last five years or so I have been engaged, on and off, in translating and annotating Pushkin's *Onegin*. In the course of this work I have learned some facts and come to certain conclusions. First, the facts.

The novel is concerned with the afflictions, affections, and fortunes of three young men—*Onegin*, the bitter lean fop, *Lenski*, the temperamental minor poet, and *Pushkin*, their friend—and of three young ladies—*Tatiana*, *Olga*, and *Pushkin's Muse*. Its events take place between the end of 1819 and the spring of 1825. The scene shifts from the capital to the countryside (midway between

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Opochka and Moscow), and thence to Moscow and back to Petersburg. There is a description of a young rake's day in town; rural landscapes and rural libraries; a dream and a duel; various festivities in country and city; and a variety of romantic, satirical and bibliographic digressions that lend wonderful depth and color to the thing.

Onegin himself is, of course, a literary phenomenon, not a local or historical one. Childe Harold, the hero of Byron's "romance" (1812), whose "early youth [had been] misspent in maddest whim," who has "moping fits," who is bid to loath his present state by a "weariness which springs from all [he] meets," is really only a relative, not the direct prototype, of *Onegin*. The latter is less "a Muscovite in Harold's cloak" than a descendant of many fantastic Frenchmen such as Chateaubriand's *René*, who was aware of existing only through a "profound sentiment d'ennui." Pushkin speaks of *Onegin's* spleen or "chondria" (the English "hypo" and the Russian "chondria" or "handra" represent a neat division of linguistic labor on the part of two nations) as of "a malady the cause of which it seems high time to find." To this search Russian critics applied themselves with commendable zeal, accumulating during the last one hundred and thirty years one of the most somniferous masses of comments known to civilized man. Even a special term for *Onegin's* "sickness" has been invented (*Oneginstro*); and thousands of pages have been devoted to him as a "type" of something or other. Modern Soviet critics standing on a tower of soapboxes provided a hundred years ago by Belinski, Herzen, and many others, diagnosed *Onegin's* sickness as the result of "Tsarist despotism." Thus a character borrowed from books but brilliantly recomposed by a great poet to whom life and library were one, placed by that poet within a brilliantly reconstructed environment, and played with by him in a succession of compositional patterns—lyrical impersonations, tomfooleries of genius, literary parodies, stylized epistles, and so on—is treated by Russian commentators as a sociological and historical phenomenon typical of Alexander the First's regime: alas, this tendency to generalize and vulgarize the unique fancy of an individual genius has also its advocates in this country.

Actually there has never been anything especially local or time-significant in hypochondria, misanthropy, ennui, the blues, *Weltschmerz*, etc. By 1820, ennui was a seasoned literary cliché of characterization which Pushkin could toy with at his leisure. French fiction of the eighteenth century is full of young characters suffer-

ing from the spleen. It was a convenient device to keep one's hero on the move. Byron gave it a new thrill; René, Adolphe, and their co-sufferers received a transfusion of demon blood.

*

Evgeniy Onegin is a Russian novel in verse. Pushkin worked at it from May 1823 to October 1831. The first complete edition appeared in the spring of 1833 in St. Petersburg; there is a well-preserved specimen of this edition at the Houghton Library, Harvard University. *Onegin* has eight chapters and consists of 5,551 lines, all of which, except a song of eighteen unrhymed lines (in trochaic trimeter), are in iambic tetrameter, rhymed. The main body of the work contains, apart from two freely rhymed epistles, 366 stanzas, each of fourteen lines, with a fixed rhyme pattern: ababeciddiff (the vowels indicate the feminine rhymes, the consonants the masculine ones). Its resemblance to the sonnet is obvious. Its octet consists of an elegiac quatrain and of two couplets, its sestet of a closed quatrain and a couplet. This hyperborean freak is far removed from the Petrarchan pattern, but is distinctly related to Malherbe's and Surrey's variations.

The tetrametric, or "anacreontic," sonnet was introduced in France by Scève de Sainte-Marthe in 1579; and it was once tried by Shakespeare (Sonnet CXLV: "Those lips that Love's own hand did make," with a rhyme scheme "make-hate-sake: state-come-sweet-doom-greet: end-day-fiend-away. Threw-you"). The *Onegin* stanza would be technically an English anacreontic sonnet had not the second quatrain consisted of two couplets instead of being closed or alternate. The novelty of Pushkin's freak sonnet is that its first twelve lines include the greatest variation in rhyme sequence possible within a three-quarain frame: alternate, paired, and closed. However, it is really from the French, not from the English, that Pushkin derived the idea for this new kind of stanza. He knew his Malherbe well—and Malherbe had composed several sonnets (see for example, "A Rabel, peintre, sur un livre de fleurs," 1630) in tetrameter, with four rhymes in the octet and asymmetrical quarains (the first alternately rhymed, the second closed), but of course Malherbe's sestet was the classical one, never clinched with a couplet in the English fashion. We have to look elsewhere for Pushkin's third quatrain and for his epigrammatic couplet—namely in French light verse of the seventeenth and eighteenth cen-

ture. In one of Gresset's *Épîtres* ("Au Père Bougeant, jésuite") the *Onegin* sestet is exactly represented by the lines

Mais pourquoi donner au mystère,
Pourquoi reprocher au hazard
De ce prompt et triste départ
La cause trop involontaire?
Oui, vous seriez encore à nous
Si vous étiez vous-même à vous.

Theoretically speaking, it is not impossible that a complete *Onegin* stanza may be found embedded somewhere in the endless "Epistles" of those periwigged bores, just as its sequence of rhymes is found in La Fontaine's *Contes* (e.g., "Nicaise," 48-61) and in Pushkin's own freely-rhymed *Ruslan i Lyudmila*, composed in his youth (see the last section of Canto Three, from *Za otdayonimi godami to skazal mne vazhno Chernomor*). In this Pushkinian pseudosonnet the opening quatrain, with its brilliant alternate rhymes, and the closing couplet, with its epigrammatic click, are in greater evidence than the intermediate parts, as if we were being shown first the pattern on one side of an immobile sphere which would then start to revolve, blurring the colors, and presently would come to a stop, revealing clearly again a smaller pattern on its opposite side.

As already said, there are in *Onegin* more than 300 stanzas of this kind. We have moreover fragments of two additional chapters and numerous stanzas canceled by Pushkin, some of them sparkling with more originality and beauty than any in the *Cantos* from which he excluded them before publication. All this matter, as well as Pushkin's own commentaries, the variants, epigraphs, dedications, and so forth, must be of course translated too, in appendices and notes.

II

Russian poetry is affected by the following six characteristics of language and prosody:

1. The number of rhymes, both masculine and feminine (i.e., single and double), is incomparably greater than in English and leads to the cult of the rare and the rich. As in French, the *consonne d'appui* is obligatory in masculine rhymes and aesthetically valued

in feminine ones. This is far removed from the English rhyme, Echo's poor relation, a genteel pauper whose attempts to shine result merely in doggerel garishness. For if in Russian and French the feminine rhyme is a glamorous lady friend, her English counterpart is either an old maid or a drunken hussy from Limerick.

2. No matter the length of a word in Russian it has but one stress; there is never a secondary accent or two accents as occurs in English—especially American English.

3. Polysyllabic words are considerably more frequent than in English.

4. All syllables are fully pronounced; there are no elisions and slurs as there are in English verse.

5. Inversion, or more exactly pyrrhichization of trochaic words—so commonly met with in English iambs (especially in the case of two-syllable words ending in -er or -ing)—is rare in Russian verse: only a few two-syllable prepositions and the trochaic components of compound words lend themselves to shifts of stress.

6. Russian poems composed in iambic tetrameter contain a larger number of modulated lines than of regular ones, while the reverse is true in regard to English poems.

By "regular line" I mean an iambic line in which the metrical beat coincides in each foot with the natural stress of the word: *Of cloudless climes and starry skies* (Byron). By "modulated line" I mean an iambic line in which at least one metrical accent falls on the unstressed syllable of a polysyllabic word (such as the third syllable in "reasonable") or on a monosyllabic word unstressed in speech (such as "of," "the," "and" etc.). In Russian prosody such modulations are termed "half-accents," and both in Russian and English poetry a tetrametric iambic line may have one such half-accent on the first, second, or third foot, or two half-accents in the first and third, or in adjacent feet. Here are some examples (the Roman figure designates the foot where the half-accent occurs).

- | | |
|----------|---|
| I | Make the delighted spirit glow (Shelley);
My apprehensions come in crowds (Wordsworth);
Of forests and enchantments drear (Milton);
Beyond participation lie (Wordsworth); |
| II | Do paint the meadows with delight (Shakespeare);
I know a reasonable woman (Pope);
And on that unforgotten shore (Bottomly); |
| III | When icicles hang by the wall (Shakespeare); |
| I + II | |
| II + III | |

I + III

Or in the chambers of the sea (Blake);
An incommunicable sleep (Wordsworth).

It is important to mark that, probably in conjunction with characteristic 3, the half-accent in the third foot occurs three or four times more frequently in Russian iambic tetrameters than in English ones, and that the regular line is more than twice rarer. If, for instance we examine Byron's *Mazeppa*, Scott's *The Lady of the Lake*, Keats's *The Eve of Saint Mark* and Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, we find that the percentage of regular lines there is around 65, as against only some 25 in *Onegin*. There is, however, one English poet whose modulations, if not as rich in quantity and variety as Pushkin's, are at least an approach to that richness. I refer to Andrew Marvell. It is instructive to compare Byron's snip-snap monotonies such as

One shade the more one ray the less
Had half impaired the nameless grace
Which waves in every raven tress
Or softly lightens o'er her face

with any of the lines addressed by Marvell "To His Coy Mistress":

And you should if you please refuse,
Till the conversion of the Jews
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires and more slow,

—four lines in which there are six half-accents against Byron's single one.

It is among such melodies that one should seek one's model when translating Pushkin in verse.

III

I shall now make a statement for which I am ready to incur the wrath of Russian patriots: Alexandr Sergeyevich Pushkin (1799–1837), the national poet of Russia, was as much a product of French literature as of Russian culture; and what happened to be added to this mixture, was individual genius which is neither Russian nor French, but universal and divine. In regard to Russian

influence, Zhukovski and Baryushkov were the immediate predecessors of Pushkin: harmony and precision—this was what he learned from both, though even his boyish verses were more vivid and vigorous than those of his young teachers. Pushkin's French was as fluent as that of any highly cultured gentleman of his day. Gallicisms in various stages of assimilation populate his poetry with the gay hardness of lucern and dandelion invading a trail in the Rocky Mountains. *Coeur flétri*, *essaim de désirs*, *transports*, *alarmes*, *attrait*, *attendrissement*, *fol amour*, *amer regret* are only a few—my list comprises about ninety expressions that Pushkin as well as his predecessors and contemporaries transposed from French into melodious Russian. Of special importance is *bizarre*, *bizarrière* which Pushkin rendered as *strannyi*, *strannost'* when alluding to the oddity of Onegin's nature. The *douces chimères* of French elegies are as close to the *sladkie mecht'i* and *sladostnie mechtaniya* of Pushkin as they are to the "delicious reverie" and "sweet delusions" of eighteenth-century English poets. The *sombres bocages* are Pushkin's *sumrachiye dubrovi* and Pope's "darksome groves." The English translator should also make up his mind how to render such significant nouns and their derivatives as *toska* (*angoisse*), *tomnost'* (*langueur*) and *nega* (*mollesse*) which constantly recur in Pushkin's idiom. I translate *toska* as "heart-ache" or "anguish" in the sense of Keats's "wakeful anguish." *Tomnost'* with its adjective *tomnyi* is among Pushkin's favorite words. The good translator will recall that "anguish" is used as a noun by Elizabethan poets (e.g., Samuel Daniel's "relieve my anguish"), and in this sense is to "anguish" what "pale" is to "dark." Blake's "her languished head" takes care of the adjective, and the "languid moon" of Keats is nicely duplicated by Pushkin's *tomnaya luna*. At some point *tomnost'* (*langueur*) grades into *nega* (*molle langueur*), soft luxury of the senses, slumberous tenderness. Pushkin was acquainted with English poets only through their French models or French versions; the English translator of *Onegin*, while seeking an idiom in the Gallic diction of Pope and Byron, or in the romantic vocabulary of Keats, must constantly refer to the French poets.

In his early youth, Pushkin's literary taste was formed by the same writers and the same *Cours de Littérature* that formed Lamartine and Stendhal. This manual was the *Lycée ou Cours de Littérature, ancienne et moderne* by Jean François Laharpe, in sixteen volumes, 1799–1805. To the end of his days, Pushkin's favorite authors were Boileau, Bossuet, Corneille, Fénelon, Lafontaine,

Molière, Pascal, Racine, and Voltaire. In relation to his contemporaries, he found Lamartine melodious but monotonous, Hugo gifted but on the whole second-rate; he welcomed the lascivious verse of young Musset, and rightly despised Béranger. In *Onegin* one finds echoes not only of Voltaire's *Le Mondain* (various passages in chapter one) or Millevoye's *Elégies* (especially in passages related to Lenski), but also of Parny's *Poésies Erotiques*, Gresset's *Vert-vert*, Chénier's melancholy melodies and of a host of *petits poètes français*, such as Baïf, Gentil Bernard, Bernis, Bertin, Chaulieu, Colardeau, Delavigne, Delille, Desbordes-Valmore, Desportes, Dorat, Ducis, Gilbert, Lattaignant, Lebrun, Le Brun, Legouvé, Lemierre, Léonard, Malfilâtre, Piron, Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, and others.

As to German and English, he hardly had any. In 1821, translating Byron into gentleman's French for his own private use, he renders "the wave that rolls below the Athenian's grave" (beginning of the *Ginour*) as "ce flot qui roule sur la grève d'Athènes." He read Shakespeare in Guizot's and Amedée Pichot's revision of Le-tourneur's edition (Paris, 1821) and Byron in Pichot's and Eusèbe de Salle's versions (Paris, 1819-21). Byron's command of the cliché was singularly dear to Russian poets as echoing the minor and major French poetry on which they had been brought up.

It would have been a flat and dry business indeed, if the verbal texture of *Onegin* were reduced to these patterns in faded silks. But a miracle occurred. When, more than a hundred and fifty years ago, the Russian literary language underwent the prodigious impact of French, the Russian poets made certain inspired selections and matched the old and the new in certain enchantingly individual ways. French stock epithets, in their Russian metamorphosis, breathe and bloom anew, so delicately does Pushkin manipulate them as he disposes them at strategic points of his meaningful harmonies. Incidentally, this does not lighten our task.

IV

The person who desires to turn a literary masterpiece into another language, has only one duty to perform, and this is to reproduce with absolute exactitude the whole text, and nothing but the text. The term "literal translation" is tautological since anything but that is not truly a translation but an imitation, an adaptation or a parody.

The problem, then, is a choice between rhyme and reason: can a translation while rendering with absolute fidelity the whole text, and nothing but the text, keep the form of the original, its rhythm and its rhyme? To the artist whom practice within the limits of one language, his own, has convinced that matter and manner are one, it comes as a shock to discover that a work of art can present itself to the would-be translator as split into form and content, and that the question of rendering one but not the other may arise at all. Actually what happens is still a monist's delight: shorn of its primary verbal existence, the original text will not be able to soar and to sing; but it can be very nicely dissected and mounted, and scientifically studied in all its organic details. So here is the sonnet, and there is the sonneteer's ardent admirer still hoping that by some miracle of ingenuity he will be able to render every shade and sheen of the original and somehow keep intact its special pattern in another tongue.

Let me state at once that in regard to mere meter there is not much trouble. The iambic measure is perfectly willing to be combined with literal accuracy for the curious reason that English prose lapses quite naturally into an iambic rhythm.

Stevenson has a delightful essay warning the student against the danger of transferring one's prose into blank verse by dint of polishing and pruning; and the beauty of the thing is that Stevenson's discussion of the rhythmic traps and pitfalls is couched in pure iambic verse with such precision and economy of diction that readers, or at least the simpler readers, are not aware of the didactic trick.

Newspapers use blank verse as commonly as Monsieur Jourdain used prose. I have just stretched my hand toward a prostrate paper, and reading at random I find

Debate on European Army interrupted: the Assembly's
Foreign Affairs Committee by a vote
Of twenty-four to twenty has decided
To recommend when the Assembly
Convenes this afternoon
That it adopt the resolution
To put off the debate indefinitely.
This, in effect, would kill the treaty.

The New York Yankees aren't conceding
The American League flag to Cleveland

But the first seed of doubt
Is growing in the minds of the defending champions.

Nebraska city proud of jail:
Stromsburg, Nebraska (Associated Press).
They're mighty proud here of the city jail,
A building that provides both for incarceration
And entertainment. The brick structure houses
The police station and the jail. The second story
Has open sides and is used as a band stand.

V

Onegin has been mistranslated into many languages. I have checked only the French and English versions, and some of the rhymed German ones. The three complete German concoctions I have seen are the worst of the lot. Of these Lippert's (1840) which changes Tatiana into Johanna, and Seubert's (1873) with its Max-and-Moritz tang, are beneath contempt; but Bodensiedt's fluffy product (1854) has been so much praised by German critics that it is necessary to warn the reader that it, too, despite a more laudable attempt at understanding if not expression, bristles with incredible blunders and ridiculous interpolations. Incidentally, at this point, it should be noted that Russians themselves are responsible for the two greatest insults that have been hurled at Pushkin's masterpiece—the vile Chaykovski (Tschaykovsky) opera and the equally vile illustrations by Repin which decorate most editions of the novel.

Onegin fared better in French—namely in Turgenev and Viardot's fairly exact prose version (in *La Revue Nationale*, Paris 1863). It would have been a really good translation had Viardot realized how much Pushkin relied on the Russian equivalent of the stock epithets of French poetry, and had he acted accordingly. As it is, Dupont's prose version (1847), while crawling with errors of a textual nature, is more idiomatic.

There are four English complete versions unfortunately available to college students: *Engene Onéguine*, translated by Lieut.-Col. Spalding (Macmillan, London, 1881); *Engene Onegin*, translated by Babette Deutsch in *The Works of Alexander Pushkin*, selected and edited by Abraham Yarmolinski (Random House, New York, 1936); *Engeniy Onegin*, translated by Oliver Elton (*The Slavonic Review*, London, January 1936 to January 1938, and The Pushkin

Press, London, 1937); *Engene Onegin*, translated by Dorothea Prall Radin and George Z. Patrick (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1937).

All four are in meter and rhyme; all are the result of earnest effort and of an incredible amount of mental labor; all contain here and there little gems of ingenuity; and all are grotesque travesties of their model, rendered in dreadful verse, teeming with mistranslations. The least offender is the bluff, matter-of-fact Colonel; the worst is Professor Elton, who combines a kind of irresponsible verbal felicity with the most exuberant vulgarity and the funniest howlers.

One of the main troubles with would-be translators is their ignorance. Only by sheer unacquaintance with Russian life in the 'twenties of the last century can one explain, for instance, their persistently translating *derevnya* by "village" instead of "countryside" and *shakat'* by "to gallop" instead of "to drive." Anyone who wishes to attempt a translation of *Onegin* should acquire exact information in regard to a number of relevant subjects, such as the Fables of Krilov, Byron's works, French poets of the eighteenth century, Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Pushkin's biography, banking games, Russian songs related to divination, Russian military ranks of the time as compared to western European and American ones, the difference between cranberry and lingonberry, the rules of the English pistol duel as used in Russia, and the Russian language.

VI

To illustrate some of the special subtleties that Pushkin's translators should be aware of, I propose to analyze the opening quatrain of stanza 39 in Chapter 4, which describes *Onegin's* life in the summer of 1820 on his country estate situated some three hundred miles west of Moscow:

Progúlki, chtén'è, son glubókoy,
Lesnáya ten', zhurchán'è struy,
Poróy belyánki cherno-ókooy
Mladóy i svézhiy potzelúy . . .

In the first line,

progulki, chten'e, son glubokoy

(which Turgenev-Viardot translated correctly as "la promenade, la lecture, un sommeil profond et salutaire"), *progulki* cannot be rendered by the obvious "walks" since the Russian term includes the additional idea of riding for exercise or pleasure. I did not care for "promenades" and settled for "rambles" since one can ramble about on horseback as well as on foot. The next word means "reading," and then comes a teaser: *glubokoy son* means not only "deep sleep" but also "sound sleep" (hence the double epithet in the French translation) and of course implies "sleep by night." One is tempted to use "slumber," which would nicely echo in another key the alliterations of the text (*progulki-glubokoy*, rambles-slumber), but of these elegancies the translator should beware. The most direct rendering of the line seems to be:

rambles, and reading, and sound sleep . . .¹

In the next line

lesnaya ten', zhurchan'e struy . . .

lesnaya ten' is "the forest's shade," or, in better concord "the sylvan shade" (and I confess to have toyed with (Byron's) "the umbrage of the wood"); and now comes another difficulty: the catch in *zhurchan'e struy*, which I finally rendered as "the bubbling of the streams," is that *strui* (nominative plural) has two meanings: its ordinary one is the old sense of the English "streams" designating not bodies of water but rather limbs of water, the shafts of a running river (for example as used by Kyd in "Cornelia": "O beauteous Tyber with thine easie streams that glide . . .," or by Anne Bradstreet in "Contemplations": "a [River] where gliding streams" etc.), while the other meaning is an attempt on Pushkin's part to express the French *onides*, waters; for it should be clear to Pushkin's translator that the line

the sylvan shade, the bubbling of the streams . . .

(or as an old English rhymster might have put it "the green-wood shade, the purling rilletts") deliberately reflects an idyllic ideal dear

1. Compare Pope's "sound sleep by night, study and ease," in "Solitude," or James Thomson's "retirement, rural quiet, friendship, books," in "The Seasons: Spring."

to the Arcadian poets. The wood and the water, "les ruisseaux et les bois," can be found together in countless "éloges de la campagne" praising the "green retreats" that were theoretically favored by eighteenth-century French and English poets. Antoine Bertin's "le silence des bois, le murmure de l'onde" (*Élégie* 22) or Evariste Parny's "dans l'épaisseur du bois, au doux bruit des ruisseaux" (*Fragment d'Alcée*) are typical commonplaces of this kind.

With the assistance of these minor French poets, we have now translated the first two lines of the stanza. Its entire first quatrain runs:

Rambles, and reading, and sound sleep,
the sylvan shade, the bubbling of the streams;
sometimes a white-skinned dark-eyed girl's
young and fresh kiss.

Poroy belyanki cherno-okoy
Mladoy i svezhiy potzeluy

The translator is confronted here by something quite special. Pushkin masks an autobiographical allusion under the disguise of a literal translation from André Chénier, whom however he does not mention in any appended note. I am against stressing the human-interest angle in the discussion of literary works; and such emphasis would be especially incongruous in the case of Pushkin's novel where a stylized, and thus fantastic, Pushkin is one of the main characters.

However there is little doubt that our author camouflaged in the present stanza, by means of a device which in 1825 was unique in the annals of literary art, his own experience: namely a brief intrigue he was having that summer on his estate in the Province of Pskov with Olga Kalashnikov, a meek, delicate-looking slave girl, whom he made pregnant and eventually bundled away to a second demesne of his, in another province. If we now turn to André Chénier, we find, in a fragment dated 1789 and published by Latouche as "Épître VII, à de Pange aîné" (lines 5-8):

. . . Il a dans sa paisible et sainte solitude,
Du loisir, d'un sommeil, et les bois, et l'étude,
Le banquet des amis, et quelquefois, les soirs,
Le baiser jeune et frais d'une blanche aux yeux noirs.

None of the translators of Pushkin, English, German or French, have noticed what several Russian students of Pushkin discovered independently (a discovery first published, I think, by Savchenko—"Elegiya Lenskogo i frantsuskaya elegiya," in *Pushkin v mirovoy literature*, note, p. 362, Leningrad, 1926), that the two first lines of our stanza 39 are a paraphrase, and the next two a metaphor of Chénier's lines. Chénier's curious preoccupation with the whiteness of a woman's skin (see for example *Elégie* 22) and Pushkin's vision of his own frail young mistress, fuse to form a marvelous mask, the disguise of a personal emotion; for it will be noted that our author, who was generally rather careful about the identification of his sources, nowhere reveals his direct borrowing here, as if by referring to the literary origin of these lines he might impinge upon the mystery of his own romance.

English translators, who were completely unaware of all the implications and niceties I have discussed in connection with this stanza, have had a good deal of trouble with it. Spalding stresses the hygienic side of the event

the uncontaminated kiss
of a young dark-eyed country maid;

Miss Radin produces the dreadful:

a kiss at times from some fair maiden
dark-eyed, with bright and youthful looks;

Miss Deutsch, apparently not realizing that Pushkin is alluding to Onegin's carnal relations with his serf girls, comes up with the incredibly coy:

and if a black-eyed girl permitted
sometimes a kiss as fresh as she;

and Professor Elton, who in such cases can always be depended upon for grotesque triteness and bad grammar, reverses the act and peroxides the concubine:

at times a fresh young kiss bestowing
upon some blond and dark-eyed maid.

Pushkin's line is, by-the-by, an excellent illustration of what I mean by "literalism, literality, literal interpretation." I take literalism to mean "absolute accuracy." If such accuracy sometimes results in the strange allegoric scene suggested by the phrase "the letter has killed the spirit," only one reason can be imagined: there must have been something wrong either with the original letter or with the original spirit, and this is not really a translator's concern. Pushkin has literally (i.e., with absolute accuracy) rendered Chénier's *une blanche* by *belyanka* and the English translator should reincarnate here both Pushkin and Chénier. It would be false literalism to render *belyanka* (*une blanche*) as "a white one"—or, still worse, "a white female"; and it would be ambiguous to say "fair-faced." The accurate meaning is "a white-skinned female," certainly "young," hence a "white-skinned girl," with dark eyes and, presumably, dark hair enhancing by contrast the luminous fairness of unpigmented skin.

Another good example of a particularly "untranslatable" stanza is 33 in Chapter 1:

I recollect the sea before a storm:

O how I envied
the waves that ran in turbulent succession
to lie down at her feet with love!

Ya pómnyu móre pred grozóyu:
kak ya zavídoval volnám
begúshchim búrnoy cheredóyu
s lyukóv'yu lech k eyó nogám!

Russian readers discern in the original here two sets of beautifully onomatopoeic alliterations: *begúshchim búrnoy* . . . which renders the turbulent rush of the surf, and *s lyubov'yu lech*—the liquid lisp of the waves dying in adoration at the lady's feet. Whomsoever the recollected feet belonged to (thirteen-year-old Marie Raevski paddling near Taganrog, or her father's godchild, a young *dame de compagnie* of Tatar origin, or what is more likely—despite Marie's own memoirs—Countess Elise Vorontzov, Pushkin's mistress in Odessa, or, most likely, a retrospective combination of reflected ladies), the only relevant fact here is that these waves come from Lafontaine through Bogdanovich. I refer to "L'onde pour toucher . . . [Vénus] à longs flots s'entrepousse et d'une égale ardeur chaque flot à son tour s'en vient baiser les pieds de la mère d'Amour" (Jean

de la Fontaine, "Les Amours de Psiche et de Cupidon," 1669) and to a close paraphrase of this by Ippolit Bogdanovich, in his "Sweet Psyche" (*Dushen'ka*, 1783-1799) which in English should read "the waves that pursue her jostle jealously to fall humbly at her feet."

Without introducing various changes, there is no possibility whatsoever to make of Pushkin's four lines an alternately rhymed tetrametric quatrain in English, even if only masculine rhymes be used. The key words are: *collect, sea, storm, envied, waves, ran, turbulent, succession, lie, feet, love*; and to these eleven not a single addition can be made without betrayal. For instance, if we try to end the first line in "before"—*I recollect the sea before* (followed by a crude enjambement)—and graft the rhyme "shore" to the end of the third line (the *something* waves that storm the shore), this one concession would involve us in a number of other changes completely breaking up the original sense and all its literary associations. In other words, the translator should constantly bear in mind not only the essential pattern of the text but also the borrowings with which that pattern is interwoven. Nor can anything be added for the sake of rhyme or meter. One thinks of some of those task problems in chess tournaments to the composition of which special restrictive rules are applied, such as the stipulation that only certain pieces may be used. In the marvelous economy of an *Onegin* stanza, the usable pieces are likewise strictly limited in number and kind: they may be shifted around by the translator but no additional men may be used for padding or filling up the gaps that impair a unique solution.

VII

To translate an *Onegin* stanza does not mean to rig up fourteen lines with alternate beats and affix to them seven jingle rhymes starting with pleasure-love-leisure-dove. Granted that rhymes can be found, they should be raised to the level of *Onegin's* harmonies but if the masculine ones may be made to take care of themselves, what shall we do about the feminine rhymes? When Pushkin rhymes *devi* (maidens) with *gde vi* (where are you?), the effect is evocative and euphonious, but when Byron rhymes "maidens" with "gay dens," the result is burlesque. Even such split rhymes in *Onegin* as the instrumental of Childe Harold and the instrumental of "Ice" (*Garol'-dom—so-l'dom*), retain their aonian gravity and

have nothing in common with such monstrosities in Byron as "new skin" and "Pouskin" (a distortion of the name of Count Musin-Pushkin, a binominal branch of the family).

So here are three conclusions I have arrived at: (1) It is impossible to translate *Onegin* in rhyme. (2) It is possible to describe in a series of footnotes the modulations and rhymes of the text as well as all its associations and other special features. (3) It is possible to translate *Onegin* with reasonable accuracy by substituting for the fourteen rhymed tetrameter lines of each stanza fourteen unrhymed lines of varying length, from iambic dimeter to iambic pentameter.

These conclusions can be generalized. I want translations with copious footnotes, footnotes reaching up like skyscrapers to the top of this or that page so as to leave only the gleam of one textual line between commentary and eternity. I want such footnotes and the absolutely literal sense, with no emasculation and no padding—I want such sense and such notes for all the poetry in other tongues that still languishes in "poetical" versions, begrimed and beslimed by rhyme. And when my *Onegin* is ready, it will either conform exactly to my vision or not appear at all.