




Narrative Poems by
**ALEXANDER
PUSHKIN**
and by
**MIKHAIL
LERMONTOV**

Translated by

CHARLES JOHNSTON

Introduction by Kyril FitzLyon

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION BY KYRIL FITZLYON	vii
TRANSLATOR'S NOTE BY CHARLES JOHNSTON	xxi
 ALEXANDER PUSHKIN:	3–53
<i>ONEGIN'S JOURNEY</i>	3
<i>GRAF NULIN</i>	14
<i>MOZART AND SALIERI</i>	27
<i>THE BRONZE HORSEMAN</i>	38
 MIKHAIL LERMONTOV:	54–144
<i>THE TAMBOV LADY</i>	54
<i>THE NOVICE</i>	82
<i>THE DEMON</i>	107



his farewell . . . and before my death
 perhaps near by once more I'll hear
 my native tongue! and someone dear,
 I'll dream, some brother, or some friend,
 how, gently, over me he'll bend,
 how, tenderly, he'll wipe my brow
 clean of death's icy sweat, and how
 he'll sing to me in undertone
 of that dear country, once my own . . .
 and so I'll sleep—no curse, no groan!"



THE DEMON

An Eastern Story

PART I

I

A Demon, soul of all the banished,
 sadly above the sinful world
 floated, and thoughts of days now vanished
 before him crowdingly unfurled;
 days when, in glory's habitation,
 he shone out a pure cherubim,
 when comets flying on their station
 rejoiced to exchange a salutation
 of welcome and of love with him,
 when through the vapours of creation,
 hungry for knowledge, he flew on
 with caravans in their migration
 to space where headlong stars have gone;
 with love and faith to lean upon,
 happy first-born of our condition,
 he knew no evil, no suspicion,
 his mind undaunted by the length
 of fruitless aeons sadly falling . . .
 so much, so much there was . . . the strength,
 the will now fails him for recalling!

II

He wandered, now long-since outcast;
 his desert had no refuge in it:
 and one by one the ages passed,

as minute follows after minute,
 each one monotonously dull.
 The world he ruled was void and null;
 the ill he sowed in his existence
 brought no delight. His technique scored,
 he found no traces of resistance—
 yet evil left him deeply bored.

III

Above the steep Caucasian places
 heaven's expatriate flew full-pelt:
 below him, Kazbek's diamond-faces
 glittered with snows that never melt,
 and far beneath them, dark, arresting
 as some crevasse where snakes are nesting,
 Daryal wound its twisted belt,
 and Terek, lioness-like, was springing,
 shaggily-maned all down its back;
 it roared, and mountain beasts and swinging
 birds high on their circuitous track
 in the azure heard its lilting water;
 and clouds from far-off southern lands
 escorted him in gilded bands
 toward horizon's northern quarter;
 and closely packed massifs of stone,
 deep-sunk in their mysterious dreaming
 had bowed their peaks as he had flown
 above the bed where waves were gleaming;
 and towered castles on the hard
 precipice-top, above the entry
 to Caucasus, in cloud stood guard
 grim as some Cyclopean sentry!
 How strange, how savage was the whole

divine landscape; but that proud soul
 viewed with disdain and some derision
 the product of his Maker's will;
 his lofty forehead at this vision
 expressed no thought, exactly nil.

IV

Before him now the picture changes;
 a different scene, a brilliant hue:
 luxurious Georgia's vales and ranges
 are counterpaned-out for his view;
 fortunate land, and sumptuous too!
 Pillar-like ruined halls and granges,
 and watercourses that run loud,
 over the dappled pebbles rolling,
 and nightingales that in the crowd
 of roses voice their amorous trolling
 to which no answer is allowed;
 plane-trees inside their ivy sheathing
 with branching shadows; caves where deer
 at flaming midday hide their fear;
 and life, and sound of leaves, and glow,
 a hundred tongues that murmur low,
 and plants in thousands gently breathing!
 The sensual heat of high noondays,
 nights which the never-failing sprays
 of dew have drenched in aromatic,
 and stars like eyes, clear and dramatic,
 sharp as a Georgian maiden's gaze! . . .
 and yet, apart from envy's chilling,
 this natural glory could inspire
 the barren exile with no thrilling
 of new emotion or new fire;

and everything he contemplated
he either scorned or execrated.

V

A lofty hall, a broad courtyard,
grey-haired Gudál built for his pleasure . . .
the building cost his slaves much treasure
of tears and labour long and hard.
His towers in light of morning barred
with stripes of shade the mountain fairway.
Out of the cliff was hacked a stairway
from where the angled bastions gleam
down to the river; Gudál's daughter,
white-veiled and flashing like a dream,
Princess Tamara, seeking water
runs down to the Arágva's stream.

VI

From the steep mountain every minute
the voiceless house stares at the vale;
today, though, there's a feast, pipes wail—
the hall resounds, wine's flowing in it,
for Gudál has betrothed his girl,
the whole clan's here, all's in a whirl.
Up on the roof, among her bidden
girl-friends, the bride looks on the hall:
sitting on rugs, they sing and call
and play. Already sunk and hidden
by distant peaks the sun's half-ball;
to keep the measure of their singing
the girls clap hands; the youthful bride

takes up her tambourine and, swinging
it round her head in sweeping-wide
circles, abruptly starts to glide;
one moment, like a bird, she dashes
and swoops; the next, she stands at gaze
and her moist eyes dart out their rays
from underneath malicious lashes;
and now she twitches a dark brow,
now suddenly she stops her gliding,
and halts, and makes a little bow;
meanwhile a heavenly foot is sliding
over the carpet; infantile
is the enjoyment in her smile.
Even the moonbeam's fitful shivers
playing on water can't in truth
rival that peerless smile: it quivers
as full of joy as life, or youth.

VII

I swear it on the midnight star,
on rays of sunset or of dawning,
never did autocrat of far
golden Iran, or earthly tsar,
kiss such an eye; on sultry morning
no sparkling fount of the harēm
ever in summertime was splashing
a waist so heavenly in the flashing,
the pearly dewfall of its stream!

Or by no human fingers, pressing
a loved one's brow in their caressing,
was ever hair like this undone;

since earth lost heaven, with humble duty
I swear it, never did such beauty
blossom beneath the southern sun.

VIII

She'd dance no more. Alas, there waited
a different morrow; she was fated,
she, heiress of the celebrated
Gudál, she, lively freedom's own
nursling, to grim incarceration,
vowed to a strange expatriation
and to a family unknown.
Sometimes a secret hesitation
obscured the brilliance of her face;
and, with her, every single motion
was so compact of inner notion,
full of such sweet and simple grace,
that if the Demon, as he floated
above, had looked upon the bride,
thinking of brothers once devoted
he would have turned away—and sighed ...

IX

And he did see her ... For a second
by turmoil too deep to be reckoned
the Demon sensed that he was bound.
His dumb soul's emptiness was slowly
filled with loud chords of blissful sound—
and once again he reached that holy
shrine where love, beauty, goodness gleam! ...
And long he gazed, with fascination,

at the sweet view; as if in dream
his earlier blisses' constellation
came as on summons from afar
and swam before him, star on star.
Then, riveted by unseen forces,
he came to feel a new sorrow;
emotion started on discourses
in language that he used to know.
Was this a sign of new begetting?
the cunning, covetousness-whetting
words came no more ... had he forgot?
God never gave that: and *he'd* not
at any price accept forgetting ...
.....

X

At sunset, spurring on his beast,
the bridegroom to the wedding feast
with all impatient haste was riding,
and the green banks of brightly gliding
Arágva he had safely gained.
Behind him staggered, limped and strained
an endless line of camels bringing
his wedding gifts in towering load;
they gleamed, and all their bells were ringing
as they strung out along the road.
Sinodal's lord himself was heading
the sumptuous caravan. His waist
inside its belt is tightly laced;
sabre and dagger-mounts are shedding
the sun's reflections; his flintlock,
slung back, has notches on its stock.
And in the wind his sleeves are straying,

sleeves of a *chukha** that all round
with trimming of galloon is crowned.

A saddle where bright silks are playing;
a bit with tassels downward swaying;
and, lathered under him, his bold
charger with that rare hue of gold.
Karabakh's brave offspring, ears with tension
pricked, all taut in apprehension
snorts as he squints down in the gloom
on the careering river's spume.
A path to make the bravest shiver!
The cliff to leftward; deep as doom,
to right the chasm of the wild river.
It's late; on snowy peaks the sliver
of radiance fades; mists rise apace . . .
the caravan begins to race.

XI

A wayside chapel . . . here is sleeping
since days of old, in God's good keeping,
now sanctified, an ancient prince
cut down by vengeance. Ever since,
heading for feast or bloody fighting,
here, as he hurried on his way,
the traveller never missed inditing
the strongest prayer that he could say:
that prayer, so fervently directed,
kept him from Moslem's knife protected.
But the bold bridegroom now disdained
the rite his forefathers maintained.

* Outer garment with sleeves that fold back. (*Lermontov's note.*)

The crafty Demon with infernal
reveries had tempted him; in thought
beneath the gloom, the shades nocturnal,
it was his sweetheart's lips he sought.
But suddenly, ahead, a figure—
no, two—no, more—a shot—whose trigger?
In clinking stirrups rising now,
ramming his fur cap on his brow
the dauntless prince in silence lifted
his Turkish whip; it flashed, it whirled,
crack went the lash; he spoke no word
as, eagle-like, he swooped, he shifted . . .
Another shot! a screaming man—
then from the valley dull groans rended
the still of night. The Georgians ran,
the battle all too soon was ended!

XII

Now calm returned; the sheepish flock
of camels on the road, in shock,
gazed back upon the dead, astounded;
and in the still of steppe and rock
dully their little bells resounded.
The sumptuous caravan was sacked;
above those Christian corpses packed
the bird of night invigilated!
no peaceful sepulchre awaited
their bodies, in some cloister's trust,
where rested their forefather's dust;
no sisters and no mothers, trailing
lengths of impenetrable veiling,
with sobs and prayers and sighs and wailing
visit their grave and mourn their loss!

And yet, by loving hands erected
 here at the highway verge, protected
 by the steep cliff, there stands a cross;
 in spring the amorous, neglected
 ivy, in emerald nets displayed,
 clasps it in tenderest embraces;
 and, turning in from far-off places,
 the walker, tired from the long grade,
 rests in the consecrated shade . . .

XIII

Swift as a deer the horse is rushing,
 snorting as if for battle; hushing
 sometimes, he halts in mid-career,
 blows out his nostrils wide in fear,
 and listens to the breeze's sighing;
 now thunderously his hooves are flying,
 beating tattoos of rhythmic sort;
 his mane all tangled, wildly spraying,
 he gallops on without a thought.
 He bears a silent horseman, swaying
 across the saddle or, down-pressed,
 collapsed upon that golden crest.
 His hand no longer steers the bridle,
 feet in the stirrups are thrust back,
 bloodstreams are flowing, broad and idle,
 across the cloth of his shabrack.
 Brave galloper, you brought your master
 out from the battle like a dart,
 but the Ossetian's bullet, faster
 than you, in darkness found his heart!

XIV

In Gudál's hall there's grief and moaning,
 the guests swarm out to the courtyard;
 whose charger, broken past atoning,
 outside the gates has fallen so hard?
 and who's the lifeless rider? traces
 of war's alarm lurk in the spaces
 of his dark-favoured, furrowed brow.
 On clothes, on weapons, blood is freezing;
 his hand in a last furious squeezing
 upon the mane is frozen now . . .
 Oh, not for long the bride had waited
 her young groom's coming: and at least,
 his princely word unviolated,
 he galloped to the wedding feast . . .
 Alas, no more that brave, hard-bitten
 charger shall bear him—so it's written! . . .

XV

Heaven's punishment like thunder swooped
 down on that family, so light-hearted!
 pitiable, Tamara drooped
 onto her bed; she sobbed, then started,
 suddenly, tear on rolling tear,
 her bosom laboured, breath oppressed her—
 when, from above, a voice addressed her;
 she seemed in magic tones to hear:
 "Don't weep, my child! no use in steeping
 a voiceless corpse with tears unsleeping!
 Such tears are no life-giving dew:
 they simply cloud your eyes; such weeping
 burns up complexion's virgin hue!

he's far from here, he's past all knowing,
 from him your grief can earn no praise;
 celestial radiance now is glowing
 before his incorporeal gaze;
 for him heaven's choirs are now intoning . . .
 what are life's paltry dreams, the oppressed
 tears of a poor young girl, her groaning,
 to the celestial country's guest?
 No mortal creature should be reckoned,
 whatever be his lot, as worth—
 believe me—for a single second,
 your grief, my angel of the earth!

"On the heavens' ethereal ocean,
 rudderless, without a sail,
 starry choirs in ordered motion
 calmly float through vapour's veil;
 over heaven's unbounded spaces,
 unattainable, unheard,
 leaving after them no traces,
 pass the clouds in fleecy herd.
 Times for meeting, or leave-taking,
 bring them neither joy nor pain;
 future brings them no wish-making,
 past, no will to live again.
 In the grievous hour of sorrows,
they are what you should recall;
 take no heed for earthly morrows,
 be uncaring, like them all!

"As soon as night on the Caucasian
 summits has cast its mantle round,
 as soon as its bewitching suasion
 has stilled the world, as if spellbound;

as soon as on the cliff there passes
 a night wind through the withered grasses,
 and hidden deep in them a bird
 cheerfully in the dark has stirred;
 as soon as, under vineyard railing
 thirstily drinking the unfailing
 dewfall, the flower of night has bloomed;
 as soon as the gold moon has loomed
 silently from the mountain-sill,
 looked at you sidelong in the still—
 then I shall fly to you and keep
 tryst with you till the daystar flashes,
 and on the silk of your eyelashes
 I shall infuse the gold of sleep . . ."

XVI

Then the voice faded like illusion,
 the sound had come, the sound died out.
 She started up, she looked about . . .
 and inexpressible confusion
 reigned in her breast; fear, grief, joy, doubt,
 compared to this were just delusion.
 Her feelings bubbled up in rout;
 her soul arose and snapped its shackles,
 while fire came racing through each vein;
 that voice, so strange it raised the hackles,
 she thought she heard it speak again.
 Just before daybreak, welcome-seeming
 slumber had dimmed Tamara's gaze;
 and yet her mind was in a daze,
 astonished with prophetic dreaming.
 A stranger, mute, through mists that curled,
 in beauty clad not of this world,

came to her, leaned above her pillow;
 and in his glance was such a billow
 of love and grief that you'd infer
 all his compassion was for her.
 This was no angel to befriend her,
 this was no heaven-sent defender:
 no crown of iridescent beams
 adorned his forehead with its gleams;
 nor one of those who burn together
 in hell, no tortured sinner—no!
 he was like evening in clear weather:
 not day, nor night—not gloom, nor glow!

PART II

I

"Oh, father, father, cease from chiding,
 leave your Tamara free from threat;
 I weep: see how my tears are gliding,
 they've flowed for days, they're flowing yet.
 It's futile that from distant places
 suitors crowd hither to my side ...
 Georgia abounds in maiden graces;
my fate is to be no one's bride! ...
 Oh, father, throw stern words away.
 You've noted how, from day to day,
 victim of poison's curse, I'm fading:
 an evil dream, past all evading,
 torments me; there's no way to flee;
 I'm lost, it's pressing down on me!
 To holy sanctuary send me,
 send me to cool my raging head;
 for there my Saviour will defend me,

with Him my anguish will be shed.
 No worldly joys can now deceive me ...
 so in a shrine's protecting gloom
 rather let some dim cell receive me,
 an early foretaste of the tomb ..."

II

And so to a secluded holy
 cloister her parents took her; dressed
 in a habiliment of lowly
 hairshirting was that maiden breast.
 But even in her monastic twilling,
 as under damask's figured gleam,
 still with the same illicit dream
 just as before her heart was thrilling.
 At the altar, in the candle's glow,
 at moments of most solemn singing,
 or while the voice of prayer was ringing,
 would sound those tones she had to know.
 And where the dim cathedral lifted
 its vaulting, often would repair,
 soundless and traceless as the air,
 where the thin films of incense drifted,
 a starlike figure, shining there;
 it called, it beckoned her ... but where?

III

Between two hills, in shade abounding,
 the sacred convent hid away
 in planes and poplars tight-surrounding;
 sometimes, when darkness came to stay

on the ravine, a lamp, appearing
 in a faint glimmer through the clearing,
 revealed where that young sinner lay.
 In shade that almond-trees projected,
 sad crosses in their rows protected
 the voiceless graves; there the small birds
 in choirs of song rehearsed their words.
 Over the stones ran, bubbling, springing,
 fountains of water, chilled as ice,
 that under beetling cliffs would slice
 across the valley-bed and, singing,
 tumble on further through a scrub
 whose bloom hoar-frosted every shrub.

IV

To northward, mountain peaks were showing.
 And when Aurora, early glowing,
 watches the smoky mists of blue
 rise from the valley, layer on layer,
 and when, face to the east, as due,
 all the muezzins call to prayer,
 and the clear voice of the bell-tower
 wakens the people with its shaking;
 in that pacific, solemn hour
 at which the Georgian maiden, taking
 her long and tapering pitcher, goes
 for water down the steep, there grows
 a mountain range, all capped in snows;
 against the limpid heaven it throws
 a wall of lilac past comparing;
 or in the sunset hour it's wearing
 a chasuble that darkly glows;
 and in the middle stands, invading

cloudland, the supreme peak by far,
 Kazbek, all turbaned in brocading,
 of Caucasus the mighty tsar.

V

With guilty thoughts in crowding session,
 Tamara's deaf to the intercession
 of honest pleasures. In her eyes
 the whole world's wrapped in shade and sadness;
 all things are cause for pain and madness—
 night's gloom, or radiance of sunrise.
 No sooner has the chill infusion
 of sleepy night flowed all around,
 than she in frenzy and confusion
 before the icon falls to ground;
 she weeps; and in the silent tension
 of night her sobs with apprehension
 trouble the wayfarer's attention:
 "There groans some spirit of the height,
 chained in a cavern, sadly stirring!"
 he listens hard through the still night,
 then gives his weary horse a spurring.

VI

Tamara at the window-sill
 stares at the distant scene, and still
 stares, languid, full of trepidation;
 she sits in lonely meditation,
 she sighs and waits, waits the whole day . . .
 a whisper comes: he's on his way!
 Her dreams, his manner of appearing,
 such flattery had not failed to reach

her heart; his sad gaze, the endearing,
 the tender strangeness of his speech.
 Herself not knowing rhyme or reason,
 she's pined and languished many days;
 her heart may wish to pray in season
 to holy saints, to *him* it prays;
 worn out by struggle unabating,
 if she lies down on slumber's bed,
 her pillow burns, she's suffocating,
 she starts up, shivering with dread;
 her breast, her shoulders flame, she races
 to breathe, she chokes, mist's in her eyes,
 her arms are thirsting for embraces,
 and on her lips a kiss that dies . . .

VII

Now Georgia's mountains had been vested
 in aery robes of twilight hue.
 Down to the cloister, as suggested
 by his sweet wont, the Demon flew.
 And yet he shrank, long minutes through,
 he started back from violating
 the peace in which that shrine was waiting.
 There was a moment when he dreamed
 of giving up his grim designing.
 Around the high wall, brooding, pining,
 he roamed: without a breeze, it seemed
 the leaves had stirred from his returning.
 In shade he looked up; her undone
 window displays a lantern burning;
 she's long been waiting for someone!
 And now, amid the silence reigning,

*chingar's** harmonious complaining
 lilted, and strains of song began;
 they flowed, these sounds, they ran and ran,
 they pressed, like tears, hard on each other;
 so tender was that song, you'd find
 that up in heaven, for mankind,
 its melodies had been designed.
 Perhaps to a forgotten brother
 some angel, moved to meet again,
 had flown in stealth and raised this strain
 to alleviate the other's pain,
 songs where time past found sweet narration? . . .
 Love's swooning and love's agitation—
 for the first time the Demon now
 experienced them; in shock and shiver
 he thinks of fleeing—but no quiver
 stirs in his wing! from his dimmed brow
 a heavy teardrop, a slow river . . .
 what marvel! till today, quite near
 that cell, there stands in wondrous fashion
 a stone scorched by a tear of passion,
 burnt through by an inhuman tear! . . .

VIII

And, as he enters, love is winning,
 his soul is opened to the good;
 he thinks, for life a new beginning
 has come, as he had prayed it would.
 The vague alarm of expectation,
 the unspoken fear of the unknown,
 as if at a first confrontation

* Chingar: A kind of guitar. (*Lermontov's note.*)

to that proud soul had now been shown.
 Then comes a grim prefiguration!
 he enters—there in front of him
 heaven's envoy, the cherubim,
 radiant, on his protective mission
 keeps the fair sinner from all things
 evil, defends her from perdition
 inside the shadow of his wings;
 and sudden light, from heaven down-beating,
 blinded the Demon's unclean sight;
 instead of a sweet-spoken greeting,
 heavy rebuke was prompt to smite:

IX

"Oh, soul of evil, soul unsleeping,
 in midnight gloom, what tryst is keeping?
 None of your votaries are here,
 no breeze of ill has dared to roister
 till now in this my well-loved cloister;
 so bring no wicked footsteps near.
 Who summoned you?" A crafty sneer
 was Demon's manner of replying;
 all red with envy was his look;
 and once more in his soul, undying,
 hate's poison brew began to cook.
 "She's mine!" cried out the grim contender,
 "release her, for you come too late,
 too late to serve as her defender
 and stand in judgement on her fate
 or mine. On her proud soul, I tell you,
 I have affixed my seal above;
 so from your cloister I repel you,
 this is *my* kingdom, here I love!"

And on the victim, now past saving,
 the Angel cast a sorrowing eye
 and slow as slow, with pinions waving,
 was drowned in the ethereal sky.

X

TAMARA

Who are you, tempter-tongue? What duty
 brings you to me—from heaven? from hell?
 What do you want of me? ...

DEMON

Your beauty ...

TAMARA

Tell me, who are you? Answer. Tell ...

DEMON

He to whose voice with rapt attention
 you listened in the still midnight,
 whose grief you guessed at, whose intention
 spoke to your soul, whose vague dimension
 you saw in dreaming; who can blight
 hopes with one glance, and bring them crashing;
 whom no one loves; who lives for lashing
 his earthly slaves with furious beat,
 the king of freedom and cognition,
 heaven's foe, and nature's own perdition,
 and yet, you see him at your feet!
 I bring a message of devotion,
 a prayer of love; for you I've kept
 my first pains of earthbound emotion,

and the first tears I ever wept.
 Oh, hear me out! oh, have some notion
 of pity! back to heaven you
 with just a single word could send me.
 With your love's raiment to defend me,
 thus vested, I'd stand there, a new
 angel with a new gleam to attend me;
 oh, only hear me out, I pray—
 I love you like a slave! the day
 when I set eyes on you there started
 in me a secret but whole-hearted
 hatred for my immortal sway.
 I found I envied such deficient
 happiness as exists down here;
 all life not yours was insufficient,
 all life away from you brought fear.
 Then in my dull heart, unexpected,
 a glow began to warm and wake;
 deep in an old wound and undetected,
 grief started stirring like a snake.
 What, without you, is life eternal?
 what are my boundless realms infernal?
 Just empty words, a loud discord,
 a vast cathedral—with no lord!

TAMARA

Deceitful spirit, you must leave me!
 Be still, I'll not believe the foe . . .
 Oh, my Creator . . . grief and woe!
 no prayer comes out . . . my wits deceive me,
 they falter, gripped by venom's ire!
 Listen, you pile up doom above me
 with words of poison and of fire . . .
 Tell me the reason why you love me!

DEMON

The reason why, fair one, you said?
 Alas, I know it not! . . . elated
 with new life, from my guilty head
 the thorny crown I relegated,
 threw in the ashes all my days:
 my heaven, my hell are in your gaze.
 I love you with no earthly passion,
 such love that *you* could never find:
 with rapture, in the towering fashion
 of an immortal heart and mind.
 On my sad soul, from world's first aeon,
 deeply your image was impressed;
 ever before me it progressed
 through wastes of timeless empyrean.
 My thoughts had long been stirred and racked
 by just one name of passing sweetness:
 my days in paradise had lacked
 just your perfection for completeness.
 If you could guess, if you could know
 how much it costs in tribulation
 throughout the ages' long gradation
 to take one's pleasure, suffer woe,
 to expect no praise for evil, no
 prize for good deeds; what condemnation
 to live for self, by self be bored
 in endless struggle—no reward,
 no crown, no reconciliation!
 To regret all, to seek no prize,
 to know, feel, see all things for ever,
 to seek to hate the world—whatever
 there may be in it, to despise! . . .
 As soon as I from heaven's employment
 was banned by curses, from that day

all nature's warmth and sweet enjoyment
 grew chilled for ever, froze away;
 bluer before me stretched the spaces;
 I saw appavelled in their places,
 like wedding guests, the lights I knew . . .
 crowned, gliding one behind another;
 and yet their former friend and brother
 not one would recognise anew.
 So, in despair, the expatriated,
 the outcasts I began to call,
 but faces, words, and looks that hated,
 I failed to recognise them all.
 And so, in horror, wings inflected,
 I swooped away—but whither? why?
 I know not . . . I had been rejected
 by my old friends; like Adam I
 found the world gone deaf-mute and dry.
 So, at the current's free impulsion,
 a helpless and storm-crippled boat,
 sailless and rudderless, will float,
 knowing no goal for its propulsion;
 so at the earliest morning-tide
 a scrap of thunder-cloud will ride,
 in heaven's azure vaults the only
 visible speck, unhalting, lonely,
 will without trace and without sense
 fly God knows whither, God knows whence!
 Briefly I guided mankind's thought,
 briefly the ways of sin I taught,
 discredited what's noble, brought
 everything beautiful to nought;
 briefly . . . the flame of all committed
 belief in man I firmly drowned . . .
 but was it worthwhile to confound
 just hypocrites and the half-witted?

I hid where the ravines run deep;
 I started, meteor-like, to sweep
 on course through midnight's darkest glooming . . .
 A lonely wayfarer was looming,
 enticed by a near lamp—to fall
 over the cliff-edge, horse and all;
 vainly he called out—bloody traces
 followed him down the mountain-side . . .
 but hatred's tricks, its sad grimaces,
 brought me a solace that soon died!
 How often, locked in dusty battle
 with some great hurricane, in shroud
 of mist and lightning I would rattle
 and swoop and storm amid the cloud,
 and hope in elemental churning
 to stifle all my heart's regret,
 to escape from thoughts that kept returning,
 the unforgotten to forget!
 What is the sum of the privations,
 the labours and the grief of man,
 of past, of future generations,
 compared with just one minute's span
 of all my untold tribulations?
 What is man's life? his labour? why—
 he's passed, he's died, he'll pass and die . . .
 his hopes on Judgement Day rely:
 sure judgement, possible forgiving!
 but *my* sorrow is endless, I
 am damned to sorrow everliving;
 for it, no grave in which to doze!
 sometimes, snakelike, it creeps, or glows
 like flame, it crackles, blazes, rushes,
 or, like a tomb, it chokes and crushes—
 a granite tomb for the repose
 of ruined passions, hopes and woes.

[TAMARA

Why should I share your griefs, your inner
torments? why listen to your moan?

You've sinned . . .

DEMON

Towards you, I'm no sinner.

TAMARA

Someone will hear us! . . .

DEMON

We're alone.

TAMARA

And God?

DEMON

Won't glance at us: eternal
for heaven, but not for earth, his care.

TAMARA

And punishment, and pains infernal?

DEMON

What of them, if we both are there?]

TAMARA

Sufferer, stranger-friend, unwilling—
whoever you may be—I find
your words set secret pleasure thrilling,
ceaselessly they disturb my mind.
But if there's cunning in your story,
if there's a secret, wicked goal . . .

oh, have some mercy! where's the glory
to you, what value is my soul?
In heaven's eye could I be reckoned
dearer than those you spurned instead?
they too are beauties, though unbeckoned!
as here, no mortal for a second
has dared defile their maiden bed . . .
Swear me a fateful oath . . . in anguish
I bid you swear . . . see how I languish;
you know the stuff of women's dreams!
instinctively you soothe my terrors . . .
you understand my ways, my errors—
and you'll have pity that redeems!
Swear it . . . from evil machinations
you'll cease for ever, swear it now.
Have you no oaths, no adjurations,
have you no single sacred vow? . . .

DEMON

By the first day of our creation
I swear, and by its final night,
I swear by evil's condemnation
and by the triumph of the right,
by downfall, with its bitter smarting,
by victories I dream to score,
by bliss of seeing you once more
and by the threat of once more parting.
I swear by all the souls of those
who serve me in predestined fashion,
I swear by my unsleeping foes;
by heaven, by hell, by earth's profession
of holiness, and by your head,
I swear by your last look's expression,
I swear by the first tear you shed,

the air your sweet lips are inhaling,
 those silky curls that wave above,
 I swear by bliss and by travailing,
 I swear, believe it, by my love.
 Old plans of vengeance and destruction
 I have renounced, and dreams of pride;
 henceforth, by evil's sly seduction
 no human spirit shall be tried;
 with heaven I seek to end my warring,
 to live for praying and adoring,
 to live for faith in all that's good.
 Tears of repentance, as they should,
 will from my forehead, thus deserving
 your virtues, wash off heaven's brand,
 and may the world, calm, unobserving,
 flourish untroubled by my hand!
 Till now, you've found appreciation
 at your true worth from me alone:
 I chose you for my adoration,
 laid at your feet my realms, my throne.
 I need your love, my benefaction
 to you will be eternal life;
 in love, just as in evil action,
 I'm strong and quite unmoved by strife.
 With me, free son of the ethereal,
 to stellar regions you'll be whirled;
 you're fated to be my imperial
 consort, and first queen of the world.
 Then without pity, without caring,
 you'll learn to look down at the earth,
 where no true bliss and no long-wearing
 beauty exist, which brings to birth
 only misdeeds and retribution,
 where only paltry passions live;

where love and hate, without dilution
 by fear, are past man's power to give.
 Surely you know how short and fleeting
 is human love's ephemeral rule?
 just for a flash, young blood is heating—
 then days go flying, blood runs cool!
 Who can stand up to pain of parting,
 or to new beauty's tempting gleams,
 to weariness or boredom starting,
 or to the waywardness of dreams?
 Be sure that you were never fated,
 my consort, to destroy your bloom
 and fade away incarcerated,
 enslaved in envy's narrow room,
 amongst the cold and the small-minded,
 the false friends and the open foes,
 the fears, the toils that vainly grinded,
 the fruitless hopes, the crushing woes.
 No, pitifully, without passion,
 you'll not expire, in prayer, behind
 high walls, removed in equal fashion
 from God, and from all human kind.
 Oh, no, you wonder of creation,
 a different destiny is yours;
 you face a different tribulation
 and different bliss in bounteous stores;
 give up all previous ambition,
 renounce the fate of this sad world:
 instead, a lofty, splendid mission
 before your eyes will be unfurled.
 A host of souls who owe me duty
 I'll bring, I'll throw them at your feet;
 magically for you, my beauty,
 handmaids will labour, deft and fleet;

for you from the eastern star I'll ravish
 a golden crown; I'll take for you
 from flowers the midnight dew, and lavish
 upon your crown that selfsame dew;
 I'll bring a sunset ray; ecstatic,
 I'll clasp it, belt-like, round your waist,
 with breath of healing aromatic
 the airs around you will be laced;
 all day the strains of heavenly playing
 will lull your hearing with their tune;
 I'll build you halls with an inlaying
 of turquoise, rooms with amber strewn;
 I'll sound the bottom of the ocean,
 high up above the clouds I'll climb,
 all, all, that's earthly, my devotion
 will give you—love me! . . .

XI

And this time
 with ardent lips so lightly grazing
 he kissed her trembling mouth, and then
 answered her pleas, in language dazing
 with sweet temptation; once again
 those mighty eyes were fixed and gazing
 deep into hers. He set her blazing.
 He gleamed above her like a spark
 or like a knife that finds its mark.
 That devil triumphed! In the dark,
 alas, to her bosom the infernal
 poison of his embrace could pierce.
 A cry resounded, tortured, fierce,
 troubling the stillnesses nocturnal.
 In it were love, and pain's hard kernel,

reproaches, a last desperate prayer,
 and then a hopeless, an eternal
 farewell to life—all these were there.

XII

Meanwhile, alone, the watchman pacing
 past the steep wall serenely made
 his nightly duty-round, embracing
 the iron gong that told his trade;
 and near the cell of that young sinner
 he slowed the measure of his tread;
 above the gong his hand in inner
 puzzlement poised, he halted dead.
 And through the stillness all around him
 he thought he heard an undertone,
 two mouths that kissed, then came to astound him
 a short, sharp cry, a feeble moan.
 And a detestable suspicion
 pierced to the old man's heart . . . but stay,
 a moment passed in this condition
 and all was silent; far away
 only a breeze began to play
 and brought the sound of leaves that rustled;
 in its dark bed the torrent bustled
 and sadly murmured on its way.
 In fear the old night-watchman hurries
 to say a text from holy writ,
 and chase the wicked thought that worries
 with its bad spell his sinful wit;
 he crosses with his quavering fingers
 a breast disturbed by reverie's force,
 in silence he no longer lingers
 but goes his customary course.

.....

XIII

Like a sweet peri sleeping lightly
 she lay inside her coffin now;
 cleaner than counterpane, and whitely
 blooming, the dull hue of her brow.
 Lowered for ever were her lashes . . .
 But heavens! who would not have supposed
 the eyes beneath them simply dozed
 and marvellously just reposed
 waiting a kiss, or daystar's flashes?
 But fruitlessly the light of day
 poured on them all its golden ray;
 her parents' lips kissed them but vainly
 in speechless sorrow. All too plainly
 from them there's nothing has the power
 to tear death's seal off at this hour!

XIV

Never in festal days' confusion
 had sweet Tamara been so dressed,
 in such bright hues, so rich a vest.
 Flowers from her valley in profusion
 (such is tradition's strict behest)
 above her shed their perfume; pressed
 in her dead hand, they looked like making
 farewell to earth, a last leave-taking!
 and nothing in her face implied
 to onlookers how she had died
 in blaze of rapture and of passion;
 no, all her features were instilled
 with a calm beauty that was chilled,
 expressionless in marble-fashion,

blank of all thought, of feeling's breath,
 impenetrable, just like death.
 And a strange smile that had come fleeting
 across her lips was frozen cold.
 Of grief and much heartbreak, on meeting
 any perceptive eye, it told:
 it carried cool contempt's impression,
 the scorn of one prepared to die,
 it carried a last thought's expression
 and, to the earth, a dumb goodbye—
 of life now gone, a vain reflection,
 deader than those death sets apart,
 of eyes grown dim, a recollection
 even more hopeless for the heart.
 Just as, at sunset's grave occasion,
 far on the skyline the Caucasian
 snow-ranges—when in molten gold
 day's chariot founders—iridescent,
 their radiance for a moment hold,
 in dark of distance incandescent—
 and yet this half-dead light can show
 no glimmer down to the benighted
 desert, and no one's path is lighted
 by gleams those icy summits throw.

XV

Now every neighbour, each relation,
 for the sad pilgrimage is bound.
 His grey locks all in laceration,
 beating his breast without a sound,
 for the last time Gudál has mounted
 his faithful, his white-crested horse,
 and the cortege begins its course.

Three days and three nights must be counted
 to reach the calm refuge she shares
 with bones of her long-dead forebears.
 Of every traveller and each village
 the scourge, an ancestor of hers,
 chained down by illness, all his pillage
 repented—history so avers—
 wished for past crimes to win redemption,
 and vowed to build a minster, right
 on top of a granitic height
 where blizzard's dirge had the preemption,
 where no bird ventured but the kite.
 And soon from Kazbek's snows a lonely
 temple arose, and on the crest
 the bones of that wrong-doer only
 in such a scene could find new rest;
 so to a graveyard was converted
 that rock, the kin of clouds on high:
 as if, the nearer to the sky,
 the tomb was warmer . . . or, averted
 and shut away from human gaze,
 as if death's sleep were sounder-seeming . . .
 vain hope! for dead men, there's no dreaming
 the joys, the griefs of earlier days.

XVI

A holy Angel through ethereal
 immensities of heaven's blue
 winged it on golden pinions, who
 was carrying off from things material
 a sinful spirit as he flew.
 And with sweet words of consolation
 and hope he scattered all her doubt;
 all trace of crime and tribulation,

with flowing tears he washed it out.
 Already, from far off, there swept them
 homeward the sounds of heavenly bliss—
 when there flew up to intercept them
 a hellish soul from the abyss.
 He was as mighty as the roaring
 whirlwind, as lightning did he shine;
 proudly, and with insanely soaring
 audacity he cried: "She's mine!"

Tamara's sinful soul was riding
 tight-gripped against her guardian's breast;
 by prayer her terrors were suppressed.
 And now her fate was for deciding,
 again he stood before her eyes,
 but, God!—too changed to recognise!
 so evil was the whole impression,
 so full of poison and aggression
 and endless hatred; in a wave
 the Demon's motionless expression
 breathed out the coldness of the grave.
 "Begone, dark spirit of denial!"
 so heaven's ambassador replied:
 "for long enough your wicked pride
 has triumphed—God will now decide,
 for this is judgement hour; her trial
 is past, the days of test by fire;
 with earth's corruptible attire
 from evil's thrall she's liberated.
 Her soul is ours, and long-awaited!
 Her spirit, one of those by right
 whose life on earth is to be reckoned
 a flash of sharpest pain, a second
 of unattainable delight:
 woven by God from an ethereal

substance are all their vital strings;
 they were not made for things material,
 nor made for them, material things!
 In cruel, costly expiation
 she has atoned for all her doubt.
 She suffered love and tribulation—
 and heaven for love has opened out."

The Angel, with stern gaze unsleeping,
 stared at the tempter, then on high,
 his pinions joyfully upsweeping,
 merged in the radiance of the sky.
 Vanquished, the Demon execrated
 his reveries and their mad scope,
 was left once more to his inflated
 arrogance, left there isolated
 in all the world—no love, no hope!

Above Koishaur's ravine, where climbs
 the mountain through its rocky stages,
 there stands, preserved to modern times,
 a jagged wreck from bygone ages.
 About it, tales for children's ears
 too frightful, linger in tradition . . .
 And voiceless as an apparition,
 witness of those uncanny years,
 it lifts, through trees, its blackened towers.
 Below, the *aül* houses spill,
 the earth is green and bright with flowers;
 a hum of voices grows, falls still
 lost in the distance, and the tinkling
 caravan bells sound far away,
 while through the vapours, gleaming, twinkling,
 the river shoots in foam and spray.

And vital, youthfully eternal,
 loving the sunshine and the vernal
 coolness, old Nature frolics there
 just like a child without a care.
 But the sad castle, after giving
 long years of duty-service, ends
 as some poor old man does, outliving
 all of his dear ones and his friends.
 Only its unseen dwellers, waiting
 for moonrise, then begin to stir;
 then is their time for celebrating!
 they buzz, they scurry, and they whirr.
 A spider, anchorite-beginner,
 works at his web, the grey old spinner;
 up on the roof a jolly pack
 of lizard families are brawling;
 a canny snake from his dark crack
 comes out punctiliously crawling
 across the flags of the old stair;
 now in three coils he gathers there,
 and now in one long streak he's creeping,
 just like a blade, all bright and steeled,
 forgot on some old battlefield,
 no use to heroes dead and sleeping! . . .
 All's wild, nowhere is any trace
 of years gone by: no, in this place
 Time's hand has long been busy sweeping,
 nothing there is that now recalls
 the glorious state Gudál was keeping,
 with his sweet daughter, in these halls!

But the church on the mountain-tower
 where to the earth their bones were vowed,
 kept safely by some sacred power,

can still be seen amidst the cloud.
 By the church-door, on sentry-go,
 a line of black granitic boulders,
 with snowy mantles on their shoulders,
 wear as breastplate against the foe
 eternal ice's glittering show.
 Relics of landslide, dreaming masses
 like waterfalls, grooved with crevasses,
 hang down where they were snapped and caught
 by frost, as if in frowning thought.
 And there the blizzard goes patrolling,
 puffing snow-dust from those grey walls,
 now setting a lament a-rolling,
 now answering with sentry-calls.
 And hearing in some far direction
 of a famed minster in this land,
 from eastward, clouds in serried band
 hurry to make their genuflection;
 but on that circle of tombstones
 no one now weeps, and no one moans.
 There Kazbek's cliff, in dour ill-humour,
 locks up its booty far from harm,
 and mankind's everlasting rumour
 troubles not that eternal calm.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

CHARLES JOHNSTON is the highly acclaimed translator of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* and has also published two volumes of his own poems. With his wife, formerly Princess Natasha Bagration, he translated *A Sportsman's Notebook* by Turgenev. From 1965 to 1971 he was British High Commissioner in Australia.