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ALEXANDER PUSHKIN

# EVGENII ONEGIN

NEW VERSE TRANSLATION BY MARY HOBSON

Read by **Neville Jason**

*A. Pushkin 1899.*

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1	<b>Evgenii Onegin</b>	1:07
2	<b>Chapter 1:</b> He hurries to live, he hastens to feel	6:14
3	How he assumed the latest air...	5:40
4	General applause. Onegin passes/A row of legs...	6:05
5	Alas, how much of my life I/Have ruined...	5:42
6	A sickness, one for which we should/Have found the reason...	6:15
7	Will freedom always be denied? The hour has come...	4:07
8	Flowers, love, the lazy country pace...	3:32
9	<b>Chapter 2:</b> O rus!... Horace O Russia!	6:13
10	He sang in praise of love, he paid/His dues to her...	6:09
11	But then, your ardent youth can never/Conceal...	4:47
12	This pensive mood, her friend, her pleasure/Right from her...	4:37
13	She used to write, in her own hand,/In blood...	5:37
14	<b>Chapter 3:</b> Elle était fille, elle était amoureuse. Malfilatre	6:02
15	And as if she herself had been a/Young heroine in a favourite...	5:50
16	'Now that's enough, dear. In those days/We hadn't heard of love.'	5:06
17	Coquettes make their cold calculations;/Tatiana loves with all...	4:41
18	<b>Tatiana's Letter to Onegin</b>	3:55
19	Tatiana sighs, and then she cries,/The letter trembles...	5:44
20	<b>The Song Of the Young Girls</b>	2:25

21	<b>Chapter 4:</b> La morale est dans la nature des choses.	5:39
22	What in the world can be worse than/A family where a...	5:32
23	What was the outcome of the meeting?/Alas, it isn't hard...	5:27
24	But Lenskii writes no madrigal/In Olga's album; into it...	5:18
25	Bare, silent fields – the harvest's home;/A cold dark dawn...	4:11
26	The fire burns low; a fine grey layer/Of ash lies on...	3:42
27	<b>Chapter 5:</b> Oh, don't dream these fearful dreams...	5:29
28	The night was frosty, the whole sky/Was clear; divine choirs...	5:24
29	More terrible, more wondrous yet,/A crab rides...	5:34
30	But lo, the dawn with crimson hand,/From morning...	4:40
31	Of course, Tania's distressed confusion/Was visible to every eye...	4:02
32	A ball meant Petersburg when first/I planned my novel...	4:17
33	<b>Chapter 6:</b> La, sotto i giorni nubilosi e brevi...	5:42
34	A brief note, cold as charity,/But pleasant, noble to the end...	5:25
35	All evening Lenskii was distracted,/Now mute, now merry...	5:30
36	'Where is my second? My friend here,/Monsieur Guillot.'	4:30
37	It's pleasant to use an epigram/To enrage a blundering...	4:12
38	Alas, dear reader, one thing's clear;/A lover and a poet...	5:13
39	<b>Chapter 7:</b> Oh Moscow, Russia's favourite daughter...	5:51
40	Ah, my poor Lenskii! though she mourned/Awhile, she did not...	5:02

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41	'Would it be possible to see/The house?' she asked.	5:23
42	Has she solved the charade at last?/Has the elusive word...	5:50
43	When we have moved the boundaries/And let the blest...	5:42
44	And that... but later, later. We/Must talk. Tomorrow we...	5:00
45	A crowd of Archive youths all stand/And gaze, in their...	5:01
46	<b>Chapter 8:</b> Fare thee well, and if for ever/Still for ever fare...	5:28
47	But why give him, may I enquire,/Such an unfavourable...	6:13
48	'You're married! I was not aware.../But when?'	5:00
49	Here was the epigrammist; he/Was angry about...	5:26
50	<b>Onegin's Letter to Tatiana.</b>	3:11
51	There's no reply. Another missive,/A second, a third.	4:15
52	The days flew past, they warmed the air/And winter...	5:08
53	Onegin, this magnificence,/The tinsel of this hateful...	4:49

**Total time: 4:27:39**

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## Alexander Pushkin

(1799–1837)

# EVGENII ONEGIN

Aleksandr Pushkin was born in 1799. He was the great-grandson of ‘the negro of Peter the Great’, Gannibal, an African page given to Peter I who, impressed by his intelligence, adopted him as his godson and sent him to be educated in Paris.

Like all children of the Russian aristocracy, Pushkin spoke only French with his parents; his Russian language was first learned from his much-loved nanny, who remained his friend till her death. When his sometimes scandalous youthful poems got him exiled from St Petersburg to one or other of his country estates, she accompanied him.

Pushkin was never permitted to travel abroad, but his knowledge of his own native Russia was wide, his understanding of it profound. Belinsky, Russian literary critic and Pushkin’s contemporary, rightly described

*Evgenii Onegin* as ‘an encyclopaedia of Russian life’. Its story ranges over every level of his society. Now and then he will break off to entertain us with his views on relations who receive cards from us at Christmas and manage to avoid thinking about us for the rest of the year, how to load a duelling pistol, the sort of friends who render enemies superfluous, dreams and their interpretation, feet, how snow makes travel bearable by filling up the pot-holes, and more, much much more. Yet all this is only the background to an extraordinary story about love and loss and life, written over eight years by a man who matured with his hero Onegin, whose ideal is embodied in his heroine, Tatiana, a work that has found its way to the hearts of generations of Russian readers and stayed there.

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Pushkin called his masterpiece *Evgenii Onegin*. But it was Tatiana who came to him first. 'Unexpectedly' he writes, in Chapter 8,

*I'm in my garden and I see  
A young provincial girl appear –  
My muse, but with a pensive look  
And carrying a small French book.*

'Perhaps Pushkin would have done even better to use the name Tatiana, not Onegin, as the title of his poem, for she is indisputably its main heroine', was Dostoevsky's comment. He saw the work as 'embodying real Russian life with a creative power and a consummate skill which has not been seen either before or since Pushkin'. Perhaps it is the poet's unprecedented realism, the beautiful directness of his clear-eyed approach to his characters and his society that has so endeared *Evgenii Onegin* to readers the world over, and given it its iconic status in Russian literature. At home, it inspired Tchaikovsky to write his stunning opera of the same name; abroad, it has never

ceased to challenge translators.

Pushkin was not slow to develop his gift. At seven he was writing poems in bed, late into the night; at twelve, accepted as a pupil at the prestigious, newly founded Imperial Lycée, in the grounds of the Tsar's Petersburg palace, he entertained his friends, and startled the great poet of the 18th century, Derzhavin, with his precocious talent. 'A second Derzhavin is about to appear in the world', the elderly poet exclaimed, 'the young Pushkin. He has already outstripped all other writers!' Pushkin was 15.

He was 24 when he started work on *Onegin*. In 1823 the capital was seething with secret societies; idealistic young officers, returned from the Napoleonic wars, were plotting reform, even regicide. Pushkin was in Kishinev. 'I'm not allowed to come to either Moscow or Petersburg this year', he writes to his friend Viazemskii, on 5 April. In December, now in Odessa, he sends another friend an excerpt from his *Ode on the Death of Napoleon*. 'It's not good, but here are the most bearable stanzas', he writes. Then

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adds: 'I'm writing a new poem in my spare time – *Evgenii Onegin*, where I'm choking with bile. I've already finished two stanzas.' Then in a letter to his younger brother, referring to that same friend, he says: 'Perhaps I'll send him some excerpts from *Onegin*; it's my best work.'

In 1825, the first chapter was published in Petersburg. Pushkin was still in 'exile' on his estate, Mikhailovskoe. This was just as well. On 14 December of that year those young idealists staged their badly-organised, abortive uprising in the capital; five were hanged, more than a hundred sent to Siberia. In September of 1826, Pushkin was summoned to appear before Nicholas I. 'What would you have done on December the 14th if you had been in Petersburg?' the Tsar asked him. 'I would have been in the ranks of the rebels', Pushkin replied. And in January of the following year he smuggled a dangerously seditious poem of support to them via the young wife of Murav'ev, who was about to join her husband in Siberia.

The second chapter of *Onegin* was published in Moscow earlier in that year, the third chapter not until 1827, with a preface which apologised for the delay caused by 'extraneous circumstances'. Pushkin promised that the rest would be published shortly. But the completed work did not appear in its entirety until 1830. He found it hard to let go of *Onegin*. In 1829 he finished the eighth chapter (originally the ninth); in 1830 he completed – and abandoned, as a part of the work, at least, – an account of Onegin's travels; then he burnt the tenth chapter. He had, at last, understood how to part with his beloved hero.

*This is the moment I craved:  
the work of long years is completed.  
Why this mysterious unease,  
incomprehensible grief?*

These are the opening lines of a poem written in that same year. Even then he was not quite finished. In the following year he added Onegin's letter to Tatiana, inserting it between stanzas XXXII and

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XXXIII of Chapter 8. It gives their two letters a tragic symmetry; but nothing was allowed to follow those final lines. I defy anyone who hears them to remain unmoved; if ever a story was meant to be read aloud, this is it.

**Notes by Mary Hobson**





**Neville Jason** trained at RADA where he was awarded the diction prize by Sir John Gielgud. His first appearance in the theatre was in Peter Brook's production of *Titus Andronicus* starring Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh. He is a former member of the Old Vic Company, the English Stage Company, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Birmingham Repertory Company. Roles include John Worthing in *The Importance of Being Ernest*, Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, Christian in *Cyrano de Bergerac* and Robert Browning in *Robert and Elizabeth*.

He is a trained singer and has appeared in numerous musicals including *The Great Waltz*, *1776*, *Ambassador*, *Lock Up Your Daughters*, *Kiss Me Kate*, *Irma La Douce*, *Robert and Elizabeth* and *Mutiny*.

Television appearances include *Maigret*, *Dr Who* (The Androids of Tara), *Hamlet* (Horatio), *Crime and Punishment* (Zamyatov), *Emergency Ward Ten*, *Dixon of Dock Green*, *When the Boat Comes In*, *Angels*, *Minder*, *Dempsey and Makepeace*, *The Richest Woman in the World*, *The Dancing Years*, *The Magic Barrel* and *Windmill Near a Frontier*. Films include *From Russia with Love* and *The Message*. He has been a member of the BBC Radio Drama Company three times, and may be heard in radio plays, documentaries and arts programmes. For Naxos AudioBooks his readings include Vasari's *Lives of the Great Artists*, *Freud*, *War and Peace*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *The Once and Future King*, *War and Peace* and *The Castle of Otranto*; he plays Antonio in *The Tempest*, and has directed productions of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

As a director he was awarded Talkies awards for *Great Expectations* and *Poets of the Great War*. As a reader he won AudioFile Earphone awards for *The Captive*, *Time Regained*, *The Once and Future King* and *War and Peace* (Best Audiobooks of the Year 2007 and 2009).

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**Mary Hobson** (1926 -) began to study Russian at 56, enrolled at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies at 62, obtaining a degree and a PhD; she won the Pushkin Gold Medal in Moscow for her translation of *Woe from Wit*, published with her thesis on Griboedov. She contributed numerous translations to *The Complete Works of Alexander Pushkin in English*. This translation of *Evgenii Onegin* won her the *Podvizhnik* prize; it was published in Moscow in August of this year.

### Credits

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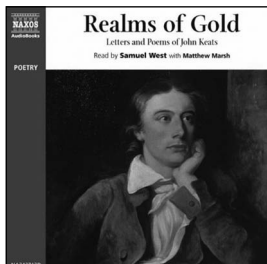
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Alexander Pushkin

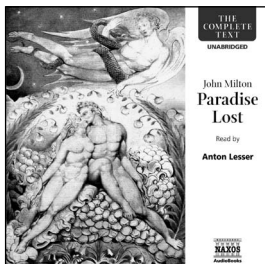
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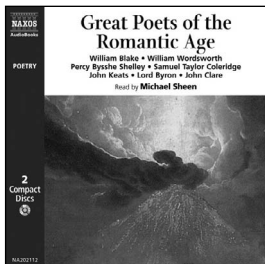
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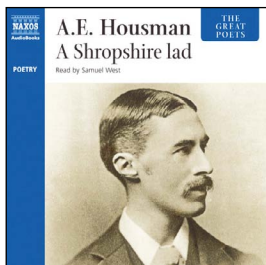
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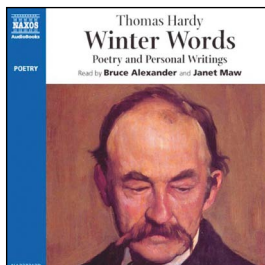
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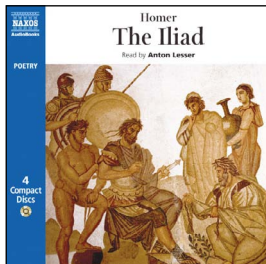
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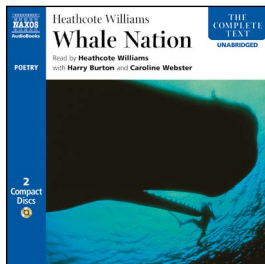
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Alexander Pushkin

# EVGENII ONEGIN

Read by **Neville Jason**

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Though *Evgenii Onegin* is best known in the West through Tchaikovsky's opera *Eugene Onegin*, the original narrative poem is one of the landmarks of Russian literature. In the poem, the eponymous hero repudiates love, only to later experience the pain of rejection himself. Pushkin's unique style proves timeless in its exploration of love, life, passion, jealousy and the consequences of social convention. This new recording of Mary Hobson's vivid verse translation effectively reintroduces *Evgenii Onegin* for the twenty-first century.



Neville Jason trained at RADA, where he was awarded the diction prize by Sir John Gielgud. He has been a member of the BBC Radio Drama Company three times, and may be heard in radio plays, documentaries and arts programmes. For Naxos AudioBooks his readings include Vasari's *Lives of the Great Artists*, *Freud*, *War and Peace*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *Favourite Essays*, *The Once and Future King* and *War and Peace*. He won AudioFile awards for *The Captive*, *Time Regained*, *The Once and Future King* and *War and Peace*.

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