In VN’s novel *Ada* (1969) Van Veen (the narrator and main character) describes his departure from Man (the Antiterran name of New York) and says that *lyudi oglyadïvalis’* (people turned to look) at his father and at Demon’s mistress:

His father saw him off. Demon had dyed his hair a blacker black. He wore a diamond ring blazing like a Caucasian ridge. His long, black, blue-ocellated wings trailed and quivered in the ocean breeze. *Lyudi oglyadïvalis’* (people turned to look). A temporary Tamara, all kohl, kasbek rouge, and flamingo-boa, could not decide what would please her daemon lover more — just moaning and ignoring his handsome son or acknowledging bluebeard’s virility as reflected in morose Van, who could not stand her Caucasian perfume, Granial Maza, seven dollars a bottle. (1.29)

Darkbloom (‘Notes to *Ada*’): Granial Maza: a perfume named after Mt Kazbek’s *‘gran’ almaza’* (diamond’s facet) of Lermontov’s *The Demon.*

In the preceding chapter of *Ada* Van mentions Lermontov’s diamond-faceted tetrameters:

The year 1880 (Aqua was still alive — somehow, somewhere!) was to prove to be the most retentive and talented one in his long, too long, never too long life. He was ten. His father had lingered in the West where the many-colored mountains acted upon Van as they had on all young Russians of genius. He could solve an Euler-type problem or learn by heart Pushkin’s ‘Headless Horseman’ poem in less than twenty minutes. With white-bloused, enthusiastically sweating Andrey Andreevich, he lolled for hours in the violet shade of pink cliffs, studying major and minor Russian writers — and puzzling out the exaggerated but, on the whole, complimentary allusions to his father’s volitations and loves in another life in Lermontov’s diamond-faceted tetrameters. (1.28)

Demon’s wife Aqua (Marina’s mad twin sister) was obsessed with the idea of Terra. The notion of Terra appeared on Demonia (aka Antiterra, Earth’s twin planet on which *Ada* is set) after the L disaster in the middle of the 19th century (1.3). In the old Russian alphabet the letter L was called *lyudi*. In a draft of Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* (Chapter Three) Tatiana Larin signs her letter to Onegin with her initials, T. L.:

*Podumala, chto skazhut lyudi?*

*I podpisala T. L.*

she wondered what people would say,

and signed T. L.

In his EO Commentary (vol. II, p. 396) VN points out that in Russian this produces an identical rhyme because of the use of special mnemonic names for letters in the old Russian alphabet: the word for *L* is *Lyudi*. The reader should imagine that in the English alphabet the letter *T* were labeled, say, “Tough,” and the letter *L*, “Little.”

And after pondering a little,

she wrote her signature: Tough, Little.

*Podumala, chto skazhut lyudi?*

*I podpisala Tverdo, Lyudi.*

At the beginning of the last (in the first edition, penultimate) stanza (**XLVI**) of Chapter Six of EO Pushkin uses the phrase *day oglyanus’* (let me glance back):

Дай оглянусь. Простите ж, сени,
Где дни мои текли в глуши,
Исполнены страстей и лени
И снов задумчивой души.
А ты, младое вдохновенье,
Волнуй моё воображенье,
Дремоту сердца оживляй,
В мой угол чаще прилетай,
Не дай остыть душе поэта,
Ожесточиться, очерстветь
И наконец окаменеть
В мертвящем упоенье света,
В сём омуте, где с вами я
Купаюсь, милые друзья![40](http://www.as-pushkin.ru/index.php?cnt=8&sub=9&page=3)

Let me glance back. Farewell now, coverts

where in the backwoods flowed my days,

fulfilled with passions and with indolence

and with the dreamings of a pensive soul.

And you, young inspiration,

stir my imagination,

the slumber of the heart enliven,

into my nook more often fly,

let not a poet's soul grow cold,

callous, crust-dry,

and finally be turned to stone

in the World's deadening intoxication

in that slough where with you

I bathe, dear friends! 40

In his EO Commentary (vol. III, p. 65) VN points out that Pushkin wrote down lines 1-4 of this stanza (already published in the 1828 and 1833 editions), together with a quotation from Coleridge, Oct. 2, 1835, at Trigorskoe, in the gold-tooled red morocco album belonging to his inamorata of ten years before, Annette Vulf. The quotation is the beginning of a five-line epigram written by Coleridge in 1802:

How seldom, friend! a good great man inherits

Honour or wealth with all his worth and pains!

Describing the family dinner in Ardis the Second, Van mentions Richard Leonard Churchill’s novel about a certain Crimean Khan, “A Great Good Man:”

Van remembered that his tutor’s great friend, the learned but prudish Semyon Afanasievich Vengerov, then a young associate professor but already a celebrated Pushkinist (1855-1954), used to say that the only vulgar passage in his author’s work was the cannibal joy of young gourmets tearing ‘plump and live’ oysters out of their ‘cloisters’ in an unfinished canto of *Eugene Onegin.* But then ‘everyone has his own taste,’ as the British writer Richard Leonard Churchill mistranslates a trite French phrase *(chacun à son gout)* twice in the course of his novel about a certain Crimean Khan once popular with reporters and politicians, ‘A Great Good Man’ — according, of course, to the cattish and prejudiced Guillaume Monparnasse about whose new celebrity Ada, while dipping the reversed corolla of one hand in a bowl, was now telling Demon, who was performing the same rite in the same graceful fashion. (1.38)

Darkbloom (‘Notes to *Ada*’): Great good man: a phrase that Winston Churchill, the British politician, enthusiastically applied to Stalin.

Richard Leonard Churchill blends Winston Churchill with Richard the Lionheart (Richard I, King of England in 1189-1199). In *Dvenadtsat’ stuliev* (“The Twelve Chairs,” 1928) Ilf and Petrov compare the voice of Vorobyaninov’s mother-in-law, Mme Petukhov, to that of Richard the Lionheart:

Голос у неё был такой силы и густоты, что ему позавидовал бы Ричард Львиное Сердце, от крика которого, как известно, приседали кони.

Her voice was so strong and fruity that it might well have been envied by Richard the Lionheart, at whose shout, as is well known, horses used to kneel. (chapter I “Bezenchuk and The Nymphs”)

Guillaume de Monparnasse (Mlle Larivière’s penname) is the Antiterran counterpart of Guy de Maupassant. As he speaks to Varfolomey Korobeynikov (the compiler of the Mirror of Life Index), Ostap Bender (the main character in “The Twelve Chairs” and “The Golden Calf”) mentions Maupassant:

Остап, который к этому времени закончил свои наблюдения над Коробейниковым, решил, что «старик – типичная сволочь».

– Так вот, – сказал Остап.

– Так вот, – сказал архивариус, – трудно, но можно…

– Потребует расходов? – помог владелец мясохладобойни.

– Небольшая сумма…

– Ближе к телу, как говорил Мопассан. Сведения будут оплачены.

"A typical old bastard," decided Ostap, who had by then completed his observation of Korobeynikov.
 "So there you are," said Ostap.
 So there you are," said the record-keeper. "It's difficult, but possible."
 "And it involves expense," suggested the refrigeration-plant owner helpfully.
 "A small sum . . ."
 "'Closer to the body', as Maupassant used to say. The information will be paid for." (chapter 11 “The Mirror of Life Index”)

In “The Twelve Chairs” Ilf and Petrov say that *velikie lyudi* (great men) make jokes twice in their lifetime:

Великие люди острят два раза в жизни. Эти остроты увеличивают их славу и попадают в историю.

Great men make jokes twice in their lifetime. The jokes boost their fame and go down in history. (chapter 23 “Absalom Vladimirovich Iznurenkov”)

In the Georgian Military Highway Ostap Bender calls Kolya and Mika (who made an inscription on the rock) *velikie lyudi* (great people):

- Великие люди! Обратите внимание, предводитель. Видите, чуть повыше облака и несколько ниже орла. Надпись: "Коля и Мика, июль 1914 г." Незабываемое зрелище! Обратите внимание на художественность исполнения! Каждая буква величиною в метр и нарисована масляной краской! Где вы сейчас, Коля и Мика?

"Great people! Look at that, marshal! Do you see it? Just a little higher than the cloud and slightly lower than the eagle! An inscription which says, 'Micky and Mike, July 1914'. An unforgettable sight! Notice the artistry with which it was done. Each letter is three feet high, and they used oil paints. Where are you now, Nicky and Mike?" (chapter 38 “Up in the Clouds”)

Describing Bender’s and Vorobyaninov’s meeting with Father Fyodor in the Caucasus, Ilf and Petrov quote Lermontov’s “Demon:”

Шли облака. Над отцом Фёдором кружились орлы. Самый смелый из них украл остаток любительской колбасы и взмахом крыла сбросил в пенящийся Терек фунта полтора хлеба.
Отец Фёдор погрозил орлу пальцем и, лучезарно улыбаясь, прошептал: Птичка божия не знает ни заботы, ни труда, хлопотливо не свивает долговечного гнезда\*.
Орел покосился на отца Федора, закричал "ку-ку-ре-ку" и улетел.
- Ах, орлуша, орлуша, большая ты стерва!
Через десять дней из Владикавказа прибыла пожарная команда с надлежащим обозом и принадлежностями и сняла отца Федора.
Когда его снимали, он хлопал руками и пел лишенным приятности голосом:
И будешь ты цар-р-рицей ми-и-и-и-рра, подр-р-руга ве-е-ечная моя!
И суровый Кавказ многократно повторил слова М. Ю. Лермонтова и музыку А. Рубинштейна.

Clouds drifted by. Eagles cruised above Father Fyodor's head. The bravest of them stole the remains of the sausage  and with its wings swept a pound and a half of bread into the foaming Terek.

Father Fyodor wagged his finger at the eagle and, smiling radiantly, whispered: "God's bird does not know Either toil or unrest, He leisurely builds his long-lasting nest."

The eagle looked sideways at Father Fyodor, squawked cockadoodledoo and flew away.

"Oh, eagle, you eagle, you bitch of a bird!"

Ten days later the Vladikavkaz fire brigade arrived with suitable equipment and brought Father Fyodor down.

As they were lowering him,  he clapped his hands and sang in a tuneless voice:

"And you will be queen of all the world, My lifelo-ong frie-nd!"

And the rugged Caucuses re-echoed Rubinstein's setting of the Lermontov poem many times. (ibid.)

The word *sterva* (bitch of a bird) used by Father Fyodor brings to mind Ada’s next audition in Sterva mentioned by Lucette:

‘Oh, it went on practically every night at Marina Ranch, and often during siestas; otherwise, in between those *vanouissements* (her expression), or when she and I had the flow, which, believe it or not —’

‘I can believe anything,’ said Van.

‘— took place at coincident dates, we were just ordinary sisters, exchanging routine nothings, having little in common, she collecting cactuses or running through her lines for the next audition in Sterva, and I reading a lot, or copying beautiful erotic pictures from an album of Forbidden Masterpieces that we found, *apropos,* in a box of *korsetov i khrestomatiy* (corsets and chrestomathies) which Belle had left behind, and I can assure you, they were far more realistic than the scroll-painting by Mong Mong, very active in 888, a millennium before Ada said it illustrated Oriental calisthenics when I found it by chance in the corner of one of my ambuscades. So the day passed, and then the star rose, and tremendous moths walked on all sixes up the window panes, and we tangled until we fell asleep. And that’s when I learnt —’ concluded Lucette, closing her eyes and making Van squirm by reproducing with diabolical accuracy Ada’s demure little whimper of ultimate bliss. (2.5)

Lucette tells Van that she imitated all Ada’s *shtuchki* (little stunts):

‘I knew it was hopeless,’ she said, looking away. ‘I did my best. I imitated all her *shtuchki* (little stunts). I’m a better actress than she but that’s not enough, I know. Go back now, they are getting dreadfully drunk on your cognac.’ (ibid.)

In *Zolotoy telyonok* (“The Golden Calf,” 1931) Ostap Bender mentions the charleston called *U moey devochki est’ odna malen’kaya shtuchka* (“My Little Girl Got a One Little Thing”):

— Это вырезка из «Малой советской энциклопедии». Вот тут что написано про Рио-де-Жанейро: «1360 тысяч жителей…» так… «значительное число мулатов… у обширной бухты Атлантического океана…» Вот, вот! «Главные улицы города по богатству магазинов и великолепию зданий не уступают первым городам мира». Представляете себе, Шура? Не уступают! Мулаты, бухта, экспорт кофе, так сказать, кофейный демпинг, чарльстон под названием «У моей девочки есть одна маленькая штучка» и… о чём говорить!

"This is from The Concise Soviet Encyclopedia. Here's what it says about Rio de Janeiro: 'Population 1,360,000 . . .' all right . . . '. . . substantial Mulatto population . . . on a large bay of the Atlantic Ocean . . .' Ah, there! 'Lined with lavish stores and stunning buildings, the city's main streets rival those of the most important cities in the world.' Can you imagine that, Shura? Rival! The mulattos, the bay, coffee export, coffee dumping, if you will, the charleston called 'My Little Girl Got a Little Thing,' and . . . Oh well, what can I say? (chapter 2 “The Thirty Sons of Lieutenant Schmidt”)

The chapter’s title brings to mind Pushkin’s frivolous poem *Tsar’ Nikita i sorok ego docherey* (“Tsar Nikita and his Forty Daughters,” 1822). The girls in Pushkin’s poem look perfect but lack something between their legs. In a letter of Nov. 25, 1892, to Suvorin Chekhov writes:

У нас нет «чего-то», это справедливо, и это значит, что поднимите подол нашей музе, и Вы увидите там плоское место. Вспомните, что писатели, которых мы называем вечными или просто хорошими и которые пьянят нас, имеют один общий и весьма важный признак: они куда-то идут и Вас зовут туда же, и Вы чувствуете не умом, а всем своим существом, что у них есть какая-то цель, как у тени отца Гамлета, которая недаром приходила и тревожила воображение. У одних, смотря по калибру, цели ближайшие — крепостное право, освобождение родины, политика, красота или просто водка, как у Дениса Давыдова, у других цели отдаленные — бог, загробная жизнь, счастье человечества и т. п.

We lack “something,” that is true, and that means that, lift the robe of our muse, and you will find within an empty void. Let me remind you that the writers, who we say are for all time or are simply good, and who intoxicate us, have one common and very important characteristic; they are going towards something and are summoning you towards it, too, and you feel not with your mind, but with your whole being, that they have some object, just like the ghost of Hamlet’s father, who did not come and disturb the imagination for nothing. Some have more immediate objects — the abolition of serfdom, the liberation of their country, politics, beauty, or simply vodka, like Denis Davydov; others have remote objects — God, life beyond the grave, the happiness of humanity, and so on. The best of them are realists and paint life as it is, but, through every line’s being soaked in the consciousness of an object, you feel, besides life as it is, the life which ought to be, and that captivates you.

Chekhov’s story *Poprygun’ya* (“The Grasshopper,” 1892) was at first entitled *Velikiy chelovek* (“A Great Man”). According to Dorothy Vinelander, her brother is *redchayshiy chelovek* (a most rare human being):

‘How did you like my brother?’ asked Dorothy. ‘On *redchayshiy chelovek* (he’s a most rare human being). I can’t tell you how profoundly affected he was by the terrible death of your father, and, of course, by Lucette’s bizarre end. Even he, the kindest of men, could not help disapproving of her Parisian *sans-gêne,* but he greatly admired her looks — as I think you also did — no, no, do not negate it! — because, as I have always said, her prettiness seemed to complement Ada’s, the two halves forming together something like perfect beauty, in the Platonic sense’ (that cheerless smile again). ‘Ada is certainly a "perfect beauty," a real *muirninochka —* even when she winces like that — but she is beautiful only in our little human terms, within the quotes of our social esthetics — right, Professor? — in the way a meal or a marriage or a little French tramp can be called perfect.’ (3.8)

Darkbloom (‘Notes to *Ada*’): This and the whole conversation parody Chekhov’s mannerisms.

Andrey Vinelander (Ada’s husband) in certain respect resembles Osip Dymov (Olga’s husband in “The Grasshopper”) and Van Veen resembles Ryabovski (Olga’s lover in “The Grasshopper”). Ada’s husband is a hunter who knows birds well. *Rara avis* (1886) is a story by Chekhov.

Alexey Sklyarenko