

Odd Stanzas

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Abstract. Stanzas with seven and nine lines have had a long tradition in English verse, but stanzas with an odd number of lines and longer than five lines occur relatively rarely in Russian. Indeed, Russian poetry has never developed a strong tradition of longer lines with an odd number of stanzas, despite two moments when they might have achieved wider acceptance. From the 1820s through the 1840s a few poets, including Lermontov and the less known Kjukhel’beker, composed some notable experiments with these forms. Even Lermontov’s famous Borodinskaja strofa did not attract many imitators, although a number of poets throughout that century and up to the present day have continued to write poems in stanzas with 7, 9 and even 11 or 13 lines. The second period occurred during the early 20th century, but among modernist poets the interest in stanzas was focused more on traditional forms, such as the sonnet. Perhaps because of their rarity, the odd stanzas found among Russian poets most often serve as the platform for complex and unconventional rhyme schemes, often accompanied by other striking formal features as well.

Key words: Russian verse, stanzaic forms

Four descriptive features define a given stanza: the number of lines or its length, the rhyme scheme, the types of endings (masculine, feminine, dactylic) and the metre (Tomashevskij 1958: 52–55).¹ Here I wish to focus on the most obvious of these characteristics, the length of the stanza. After some brief comments about stanzas in English verse for background purposes, I will provide a brief overview of the predominant stanza lengths in Russian and then look more closely at what I term “odd stanzas”: those whose line length is at least seven and not divisible by two. These Russian stanzas are odd not just due to their number of lines, but also in the word’s two other basic meanings: they occur infrequently, and, especially in terms of their rhyme schemes, they often exhibit a strange or unusual appearance. The relative paucity of these forms throughout the history of Russian verse stands in sharp contrast to English. The “rhyme royal”, a stanza of seven lines rhyming ababbcc, was introduced

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¹ In this classical work Tomashevskij groups these features under two overall indicators. For a valuable commentary on his study of stanzas, see Vishnevskij (1965: 4–8, 10–12).

to English poetry by Chaucer in *Troilus and Criseyde* (hence sometimes it is called the Troilus stanza) and enjoyed wide popularity in subsequent centuries. The 9-line Spenserian stanza (ababbcbcc) first appeared in *The Faerie Queene* and then was revived in the 19th century by such poets as Byron, Shelley and Keats. Spenser apparently created it by adding a final iambic hexameter line to the basic ballade stanza (ababbcbc) in iambic pentameter.

Granted, the most common stanza length in English, as well as in Russian and in European poetry in general, is the quatrain.² Its popularity may owe much to the simple fact that two rhymes require four lines. The length also appears particularly suited to the concise means of expression found in poetic speech: four lines can comfortably embody a single notion that serves as a building block of the poem. Three or five lines might do as well, but then the rhyming would not be balanced in the same way. At first glance, a reliance on quatrains could seem repetitive or dull, but of course it is possible to vary the rhyme scheme, with alternating, paired or enclosed rhyme, to say nothing of creating a scheme in which one or two lines of a stanza are unrhymed. In Russian, varying combinations of masculine, feminine, dactylic and hyperdactylic clausulae allow for still more variety. Furthermore, individual lines may employ different metres. Thus the possibilities for variety are enormous. Aleksandr Kushner, not noted for a great deal of experimentation in his verse, has nonetheless employed more than 120 different kinds of quatrain in his poetry (Laletina et al. 2008: 579–584). By incorporating different kinds of quatrains within the same poem, he has created still greater variety in his usage of this seemingly simple 4-line form.

In short, poets can easily find variety writing nothing but quatrains, and most poets employ quatrains for a majority, often a significant majority, of all their stanzaic verse. Similarly, for many poets the second most common form of stanza contains eight lines, which, in terms of the rhyme scheme, may simply consist of two quatrains joined into a single stanza. In branching out into other forms, English poetry has made special use of the final couplet. Thus a particularly important form has been *ottava rima*, which rhymes abababcc. Most notably, Byron used it in such works as *Beppo* and *Don Juan*; both Keats and Shelley turned to it as well. What is most distinctive about this form is its structure, with the use of three alternating a and b rhymes followed by a two-line coda. While 6-line stanzas in English have exhibited a wide variety of rhyme schemes, the rhyme scheme ababcc, also with a final couplet, gained

² For information about the frequency of stanza lengths in European languages and about the most widely used rhyme schemes see Häublein (1978: 18–33).

initial popularity for this form. The 7-line Troilus stanza and the Spenserian stanza both also end with a “cc” pair. Given that long stanzas are relatively rare in English, as they are in Russian, and the proclivity to favour stanzas with an even number of lines over those with an odd number, the relatively robust use of the 9-line stanza by English poets is in particular noteworthy (Häublein 1978: 33). Indeed, for all that English verse in modern times has frequently turned away from both metre and rhyme, complex 7- and 9-line stanzas have continued to appear. Yeats has a number of poems featuring these stanzas, including the Chaucerian rhyme royal, which appears as well in Auden’s “Letter to Lord Byron”. To take an even more recent instance, Philip Larkin made extensive use of long stanzas with an odd number of lines, albeit not always fully rhymed.³

As is already evident from the remarks about the quatrain, stanzas with an even number of lines seem inherently more “natural” for poets, with various kinds of balance among the rhyme patterns: two each of the a and b rhymes in the quatrain, likely a third rhyme pair in the 6-line stanza, and possibly a fourth pair in the eight-line (or three each of the a and b rhymes and two appearances of the c rhyme). Other combinations, often less balanced or symmetrical, are of course possible, but the relative ease of producing the simplest schemes no doubt helps explain their relative frequency. The 8-line stanza’s possibility for building on the quatrain as well as the readiness with which it can result in a variety of balanced structures possibly accounts for its being used somewhat more often than the 6-line stanza. By contrast, stanzas with an odd number of lines lack ready symmetry. A 5-line stanza may, for instance, rhyme abaab or abbab, but both forms give rise to an asymmetry, with three of one rhyme and two of the other. Why then did the 7- and 9-line stanzas become widely used in English?

There is no clear answer to the question, but a couple of possibilities readily suggest themselves. First and probably most important is the simple matter of tradition: in the case of English, the 7- and 9-line stanzas gained popularity in part because major poets had used them in important works. The early history of Russian verse for the most part lacks such models. The Onegin stanza would be an obvious exception, and of course poets after Pushkin occasionally have

³ Yeats employs rhyme royal in, for instance “A Bronze Head” (1938), but he uses several different rhyme schemes for his seven-line stanzas; see, for instance, the interesting pattern abcabca in “A Memory of Youth” (1912) where the middle line (and middle a rhyme) in each of the three stanzas is introduced by the word “And”. Notable poems by Larkin in this category include “Maiden Name”, a 7-line poem rhyming abbacca, “Church Going,” in 9-line stanzas rhyming ababcadcd, and “Winter”, where the often very inexact rhymes of the 11-line stanzas suggest the approximate scheme abbacxcedd (Larkin 2004: 53, 58–59, 11–12).

turned to it, but the stanza became so strongly associated with *Evgenij Onegin* that it was difficult to use it in other works without referring back to (or at least bringing to mind) its initial use. Then, too, a 14-line stanza does not necessarily lend itself readily to the conciseness of lyric poetry. Second, the tendency among English poets to employ a final rhymed couplet pair has provided a sense of structural closure to many of the stanza forms in English. In the case of the 7- and 9-line stanzas, these final couplets provide a structural anchor to a stanza that otherwise may seem unbalanced. For its part, the 9-line stanza further gained acceptance in English because poets could see it as building on the already widely used ballade stanza. Once these line lengths were in wide use, poets felt free to turn to them as the basis for other rhyme patterns. In Russian, as we shall see, the prevailing rhyme schemes for the odd stanzas were quite varied and did not give rise to base structures.

It is not that Russian poets were unfamiliar with the English forms. In particular, the Spenserian sonnet was well known by the 1820s through Byron's *Childe-Harold's Pilgrimage*. Toward the end of the decade poets would have had a chance to read Russian examples of that stanza when Ivan Kozlov published his versions of selected passages from that work.⁴ The best known of these, "K morju" (dedicated to Pushkin) – with six stanzas, numbers 178–83, from Canto 4 – altered the rhyme sequence to AbAbACCdd. However, his "Pri grobnice Cecilii M." (stanzas 104 and 105 from the same canto) captured the pattern exactly: aBaBBcBcc (Kozlov 1960: 135–136, 141–142, 456–457). L.V. Pumpjanskij (1941: 398) has speculated that the unfamiliarity of the stanza – in particular, the use of a final iambic hexameter line after eight lines in iambic pentameter – kept Russian poets from becoming more interested in the form. Whether or not this was the decisive factor, the Spenserian stanza found little resonance in Russia, despite the enormous popularity of Byron and this work.

Although scholars have published detailed descriptions of the stanzaic forms employed by certain Russian poets, this information has come out sporadically and not always in the same form. Furthermore, researchers have yet to examine the stanzaic usage of many major poets, especially those of the 20th century. The initial effort to compile statistical data for the formal features of Russian verse goes back to the 1930s, when Boris Jarkho along with his pupils prepared metrical handbooks for Pushkin and Lermontov. Jarkho was planning a vast project that would collect such data for other poets and that would expand to

⁴ For an overview of Kozlov's work on Byron, as well as both the originals and all of Kozlov's translations, see Barratt (1972). Two other excerpts that Kozlov translated from *Childe Harold* are not discussed here because they do not adhere to its stanzaic form – in his later translations from Byron Kozlov often has more lines than the original (Barratt 1972: 52).

include rhyme dictionaries as well. However, the undertaking was subjected to sharp criticism in the “anti-formalist” atmosphere of his time and little was done to follow up on his work until the late 1960s (Gasparov et al. 1979: 5).⁵ Only then did several scholars elaborate on a methodology for creating such handbooks, which would include extensive data for each poem: the date, the length, metre, stanzaic form and rhyme scheme. The product of this effort was the volume titled *Russkoe stikhoslozhenie* (Gasparov et al. 1979), which contained the data for nine poets, with an emphasis on key figures from the first half of the 19th century.⁶ For their methodology the handbooks owed much both to Jarkho’s pioneering work on metrical handbooks and to Boris Tomashevskij’s impressive effort to catalogue Pushkin’s stanzas (1958). The collective volume, while containing much valuable data, nonetheless suffered from inconsistencies among the individual handbooks as well as varying degrees of care in their preparation (Lilly 1979). Due to space considerations, the handbooks furthermore lacked detailed indexes but instead used page numbers or the number of each poem in a particular edition to refer scholars back to individual works. This solution was at best an inconvenience, and in those instances when the sources used were relatively rare the handbooks were difficult to use. Ultimately the project’s greatest failing, though, is that the intended sequel(s) did not emerge. Over the next several decades a few other handbooks appeared, offering an overview of both the metrical and stanzaic usage of individual authors, along with some studies devoted just to metre or to stanzaic forms (for instance, Rudnev 1972; Car’kova 1978; Pavlova 1984; Lauwers 1993: 93–133, 202–221; Scherr 2001). Only after an interval of nearly three decades did the project resume, this time under the editorship of Elena Khvorost’janova (2008). The resulting publication, *Peterburgskaja stikhotvornaja kul’tura*, is notable both for the consistency among entries, enforced by an extremely detailed and strict set of instructions, as well as for its completeness, with detailed tables for each poet and an index of individual poems.⁷ The

⁵ For an overview of Jarkho’s contributions to literary studies and the difficulties he encountered because of his approach, along with a bibliography of works by and about him, see Akimova, Shapir (2006: vii–xxxii).

⁶ The poets treated are Zhukovskij, Batjushkov, Vostokov, Pushkin, Del’vig, Baratynskij, Kol’cov, Tjutchev and Polonskij.

⁷ As the result of its thoroughness, this substantial volume (660 pages) contains data for just seven poets, including several lesser-known figures (A. A. Rzhavskij, Ivan Rukavishnikov, Dmitrij Maksimov).

focus on Petersburg poets narrows the project somewhat, but for now there are still many more figures to cover in what promises to be an ongoing venture.⁸

These previous studies provide the bulk of the data for the table in the appendix to this article, which will be a touchstone for the discussions that follow.⁹ While most of the poets are from the 19th century and the table lacks the breadth to offer a definitive view of Russian stanzaic usage, nonetheless the corpus of nearly 5700 poems by 13 authors active from the 18th into the 21st centuries offers at least a rough picture of stanza lengths among Russian poets. The columns to the right show that far from all poetry is stanzaic; indeed, for many authors, especially in the 19th century, stanzaic verse accounts for well under half the number of lines they wrote.

The relative predominance of non-stanzaic verse results in part from issues of classification. Scholars of Russian verse generally characterize “traditional” or “fixed” forms, such as the sonnet or the sestina, as falling outside the category of stanzaic verse. Furthermore, they describe short poems (up to eight lines according to some scholars, up to 12 or so according to others) with no graphic break into separate stanzas as “odnostrofnye”, or “monostanzaic”, and these too are generally seen as falling into a separate grouping: a basic feature of the stanza involves repetition, which is difficult or impossible to discern in a short undivided poem. In contrast, longer poems with regularly

⁸ Indeed, Khvorost’janova (2013) appeared as this article was ready for publication; it describes the meters, stanzas and rhymes used by seven additional authors: Apukhtin, Annenskij, Komarovskij, Adamovich, Kulle, Vinogradov and Bitov.

⁹ The data for Zhukovskij, Batjushkov, Pushkin, Del’vig, Tjutchev, and Polonskij comes from Gasparov et al. (1979); while Khvorost’janova (2008) serves as the source for the figures regarding Lomonosov, Rukavishnikov and Kushner. The statistics for Lermontov are based on Vishnevskij (1965, see especially the table on p. 98). Vishnevskij only counted the number of stanzas in quatrains that were divided by spaces on the page; my figure, in keeping with what is given for other poets, includes the number of stanzas in both the divided and the undivided poems. In addition to the 269 poems he lists as being in identical stanzas, I have added in 13 others in which the stanzas are of identical length but differ in rhyme scheme (see section 3, 120–123, where he lists 24 poems, eleven of which have stanzas of unequal length). For the information about the stanzas used by Bal’mont, see Ljapina (1984); the Benediktov and Brodskij figures are derived from the data in two articles by Scherr (1989; 2002). The percentages are based on all the stanzaic works by each poet, the totals of which appear in the third column from the right. Note that the table refers to poems where all, or nearly all, the stanzas are of the same length; this criterion is also used for the tables labelled 13.3 in the contributions to Khvorost’janova (2008; see 51 for a description of these tables). The occasional defective stanza results in some of the numbers in the second row for each poet not being evenly divisible by the number of lines in the stanza. The abbreviations used for the “fixed forms” are “son” for sonnet, “oct” for octave, “ter” for terza rima, “tri” for triolet, “ses” for sestina, and “ron” for rondel.

repeated rhyme patterns are counted as stanzaic even when there is no space between stanzas on the page. A resulting anomaly involves, for instance, an eight-line poem with four rhyme pairs: if it is divided on the page into two stanzas that rhyme, say, AbAb, then it is classified as stanzaic; if there is no space between lines four and five, though, it is a monostanzaic poem rhyming AbAbCdCd (which could either be two quatrains or an 8-line stanza).¹⁰ Tver'janovich and Khvorost'janova (2008: 49–50) describe both fixed forms and monostanzas as “transitional verse” – that is, belonging to a category that falls between non-stanzaic and stanzaic – and, what is more, require that monostanzaic poems not be formally divisible into shorter structures.¹¹ The differences in the approach to this kind of verse indicate that the data for various poets provided in the appendix are not always precisely comparable, though the discrepancies have little or no effect on the statistics for the “odd” stanzas, which are the main focus of this article.

Thus quite a few poems exhibiting a regular rhyme pattern fall outside the definition of stanzaic verse. In addition, longer works are more likely to be non-stanzaic, and so stanzaic verse frequently accounts for a significantly lower percentage of a poet's lines than of the poems. Thus nearly 40% of Zhukovskij's poems are stanzaic but those works contains only 20% of his lines, while for Polonskij somewhat more than half his works are stanzaic and only one-fourth of the lines. Non-stanzaic verse plays were common in the 19th century and contributed significantly to the imbalance. What is more, narrative and epic verse, while occasionally stanzaic (with *Evgenij Onegin* serving as a prime example) very often turns out to be non-stanzaic.

As already noted, within Russian stanzaic poetry quatrains occupy the dominant position, accounting for nearly 2/3 of all the stanzaic poems. 8-line stanzas, thanks no doubt to their frequent resemblance to two quatrains combined into a single stanza, are a distant second, with 6-line stanzas third. Poems visually divided into couplets are not all that common, but works consisting entirely of contiguous rhyme pairs (with no space between the pairs) occur at least occasionally in the work of most poets; as a result, 2-line and 5-line stanzas are the other lengths that appear with some regularity. Roughly

¹⁰ See, for instance, the list of 8-line monostanzaic poems by Pushkin in Tomashevskij (1958: [144–147]).

¹¹ Tver'janovich and Khvorost'janova (2008: 13) note the inconsistencies among previous researchers in defining monostanzas. Most, though, have followed the lead of Tomashevskij (1958: 135) and have considered monostanzaic poems to be those that are not divided and contain eight or fewer lines. For a thoughtful discussion of such poems, see also Vishnevskij (1978: 50–51).

95% of all the stanzaic poems in this sample employ one of these five lengths; 3-line stanzas, 7-line stanzas, and 9-line stanzas, together, appear in fewer than 3% of the poems.

The tendency to avoid stanzas of an odd length carries over into the very long stanzas, those with more than 10 lines. Among the thirteen poets in the table, 12-line stanzas appear in more than half the poems with very long stanzas, 37 of 72. Strikingly, then, the very long 12-line stanzas are used in more poems than 9-line stanzas. Indeed, if Lomonosov were eliminated from the table, there would be just about as many 12-line stanzas as the even-numbered 10-line. This relative frequency hints at a preference for stanza lengths that are divisible by four, a phenomenon partially confirmed by the presence in this sampling of no fewer than ten poems with 16-line stanzas. Thirteen works have 14-line stanzas (with the Onegin stanza accounting for most of these), and the table also reflects one instance each of an 18-line stanza (Rukavishnikov) and 20-line stanza (Zhukovskij). By contrast to the long stanzas with an even number of lines, 11-line stanzas (one each by Bal'mont and Kushner) and 13-line (one each by Bal'mont and Rukavishnikov) are weakly represented even among 20th-century poets; for 19th-century poets in the table stanzas of these lengths are found only in the work of Lermontov, who, in addition to five works that employ 11-line stanzas, also has a poem with two 13-line stanzas.

For the sake of comparison, it is instructive to consider Smith (1977), who examined 3135 stanzaic poems written between 1735 and 1816; thus the only overlap with poets in the appendix involves the verse of Lomonosov and pre-1817 works by Zhukovskij and Batjushkov. The most significant difference between his overall figures (Table 14, 170) and mine concerns the 10-line stanzas, which in the 18th century were widely used in odes. They were the second most common stanza in his data, but otherwise the relative frequency of the various stanza lengths is quite similar to that found in the table accompanying this article. Strikingly, the odd stanzas occurred with about the same frequency among these earlier poets as they did later: his percentages for poems in 7-, 9- and 11-line stanzas are 1.2, 0.5 and 0.2; for the thirteen poets represented in the appendix to this article the corresponding figures are 1.1, 0.4 and 0.1. With such small numbers, a relatively few poets can account for significant portions of the works. Thus Sumarokov composed three of the six poems in 11-line stanzas (and also five of the 17 in 9-line stanzas); Derzhavin has five poems in 7-line stanzas and three in 9-line (Table 28, 241). Trediakovskij, who did not write many stanzaic poems, has the highest percentage of stanzas with an odd number of lines (Smith 1977: 266–267).

A closer examination of the earliest instances of the 7- and 9-line stanzas in the appendix to this article suggests that in the first half of the 19th century, at

least, they were even rarer in the works of most poets than this table suggests. Thus one of Zhukovskij's three usages of 9-line stanzas occurs in section VII of "Iz Don-Kikhota" (1804) and is in effect an 8-line unit (rhymed aBBaCdCd) in iambic tetrameter with an unrhymed one-line refrain in iambic trimeter at the end of each stanza. The same is true of Batjushkov's single 9-line poem "Pesn' Garal'da smelogo", which even has the same rhyme scheme as the Zhukovskij poem although it exhibits a different metre: the first eight lines of its five stanzas are in amphibrachic tetrameter and the orphan refrain is in iambic hexameter. The work that the authors of the metrical and stanzaic handbook for Pushkin consider a nine-line stanza is "Nochnoj zefir", in which a thrice repeated 5-line refrain (in short iambic lines, rhyming aabba) alternates with two 4-line trochaic tetrameter units (rhyming AbAb). All of Pushkin's 7-line stanzas date from the lycée period; two of those are collective works (one of which is a takeoff on "Bozhe! Carja khрани!", discussed below with Zhukovskij's other 7-line stanzas), and the other two are "K Delii" and "Delija", in which the rhyme schemes are AbAbCCb and AbAbAAb. Neither of these stanzas found any reflection in his mature period. Batjushkov's one work in 7-line stanzas is similarly marginal: it occurs in a 14-line chorus attributed to Batjushkov within a collective work titled "Sceny chetyrekh vozrastov". In short, neither Batjushkov nor Pushkin (to say nothing of Lomonosov, all of whose stanzaic poems contained an even number of lines) contributed significantly to a tradition of longer stanzas with an odd number of lines.

And yet this period does not lack for some notable examples. Zhukovskij's single 7-line stanza poem turns out to be the very familiar "Bozhe! Carja khрани!" (Zhukovskij 1902: I.77). The rhyme scheme is the rather interesting aabC'C'C'b in the first stanza and then A'A'bc'C'C'b. The work is in dactylic dimeter, with the contrast between the masculine and the dactylic lines creating a marked variation in line length.

Of Zhukovskij's remaining poems with 9-line stanzas, one occurs in a work titled "Pesnja" ("Rozy rascvetajut...", 1831) which employs a similarly short line, trochaic trimeter. The rhyme is AbAbCdCCd, and thus it reads (as do some other 9-line stanzas) like a quatrain joined with a 5-line stanza. His longest work to employ a long stanza with an odd number of lines is the 63-line "Proshchal'naja pesn'" (1824, subtitled "petaja vospitannicami obshchestva blagorodnykh devic, pri vypuske 1824 goda"; see Zhukovskij 1902: III.67). While justifiably not among Zhukovskij's most acclaimed achievements in terms of content, the poem exhibits a stanzaic structure that is of more than passing interest. The rhyme scheme is AAbCCbDDb, with the "b" rhyme serving to link the entire stanza into a unified whole even as it delineates a tripartite structure: in most of the stanzas strong syntactic breaks occur after the

third and sixth lines. These few instances already attest to his willingness to try unusual stanzaic forms. As the table indicates, he also had relatively frequent recourse to long stanzas (with up to 20 lines!), though eight of these long forms consist of 12-line stanzas, which Zhukovskij associated with the ballad (Matjash 1979: 72, 89), and none contain an odd number of lines.

The innovative quality of Zhukovskij's 9-line stanzas turns out to be indicative for the manner in which poets write long stanzas with an odd number of lines: the use of such stanzaic forms generally reflects an effort not so much to follow or establish a tradition as to experiment with form, to work out new rhyme schemes as well as unusual combinations of line lengths and metres. In contrast, the long stanzas with an even number of lines, at least during the 19th century, show a stronger tendency toward the symmetrical and the balanced. Thus Zhukovskij's 12-line stanzas, in terms of their rhyme schemes (for a list of the schemes see Matjash 1979: 84), most often read as though they were a combination of three quatrains, and even his 14-line stanzas have the appearance of three quatrains combined with a couplet after the second four-line unit. For that matter, of course, the rhymes of the Onegin stanza form three quatrains and a concluding couplet – a far more regular pattern than that found in most poems with long stanzas containing an odd number of lines.

Del'vig's small corpus of these "odd" stanzas provides further evidence of the tendency toward formal experimentation. Of his two works in 7-line stanzas, one "Difiramb [na priezd trekh družej]" (1821), is unrhymed, but the varied line lengths and the mix of masculine, feminine and dactylic endings, which appear in the same position in each of the stanzas, show that he had in mind a clear but complex structure. The line lengths are 12, 4, 5, 6, 6, 7 and 8 syllables, with dactylic clausulae in lines 1 and 6, masculine in 2 and 7, and feminine in 3–5. The metres go from a four-stress *doľ'nik* in the first line, to dactylic dimeter, then iambic dimeter, and ending with four lines in amphibrachic dimeter (Del'vig 1959: 150). Displaying the same sequence of metres in each stanza, the poem as a whole can be characterized as written in *logaoedics*.

His other 7-line stanza ("Druž'ja, pover'te, ne greshno", 1819) rhymes *ababcXc*, with the sixth line blank. It again contains lines of varying lengths, albeit all are iambic and follow a repeated pattern: tetrameter in lines 1, 3 and 7; trimeter in 2, 4 and 5; pentameter in 6 (Del'vig 1959: 130–131). In the third and final stanza the "c" rhyme is replaced with a repeat of the "b" rhyme, so the scheme becomes *ababbXb*. The iambic tetrameter "Poet" (1820), the one instance in which he used a 9-line stanza, ends with a paired rhyme, as in the Spenserian stanza, but otherwise is quite different: *aBBBaCCdd* (Del'vig 1959: 137–137). The rhyme scheme hints at a 5+4 structure, but the strong internal syntactic breaks, rather than appearing regularly after the fifth line, instead

serve more as a counterpoint to the rhyme pattern. In two of the three stanzas, rather than a break, enjambement occurs between lines five and six; in the first stanza, for instance, major syntactic breaks appear instead after lines two and eight. Del'vig here creates an integral nine-line unit, and employs the same rhyme in three consecutive lines, which is found among other poets as well in their longer stanzas with an odd number of lines.

Many poets turned to these stanzas only one or two times, if at all. Baratynskij, for instance wrote two poems in 5-line stanzas but otherwise avoided stanzas with an odd number of lines. In the case of Tjutchev, "More i utes" (1848) marks his only use of a longer "odd" stanza in an original poem: AbAbCdCCd, with trochaic tetrameter throughout. Each of the four stanzas contains a strong syntactic break after the fourth line, so that both the rhyme scheme and the semantic structure of the stanzas cause them to read – like Zhukovskij's "Pesnja" – as though they consist of a quatrain (AbAb) and a 5-line stanza (AbAAb) joined together. This single use of a long stanza with an odd number of lines, unlike those of Del'vig and Zhukovskij, turns out to embody qualities found frequently in the poet's other verse: the trochaic tetrameter was one of his favoured metres, the AbAb stanza represents his favoured quatrain, and nine of his 16 original 5-line stanzas display the rhyme pattern AbAAb. In short, Tjutchev branches out into this form only gingerly, treading over familiar ground, and does not repeat the venture.

For Polonskij, on the other hand, 7-line stanzas comprised a minor but hardly rare part of his repertoire: they appear in 7 poems, totalling an impressive 1186 lines. For the most part the poems are not long, from two to four stanzas, and adhere to a similar rhyme pattern: the first four lines are in alternating rhyme, followed by a paired rhyme, and then either the a or the b rhyme recurs at the end. Typical is his "V telege zhizni" (1876), with the rhyme scheme ababccb (Polonskij 1954: 344). In this and works with a similar scheme Polonskij employs a flexible structure – resembling that used by Pushkin in his early "K Delii" and "Delija". As in this poem, the stanza can exhibit a clear 4+3 structure, though in other cases, because the final b rhyme echoes lines 2 and 4, it is just as likely to divide differently or to appear as an integral whole. While the stanza lacks the sense of closure provided by the final paired rhyme of the rhyme royal, it is nonetheless a form that seems conducive to both lyric and narrative poetry.

By far the largest portion of his lines written in 7-line stanzas occur in a single poem that appears not to have been republished since Polonskij's death. "Neuch" (subtitled "Proza v stikhakh") contains 153 numbered stanzas, of which one (no. 37) is empty, resulting in a total of 1064 lines; below is the sixteenth of those stanzas:

И все газеты наши плохи! Но,	a
Постойте! – вот, свою газету	B
Он сам начнет фабриковать:	c
Он обновит российскую печать	c
О нем пройдет молва по белу свету,	B
Он скажет все, что следует давно	a
Сказать, о чем молчать постыдно и грешно!	a
(Polonskij 1896: IV.354)	

The order of the first six rhyme words forms a mirror image: aBc is followed by cBa, leading to a stark separation of the first two a rhyme words, before the last line echoes and reinforces the a-rhyme, resulting in a concluding rhyme pair. All the lines are iambic, with pentameters in lines 1 and 4–6, tetrameters in lines 2 and 3, and a hexameter in line 7. The final rhyme pair and the switch from pentameter to hexameter at the very end of the stanza recall the structure found in the English 7- and 9-line stanzas; it is quite likely that Polonskij either directly or indirectly was reflecting that influence, even if his stanza on the whole displays an original and unusual form. For Polonskij, then, “Neuch” turns out to be the exception, in terms of both length and the originality of the rhyme scheme.

Two 19th-century poets, one famous and the other far less so, stand out for the radical quality of their experimentation with these long forms. Vil’gel’m Kjukhel’beker has received relatively little scholarly attention and is not represented in the table, but his use of these forms was among the earliest and the most unconventional. Consider his “Beda i ne beda” (late 1810s or early 1820s). If the lines that form a refrain are counted as separate lines, then it displays a 13-line stanza, rhyming aBaBccDDccDDc (and once aBaBccDDc-cEEc). The 23 stanzas of “Rogdaevy psy” (1824) have eleven lines, rhyming aBBaCCddEdE; nine of the lines are in amphibrachic tetrameter, while the 9th and 10th are in trimeter (Kjukhel’beker 1967: I.192). This poem is almost certainly the longest work to that date employing an 11-line stanza.¹²

The first half of the 1830s witnessed Kjukhel’beker’s most intensive experiments with stanzaic form. During this period, for example, he composed the 140-line “Elisaveta Kul’man”, one of the few poems in Russian to employ a

¹² This one poem thus has as many lines as all six of the poems in 11-line stanzas discovered by Smith (1997: Table 14, 170). Vishnevskij (1965: 82) noted that he had found only a single usage of an 11-line stanza prior to Lermontov: “Pesnja” (“Vek junyj, prelestnyj...”) by the little-known poet N. M. Konshin. However, Kjukhel’beker’s poem and all those noted by Smith were earlier.

20-line stanza. Furthermore, the stanza consists not simply of five quatrains or a mix of quatrains and couplets, but exhibits a truly complex structure – AbbAcAcDDeFeFgHHgIIg – where seven-line rhyme structures at either end set off the six lines in the middle portion. By comparison, his 7-line stanza in the ballad “Kudejar” has a more familiar rhyme scheme, AbAbCCb, which had already been employed by Pushkin, though Kjukhel’beker again varies the line lengths, with amphibrachic tetrameter in lines 1, 3, 5 and 6, while the rest are in amphibrachic trimeter. The stanzas in “Son i smert” are less ambitious metrically, with iambic pentameter throughout, but they employ a more unusual pattern, AbAbAbb, based on just two rhymes and with a final couplet. “Ossian” features what must be one of the longest stanzas in Russian with an odd number of lines – fifteen – albeit the rhyme scheme here, consisting of two quatrains, then a couplet, followed by a 5-line unit rhyming ffGGf, is significantly less adventurous than in his 20-line stanza. The shorter stanza in “Rosinka”, however is notable for its complexity:

Сон побежденный	A
С выси янтарной	B
Канул за лес:	c
Шар лучезарный,	B
Око вселенной,	A
Сердце небес,	c
Всходит и – пало	D
Тьмы покрывало,	D
Сумрак исчез.	c
(Kjukhel’beker 1967: I.284–285)	

The poem is written in dactylic dimeter, with the c rhyme marking the end of each third of the stanza, but the reversal of the AB rhyme in the middle third helps make this a particularly atypical rhyme pattern. Remarkably, then, in virtually every poem where Kjukhel’beker employs a long stanza, he devises a different form – several of them unique in his day, and a couple of which very likely remain unique to the present.

The other 19th-century poet notable for his compositions with long odd stanzas is Lermontov. In his case, far more than with the relatively little-read Kjukhel’beker, it is surprising that his verse forms did not become more widely imitated. For the most part, Lermontov’s use of these stanzas occurs during his years of youthful exploration, but some also appeared during the brief mature period of his short career, from 1837 to 1841, when he wrote nearly all of his

best works.¹³ At first the raw statistics in the table may not seem overly impressive. Taken together, his two poems in 7-line stanzas and the three in 9-line stanzas account for just 1.8% of the poems and 2% of the lines written in stanzas. However, Lermontov also has no fewer than 14 works (5% of all his stanzaic poems) in long stanzas. Of the poets examined here, only Zhukovskij comes close to that percentage, though in his case 8 of the 11 poems have the 12-line stanzas that often read as though they were simply constructed by joining three quatrains. For Lermontov, only three of his poems in this category have 12-line stanzas, while five works, including the lengthy “Tambovskaja kaznachejsja”, are written in the complex Onegin stanza. His turning to the extremely rare 11-line stanza in five works, including a couple of narrative poems, quite possibly makes him the most prolific Russian author of verse in this form. And he also has one poem that makes striking use of a 13-line stanza.

Lermontov’s “Borodino” (1837; see Lermontov 1958: I.408) is perhaps the most famous poem to employ a seven-line stanza, and in fact the term “Borodinskaja strofa” refers both to Lermontov’s use of that stanza and to modern imitations. The rhyme scheme is AAbCCCb. The lines with the masculine b rhyme are in iambic trimeter; the others in iambic tetrameter. If both the poem and the stanzaic form are well known, the stanza nonetheless failed to find any significant following among Lermontov’s contemporaries or among recognized poets of subsequent generations. The particular mix of metres and the 3-fold adjacent rhyme in lines 4–6, while certainly possible to imitate, do not allow for the flexibility and easily varied internal structures of the more common rhyme schemes found in English. Perhaps more importantly, though, the stanza, with its resulting rhythm that recalls a military march, seems so suited to the poem and became so widely associated with “Borodino”, that, as with the Onegin stanza, almost any use of it was bound to recall its original appearance (Vishnevskij 1965: 64–65). Lermontov’s other seven-line stanza, found in the early “Pesnja” (“Kolokol stonet...”, 1830–31) is even more unusual: it begins with three unrhymed lines followed by two lines consisting of the same word, and then concludes with an adjacent rhyme. The metre consists of two dactylic dimeter lines followed by five in amphibrachs: a trimeter, two monometers, and two tetrameters (with the third line of the second stanza iambic rather than amphibrachic). Not surprisingly, this stanza has lacked imitators.

Lermontov’s three poems written in 9-line stanzas are all relatively early: “Zhelan’e” (1832), “On byl rozhděn dlja schast’ja, dlja nadezhd” (1832), “Opjat’

¹³ For an overview, see Pejsakhovich (1964: 489). Vishnevskij (1969: 87) claims that Lermontov’s most polished stanzaic discoveries only begin in 1837; he may have fewer long forms in the late years, but they are more impressive for their virtuosity.

narodnye vitii" (1833–35). Other than the fact of their employing a relatively rare stanza length, they are not especially venturesome in their structure. Each begins with four lines in alternating rhyme and concludes with a five-line unit, which is a little different in each of the poems: respectfully, these are CdCCd, cDDcc, and CCdCd.¹⁴ Because its stanzas are of varying lengths (9, 12, 6 and 9 lines), "Umirajushchij gladiator" (1836) is not counted in the table. The poem is a free rendering of stanzas 139–141 in Part IV of Byron's *Childe-Harold's Pilgrimage*, and thus the appearance of two 9-line stanzas is probably no accident, though these stanzas' metre (consistently iambic hexameter) and rhyme scheme (aBaBcDcDc) differ from Byron's Spenserian stanza.

Four of Lermontov's poems in 11-line stanzas date from his transitional or mature periods. The sole exception, "Pole Borodina" (1830–31), an early version of "Borodino", rhymes AbAbCCdEEEd. It is written in iambic tetrameter, except for the lines containing the d rhyme, which are in iambic trimeter. This 11-line form clearly served as the prototype for "Borodino": the final 7 lines are exactly the same as the Borodino stanza. Three of the later poems with 11-line stanzas – the very long "Sashka" (1835–36), the second version of "Tebe, Kavkaz, surovij car' zemli..." (1838?), and "Skazka dlja detej" (1840) – employ the exact same form: aBaBaCCddEE, with iambic pentameter lines. Lermontov's one other poem with an 11-line stanza, "Pamjati A. I. O[doevsko] go" (1839), exhibits the same metre and a similar rhyme scheme: aBaBcDDc-cEE. The key difference is that the initial rhyme pair ends with line four, and the fifth line instead introduces the c rhyme, which is again followed by three adjacent pairs: DDccEE. Thus Lermontov, like Polonskij, made a particular long stanza with an odd number of lines a part of his repertoire, using the same rhyme pattern or a minor variation no fewer than four times, in both long works and lyrics. Even though this form seems less restrictive than the Borodino stanza and in Lermontov was being championed by one of the most accomplished poets of the 19th century, it too languished.¹⁵

Lermontov's poem in 13-line stanzas, "[A. G. Khomutovoj]" ("Slepec, stradan'em vdokhnovenyj...", 1838), also belongs to his mature period. The

¹⁴ For more on these poems and on their relationship to other stanzaic forms used by Lermontov, see Pejsakhovich (1964: 479–81) and Vishnevskij (1965: 78–80). Vishnevskij assigns just these three works to this category, but Pejsakhovich has five: he includes both a monostanzaic work with 9 lines, "Shcherbatovoj" (1831), and the heterostanzaic "Umirajushchij gladiator".

¹⁵ While these stanzaic inventions left little trace among later generations of poets, several of Lermontov's other formal innovations did have a major influence on subsequent developments in Russian verse (Vishnevskij 1969: 78–88, especially the summary, 87–88).

first stanza of this iambic tetrameter poem has the form of a 5-line stanza followed by two quatrains – AbAAbCdCdEdEf – and major syntactic breaks in fact occur after lines 5 and 9. Then, in the second of the two stanzas, Lermontov reverses the structure, with the two quatrains preceding the five-line unit – AbAbCdCdEfEEf – and the strong syntactic breaks appearing after lines 4 and 8.

With the failure of either Lermontov's 11-line stanzas or his *Borodinskaja strofa* to gain wide usage, the sporadic appearances of long stanzas with an odd number of lines was to remain the norm throughout the 19th century – and for that matter since then as well. Some poets do not use these forms at all; others write a handful of works in 7-, 9- or even 11-line stanzas. Among 19th century poets, Nikolaj Jazykov has “Kubok”, written in a unique 17-line stanza; the 3 stanzas rhyme AbAbCdCdEfEEfGhGh (Jazykov 1988: 276–277). His 7-line stanzas appear in two songs, neither published until many years after his death: “Bozhe! Vina, vina!” parodies “Bozhe! Carja khрани!”, while the other, “Ot serdca družnye s vinom”, has 4 stanzas in iambic tetrameter and an interesting symmetrical structure, with couplets at the beginning and the end surrounding the BaB rhyme in the centre: aaBaBcc. His poems with 9-line stanzas include “Denisu Vasil'evichu Davydovu” (1835) and “Elegija” (1839); notably, the two poems share the same metre, trochaic tetrameter, and the same rhyme scheme, AbAbCdCCd (Jazykov 1988: 85, 84, 293–295, 309–310). Nekrasov's “N. F. Kruze” (1858) begins with two 7-line stanzas rhyming AAAbCCb before concluding with a conventional 8-line stanza. More striking are the three 11-line stanzas that comprise his “Muzh i zhena” (1877), rhyming A 'A 'bCCbbbDDb, AbAbCCddEEd, AbAbCCbbDDb (Nekrasov 1967: III.332). The last four lines in each stanza are a refrain, and line 5 of the first stanza (Slezy, nervicheskij khokhot, pripadok...) is repeated as line six of the second and five of the third. This means that the C rhyme is based on the same sound throughout the poem, while the b rhymes in stanzas 1 and 3 and the d rhyme in 2 are also identical. The entire poem is dactylic. The lines in the refrain contain 3, 4, 3 and 2 feet, while the remaining lines are either all tetrameter (stanza 3) or a mix of tetrameter and trimeter. The interplay of parallels and variations between stanzas, along with the asymmetrical structure within each stanza brought about by the odd number of lines and the rhyme scheme, make this a striking example of the possibilities inherent in odd stanzas. Other poets who similarly forayed into such forms only very rarely, such as A. N. Pleshcheev, were often less adventurous. Thus his “Tak mne mila, pora zakata!” simply has two 7-line stanzas in iambic tetrameter rhyming AbAbAcc, using a variant of the form found in English.

The lack of an established tradition that could have led to greater acceptance of these odd stanzas continued into the 20th century, with the level of interest in

these odd stanzas not changing much during the age of Modernism. Significant developments took place in the repertoire of metres, and a wider range of approximate rhymes came into use. Interest in stanzas, though, largely centred on forms that had originated in Western traditions – primarily the sonnet, but also the triolet (for Sologub and Rukavishnikov) as well as the sestina, Dante’s terza rima, etc. Brjusov’s *Opyty po strofike* may be representative: it includes everything from sonnets to examples of the rondeau, triolet, villanelle, sestina, ghazal, and song patterns from various traditions, among other forms. It reads almost like a handbook of foreign forms (and not just those from Western traditions), complete with examples, though Brjusov (1973–1975: III.332) stated that his goal was not to offer examples of every form or to provide a systematic textbook but to select representative examples from his own writing. Interestingly the Spenserian stanzas he began to prepare for the volume were never completed.¹⁶ These stanza forms with an odd number of lines, it seems, did not appear sufficiently important to Brjusov for him to feel it necessary to include them in his book. Long stanzas with an odd number of lines seem to have accounted for only a small part of the verse composed by poets who are associated with the beginnings of the Modernist trend in literature.

Even so, a few isolated items of interest occur. Merezhkovskij employs a 7-line stanza for the more than 2000 lines in his “Vera” (1890). He uses a form resembling the English rhyme royal, with a concluding couplet (CC or cc), but he turns the stanza into a particularly flexible device for a long narrative poem by varying the rhyme scheme over the first five lines: AbbAb, aBaBa, aBaaB, etc. Gippius alters this form even further and makes her ABABAcc structure into something of a tour de force; over the 5 stanzas of “Progulka vdvoem” (1900) she uses the same words throughout for the c rhyme and in each stanza repeats the final word of the first line at the end of the fifth line. An examination of some 600 poems by Maksimilian Voloshin yields only a single instance of what initially appears to be a longer stanza with an odd number of lines, “Zaklinanie (ot usobic)” (1920). The rhymes of the two stanzas are linked, resulting in less a 7-line structure than a single 14-line stanza: aaBccBc // cEEfGfG (Voloshin 2003–: I.353). Close examination reveals that in fact the poem is a reverse Onegin stanza; labelling the lines from the end would result in the rhyme scheme AbAbCCddEffEgg.

¹⁶ See the notes to *Opyty* (Brjusov: 1973–1975: III.626–667), which include three Spenserian stanzas that Brjusov omitted from the published volume. For the “*Opyty po strofike*” that were written specifically as part of the *Opyty* project and for references to those poems that had been published earlier, see Brjusov (1973–1975: III.511–529).

Other poets have been more willing to test odd stanzas. Nikolaj Minskij employed both 7- and 9-line stanzas, sometimes in poems that pre-date Russian Modernism. For instance, “Posvjashchenie” (1882?) consists of eight 7-line stanzas in iambic hexameter rhyming aBaBaCC – displaying the concluding couplet favoured by the English forms of this stanza. Several of his works in these forms are songs, including “Serenada” (1879), which was set to music by numerous composers. This latter work consists of two nine-line stanzas with a 3-line refrain in each. All the lines are dactylic, with the first six alternating tetrameter and trimeter, and the three lines of the refrain in dimeter; unusually, five of the lines end in dactylic rhymes: A’ba’bA’cD’cD’ (Minskij, Dobroljubov 2005: 99–100, 124; see also the commentary, 329–300, 338–339).

Mikhail Kuzmin was one of the few to show a genuine interest in these stanzas. Of the 670 poems in the Biblioteka poeta edition of his verse, seven employ 7-line stanzas and four others 9-line stanzas: not an extremely high percentage, but also not insignificant. What is more, each of the seven poems in 7-line stanzas possesses a different rhyme scheme: AbbAcbc, aBaBBcc, ababbaa, AbbAAAb, aBaBccc, aabbCCb, and aBBBaaa.¹⁷ All are written in iambic or trochaic verse and some have lines of varying lengths. Kuzmin clearly seeks unusual combinations of rhymes that heighten the sense of an atypical form. Thus in the fifth of these poems five lines are in iambic tetrameter but the first two lines in the c rhyme triplet are in dimeter, thereby underscoring the asymmetrical nature of the structure. The two longest of his poems in 9-line stanzas reveal his mastery of the Spenserian form: the 28 stanzas of “Vsadnik” (1908) and the 12 stanzas of “Chuzhaja poema” (1916, with a missing final line in the eleventh stanza). The metre is also that associated with the Spenserian stanza: eight lines in iambic pentameter and a ninth in hexameter. Clearly, like his English predecessors, he saw the possibilities of this form for longer works. But his first and last poems in this stanza length show that he could be inventive here as well: “Gde somnen’ja? Gde tomnen’ja?...” (1907) has stanzas that rhyme AAbCCbDDb, while “Razletajutsia, kak pticy...” reveals a still more original pattern: AbAbCCCCb (Kuzmin 1996: 523). The poem is in trochaic tetrameter with trochaic trimeter in lines 7 and 8, but the most distinctive feature consists of the four consecutive C rhymes. With the last two of these rhymes appearing in the dimeter lines, the rapid repetition of identical sounds gives the poem a lively and distinctive rhythm.

¹⁷ The works are “Serdce betsja, plennyj strepet...” (Part 8, Chapter 3 of *Novyj Rolla*; 1908–10; Kuzmin 1996: 284–85), “Kakaja belizna i krotkij son!” (1917; 1996: 311), “Eto vsë pro nastojashchee, družhok...” (1920; 1996: 416–17), “Italija” (1920; 1996: 452–53); “Ja imeni ne nazovu...” (1924; 1996: 527–28), “Ty/2-oe” (1927; 1996: 565–66), “Ja rassmejalsja by v lico...” (1911–12; 1996: 621–22).

One of the greatest experimenters of the early 20th century was the relatively obscure but productive Ivan Rukavishnikov. With the exception of the identical triolets, of which he wrote more than 300, the vast majority of his poems display a unique combination of stanzaic length, rhyme scheme and metre. However, his stanzaic inventiveness is most notable for such features as including unrhymed lines in his otherwise rhymed poems and creating hybrid forms that combined features of non-identical stanzas and linked stanzas (Laletina 2011: 191). He has only a few poems in regular 7- or 9-line stanzas, though he also composed one early work, “Za schast'em” (1901), in an unusual 13-line stanza: AAbC'bbC'ddeffe. In addition, on several occasions he wrote poems in 7- and 9-line stanzas that are linked by the appearance of the same rhyme in adjacent stanzas. His fourth collection of poems contains two such instances.¹⁸ “Veka”, consists of two 9-line stanzas, where the first two lines of both stanzas share the same aa rhyme and are in iambic pentameter, with the remaining lines in iambic dimeter that rhyme B'B'cD'cD'D'. A more radical experiment is “Volny”, where the two 7-line stanzas contain the same rhyme words (except for a different post-tonic ending in the final two lines):

Я все смотрелся в волны мутные	A'
Бесцельно плещущей реки.	b
И мне казалось: Волны мутные	A'
Рисуют облики минутные	A'
Моей рыдающей тоски,	b
Тоски всегдашней, неизменной,	C
Тоски и тленной и нетленной.	C
Я все смотрелся в очи мутные	A'
Моей рыдающей тоски.	b
И мне казалось: Очи мутные	A'
Рисуют отблески минутные	A'
Бесцельно плещущей реки,	b
Реки под солнцем неизменным,	C
Под солнцем тленным и нетленным.	C

(Rukavishnikov 1906: 140).

¹⁸ Laletina (2008: 323–324) lists these poems separately from the poems that are in regular 7- and 9-line stanzas. It is questionable whether this phenomenon deserves a distinct category (especially in the case of “Veka”, where only the aa rhyme pair is the same in both 9-line stanzas), but the linked stanzas are sufficiently unusual to deserve special attention.

Whatever the quality of the resulting work as poetry, it at least displays formal inventiveness, as does much of Rukavishnikov's verse.

Among the poets at the turn of the 20th century Bal'mont makes the most use of 7- and 9-line stanzas: indeed, his 42 works in these two forms comprise exactly half those composed by all 13 of the poets in the table. Seen as a percentage of his entire work, the numbers are not necessarily that high: Bal'mont was very prolific and his more than 2000 stanzaic poems far exceed the output by any of the dozen other poets. Still, the sheer number of works in these stanzas shows that they were an established part of his repertoire. He rarely repeats the same rhyme scheme, often combines lines of varying lengths within the stanzas, and occasionally inserts unrhymed lines (as in "Cvetozyb", where the rhyme scheme is X'X'X'aB'B'a). Like Rukavishnikov, he is capable of linking stanzas; see, for instance, the 7-line stanzas in his "Pesn' Gara'da Smelogo (12-j vek)", based on an old Norse ballad (the same work that served as Batjushkov's source for his poem in 9-line stanzas). In Bal'mont the final line is a refrain and the D rhyme appears only in the sixth line of each stanza. The first two of the six stanzas additionally share the a rhyme, so that the scheme becomes aBaBcDc // aEaEcDc. Some of his 7-line stanzas contain just two rhymes, and one of the two may appear in five lines, as in "Cherep", which rhymes AbbbAbb (Bal'mont: 1921: 121).

Bal'mont's poems in 9-line stanzas tend to be equally imaginative in their rhyme schemes; for "Uzornoe okno" (1897?) he uses the B rhyme to link together the entire stanza while creating an effective asymmetrical structure aBaaaBccB (Bal'mont: 1980: 67). Bal'mont only rarely wrote odd stanzas with more than 9 lines, but it is interesting to note that in the three 11-line stanzas of "Tkachikha" – rhyming AAbCCDDbAAb – he similarly uses the lines with the b rhyme to mark the major syntactic breaks (Bal'mont: 1908: 142). The b lines are in trochaic dimeter (as opposed to the tetrameter in the remaining lines, all with feminine endings) so that the sharp distinctions between the lines with three syllables and those with eight further punctuate the delineations.

The utilization of stanzas with these odd line lengths has remained modest and uneven over the latter part of the 20th century and into the 21st. While the 9-line stanza and especially the 11-line remain rarities, it is possible to find occasional 7-line stanzas among some poets. Thus in "Zrelost" (1956) David Samojlov uses the rhyme scheme aaBcccB in the first stanza before switching to aaaBccB in the other two. The metre consists of iambic tetrameter and trimeter, with the trimeter lines always with the B rhyme: I4434443 and then I4443443. One of the many poems that Boris Sluckij wrote "for the drawer", "Generala legko ponjat", consists of eight 7-line stanzas in 3-stress dol'niki that are variously rhymed, with the pattern aBBaCCa dominating the first half of

the work (though the poem's very first line is unrhymed). Arsenij Tarkovskij's "Olivy" (1958), written entirely in amphibrachic trimeter, contains four stanzas, with the last truncated to five lines. He uses two rhymes in each stanza, altering the pattern slightly as he goes along: aBaaBaB, aBaaBBa, AbbAAbb, AbAAb. Junna Moric starts with a pair of masculine couplets and concludes with a triplet, so that the five stanzas of "V junosti, v pasti ognja" rhyme aabbccc. The first two pairs are in dactylic trimeter, but the stanza concludes with two lines in amphibrachic dimeter and one in amphibrachic trimeter. Lev Loseff wrote several poems in odd stanzas, including the very late "Ekskursija", with its quirky delay of the final rhyme until the sixth line: aaBccaB. He also has the early "Marsh", in five 9-line stanzas rhyming A 'bA 'bccDDc, with a 3-line coda tacked on at the end of the poem. The stanzas all start with four lines in anapaestic trimeter. What follows varies; for the most part there are four shorter anapaestic and iambic lines, with a final iambic line in tetrameter, although twice the final line also has a two-foot coda added on.¹⁹

A closer examination of works by the last two poets in the table will help round out the modern picture. The available analyses of Aleksandr Kushner's work cover virtually all his published poetry from the end of the 1950s until the middle of the 2000s – some 1300 poems over nearly 50 years. Even more than most poets, he has favoured a relatively narrow range of stanza lengths: 4-, 5-, 6- and 8-line stanzas together account for more than 97% of his stanzaic poems. Meanwhile, 7-line, 9-line, 10-line and longer stanzas together appear in just a dozen poems, about 1% of his stanzaic verse. As rare as they may be, stanzas of these lengths tend to feature complex rhyme schemes – with the exception of his 12-line stanzas, which can be broken down into three quatrains with alternating rhyme (Laletina et al. 2008: 542). For example, "Ja plokho splju: prihodjat, slovno dnev..." (1993) has a 10-line stanza that rhymes aBCaBCaBCa. Kushner did little with longer stanzaic forms, especially those with an odd number of lines, until the late 1980s, a time when both the number of works he was writing each year and the range of his metrical repertoire reached their highest levels (Laletina et al. 2008: 548). An early exception is "Vbezhal na kholm i zadokhnulsja", (1973) in which he precisely imitates the Borodino stanza: AAbCCCb (Kushner 1975: 89). Here Kushner is being more playful than inventive, but his later poems in long stanzas with an odd number of lines tend to be both original and striking in their rhyme patterns. Consider his single poem with 9-line stanzas, "Manija" (1997), which

¹⁹ In a note to the author some years ago Loseff remarked that in this poem he was imitating the metre and rhythm of a popular military march, "Proshchanie slavjanki", but apparently nobody had noticed the similarity.

rhymes A'B'c A'B'c A'B'c (Kushner 1998: 49). The pattern is highly unusual due to the three-fold abc rhyme and dactylic endings in both the a and b positions. The metre is primarily iambic pentameter, but one trimeter line appears at varying places in each stanza. His one poem in 11-line stanzas, the iambic tetrameter “Ne mozhet byt' durnoj molitvy”, has a particularly convoluted rhyme scheme in the first stanza: ABABBCDBCDB. In contrast, the second stanza employs a simpler pattern of alternating rhymes throughout: ABABACDCDCD (Kushner 1997: 391–392). The exclusive reliance on feminine rhyme for a stanza of this length is exceptional.²⁰

If some of Kushner's most unusual forms appear in his handful of poems with odd stanzas of seven or more lines, then Joseph Brodsky was on the whole more innovative in his use of all stanza lengths, employing a wide range of rhyme schemes and at times coming up with unique variations (Scherr 2002: 286). That said, he was like Kushner in employing the longer odd stanzas quite rarely; for that matter (and unlike Kushner), even his usage of the 5-line stanza is quite low. Clearly, Brodsky's extensive reading of English poetry did not influence him toward borrowing the 7- and 9-line stanzas that he came across (Scherr 2002: 276). When he does turn to those stanzas, he devises rhyme schemes that are very much his own. His early “Dva chasa v rezervuare” (1965) employs a variety of 7-line stanzas in sections 2, 3 and 4 (though section four has one eight-line stanza). While the rhyme patterns in 2 and 3 vary slightly, both (along with section 4) start with a stanza that features four consecutive feminine A rhymes followed by a rhyme triplet in B. The middle two stanzas have an interlocking scheme with all feminine rhymes, before a final stanza that introduces some masculine rhyming. Thus the unique combination of rhymes in section 3 is as follows: AAAABBB AABBCDC / DEEFFFF aaBBBcc. Some years later Brodsky (2011: II.194) resurrected the AAAABBB stanza, using it throughout his 84-line “Portret tragedii” (1991).

Brodsky carries his interest in rhyme triplets over to his even rarer 9-line stanzas. The three triple adjacent feminine rhymes in “Dekabr' vo Florencii” create a unique pattern, made all the more distinct both by the frequent use of strong enjambement (as in Kushner's “Ne mozhet byt' durnoj molitvy”) as well as Brodsky's distinctive dol'nik-like metrical structure (also seen in “Portret tragedii”); below is the second of its nine stanzas:

²⁰ Long stanzas with an odd number of lines have not disappeared from Kushner's repertoire. A recent poem with the rather gruesome opening line “Prisnilas' deva mne s otbituju rukoj” consists of two 7-line stanzas in iambic hexameter, rhyming aBaaBaB and aBaBaaB (Kushner 2013: 3).

Глаз, мигая, заглатывает, погружаясь в сырые	A
сумерки, как таблетки от памяти, фонари; и	A
твой подъезд в двух минутах от Синьории	A
намекает глухо, спустя века, на	B
причину изгнания: вблизи вулкана	B
невозможно жить, не показывая кулака; но	B
и нельзя разжать его, умирая,	C
потому что смерть – это всегда вторая	C
Флоренция с архитектурой Рая.	C

(Brodsky 2011: I.378)

The pyrotechnic quality of Brodsky's rhyme schemes and other formal elements helps compensate for the few examples of poems by him with these stanza lengths.

This survey of odd stanzas leads to several conclusions. First, Russia never developed a clear tradition of such stanzas, so that, with the occasional exception of a Kuzmin using the Spenserian stanza, poets are not so much referring back to a corpus of earlier works as creating forms for themselves. Second, the history of Russian verse points to two key moments when a tradition might have arisen. The earlier of these occurred from the 1820s through the 1840s, when a few poets – Lermontov among the most widely-read figures, but also Kjukhel'beker and to a lesser extent Jazykov – experimented with these forms but failed to attract followers. During the second period – the turn of the 20th century and the rise of Modernism – more attention was paid instead to metre and rhyme. Interest in stanzas related more to traditional forms, especially the sonnet, and to such phenomena as linked stanzas; long odd stanzas never achieved anything approaching wide currency. Third, while such stanzas have remained uncommon, they have never gone entirely out of fashion: many poets have used them for the occasional work or two, and a few have turned to them more extensively. Fourth, and most importantly, the very infrequency with these forms occur has generally given them an experimental flavour. There are exceptions; for instance, the stanza that Merezhkovskij uses for “Vera” is not dissimilar to that found earlier among both Russian and English poets and seems well-suited to the long narrative text in which it appears. However, the odd stanzas have most often served as a platform for unconventional and frequently complex rhyme schemes, for combining lines of different lengths into a single stanza, and in general for highlighting the formal features of the text. If Russian poets have only rarely been able to use these stanzas to evoke earlier poets in the way that, say, Yeats and Auden did within the English tradition, they nonetheless have found – and continue to find – these forms a source for inspiring some of their most dazzling creations.

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Appendix: Stanza Lengths for Selected Poets

Stanza size:		2-line		3-line		4-line		5-line		6-line		7-line		8-line		9-line		10-line		11-plus		Totals: Stanzaic Poems	Fixed forms	All poems
		№	%	№	%	№	%	№	%	№	%	№	%	№	%	№	%	№	%	№	%			
Poet:																								
Lomonosov	Poems	-	-	-	-	12	28.6	-	-	2	4.8	-	-	5	11.9	-	-	23	54.8	-	-	42	-	289
	Lines	-	-	-	-	2120	26.9	-	-	90	1.1	-	-	608	7.7	-	-	5060	64.2	-	-	7878	-	13,925
	Stanzas	-	-	-	-	530	47.0	-	-	15	1.3	-	-	76	6.7	-	-	506	44.9	-	-	1127	-	
Zhukovskij	Poems	2	0.8	4	1.7	126	53.2	8	3.4	15	6.3	1	0.4	64	27.0	3	1.3	3	1.3	11	4.6	237	-	615
	Lines	32	0.2	87	0.6	4776	34.4	305	2.2	846	6.1	42	0.3	4402	31.7	99	0.7	248	1.8	3032	21.9	13,869	-	69,175
	Stanzas	16	0.7	29	1.3	1194	52.5	61	2.7	141	6.2	6	0.3	550	24.2	11	0.5	25	1.1	243	10.7	2276	-	
Batjushkov	Poems	-	-	-	-	34	77.3	1	2.3	1	2.3	1	2.3	4	9.1	1	2.3	1	2.3	1	2.3	44	-	172
	Lines	-	-	-	-	1257	66.9	38	2.0	44	2.3	14	0.7	304	16.2	45	2.4	40	2.1	136	7.2	1878	-	6714
	Stanzas	-	-	-	-	314	81.1	8	2.1	7	1.8	2	0.5	38	9.8	5	1.3	4	1.0	9	2.3	387	-	
Pushkin	Poems	100	26.5	1	0.3	185	48.9	7	1.9	24	6.3	4	1.1	47	12.4	1	0.3	4	1.1	5	1.3	378	3 son	1000
	Lines	4196	24.3	9	0.1	3109	18.0	125	0.7	808	4.7	98	0.6	2621	15.2	23	0.1	180	1.0	6078	35.2	17,247	3 ter	42,663
	Stanzas	2103	54.6	3	0.1	778	20.2	25	0.6	135	3.5	14	0.4	330	8.6	3	0.1	18	0.5	445	11.5	3854		
Del'vig	Poems	6	7.0	2	2.3	55	64.0	4	4.7	6	7.0	2	2.3	9	10.5	1	1.2	-	-	1	1.2	86	7 son	200
	Lines	85	4.2	21	1.0	1236	60.8	145	7.1	174	8.6	49	2.4	272	13.4	27	1.3	-	-	24	1.2	2033	2 oct	5245
	Stanzas	43	9.1	7	1.5	319	67.4	29	6.1	29	6.1	7	1.5	34	7.2	3	0.6	-	-	2	0.4	473		
Tjutchev	Poems	2	0.9	-	-	158	69.0	16	7.0	9	3.9	-	-	42	18.3	1	0.4	1	0.4	-	-	229	-	377
	Lines	48	1.1	-	-	2824	66.3	230	5.4	156	3.7	-	-	944	22.2	36	0.8	20	0.5	-	-	4258	-	6978
	Stanzas	24	2.6	-	-	706	76.2	46	5.0	26	2.8	-	-	118	12.7	4	0.4	2	0.2	-	-	926	-	
Benediktov	Poems	2	1.7	1	0.8	73	60.3	6	5.0	16	13.2	-	-	16	13.2	1	0.8	3	2.5	3	2.5	121	8 son	400
	Lines	62	1.0	12	0.2	3752	63.4	240	4.1	822	13.9	-	-	496	8.4	54	0.9	379	6.4	104	1.8	5921	1 oct	19,449
	Stanzas	31	2.4	4	0.3	938	73.8	48	3.8	137	10.8	-	-	62	4.9	6	0.5	38	3.0	7	0.6	1271		
Lermontov	Poems	2	0.7	-	-	173	61.3	6	2.1	17	6.0	2	0.7	60	21.3	3	1.1	5	1.8	14	5.0	282	1 son	509
	Lines	64	0.6	-	-	3355	32.7	135	1.3	498	4.9	119	1.2	2608	25.4	81	0.8	140	1.4	3266	31.8	10266		33,149
	Stanzas	32	2.0	-	-	839	51.7	27	1.7	83	5.1	17	1.0	326	20.1	9	0.6	14	0.9	277	17.1	1624		
Polonskij	Poems	9	3.6	2	0.8	160	64.5	13	5.2	24	9.8	7	2.8	28	11.3	-	-	4	1.6	1	0.4	248	2 son	431
	Lines	212	1.9	48	0.4	6332	55.8	575	5.1	1092	9.6	1186	10.4	1712	15.1	-	-	160	1.40	36	0.3	11353		45,943
	Stanzas	106	4.4	16	6.7	1583	65.8	115	4.8	182	7.6	170	7.1	214	8.9	-	-	16	0.7	3	0.1	2405		
Bal'mont	Poems	142	7.0	39	1.9	1469	72.7	100	5.0	133	6.6	33	1.6	83	4.1	8	0.4	4	0.2	9	0.4	2020	534 son	3350
																						(11 ses)	35 ter	68,786
Rukavishnikov	Poems	13	2.5	6	1.2	354	68.7	43	8.3	56	10.9	4	0.8	20	3.9	2	0.4	5	1.0	12	2.3	515	9 son	1425
	Lines	172	1.4	96	0.8	7912	65.6	1075	8.9	1494	12.4	105	0.9	472	3.9	63	0.5	240	2.0	427	3.5	12056	308 tri	35,150
	Stanzas	86	3.2	32	1.2	1978	73.3	215	7.8	249	9.2	15	0.6	59	2.2	7	0.3	24	0.9	32	1.2	2697	1 ron	
Brodsky	Poems	3	0.9	5	1.5	186	54.7	2	0.6	48	14.2	4	1.2	75	22.1	1	0.3	4	1.2	11	3.2	339	47 son	690
	Lines	86	0.5	507	3.2	6456	40.4	60	0.4	3187	20.0	161	1.0	4251	26.6	81	0.5	422	2.6	758	4.7	15969		30,353
	Stanzas	43	1.4	169	5.6	1614	53.2	12	0.3	531	17.5	23	0.8	531	17.5	9	0.3	42	1.4	57	1.9	3031		
Kushner	Poems	8	0.7	9	0.8	751	65.2	78	6.8	105	9.1	3	0.3	188	16.3	1	0.1	5	0.4	4	0.3	1152	2 son	1300
	Lines	104	0.4	171	0.7	14596	60.9	1845	7.7	2574	10.7	77	0.3	4304	18.0	45	0.2	160	0.7	94	0.4	23970		27,738
	Stanzas	52	1.0	57	1.1	3649	71.1	369	7.2	429	8.4	11	0.2	538	10.5	5	0.1	16	0.3	8	0.2	5134		
TOTALS	Poems	289	5.1	69	1.2	3736	65.6	284	5.0	456	8.0	61	1.1	641	11.3	23	0.4	62	1.1	72	1.3	5693		
		2-line		3-line		4-line		5-line		6-line		7-line		8-line		9-line		10-line		11-plus		Total		