

Jennifer Woodhouse

TANIA'S WEDDING

Two Russian priests
preside at Tania's wedding —
Father Steven's flaming beard and hair
murmur beneath his priestly purple cap
of heresy; the deacon's aureole
of sober grey, the bridegroom's brown
complete the trio of the ancient tale.
The bride, a blonde Vasilisa
beneath a mist of tulle
has sad brown eyes
but laughter at her lips;
the voices of the choir
ring sure and strong, a perezvon,
a many-stranded harmony of amethyst and bronze.

A patriarchal figure, brother Fyodor, Old Believer
presides over the Russian wedding feast
with cries of gorko, gorko! bitter, bitter! make it sweet!
Russet Queensland cedar from an empire's sunset days,
morticed, and fretted over ceiling vents
is resonant with waltzes from old Salzburg and Vienna,
insinuating grace and gaiety
to keep Slav melancholia at bay.
Three Greek musicians oust the old violin
with wild Slavonic dances from the Volga and the Don —
The moment is triumphant, here is now,
the vodka flows like mead
tossed off against the rhythm of the drinking song;
Tania is Tatiana, safe from sinister Onegin,
and happiness is many dancing feet.