Constructing the Russian Moral Project through the Classics: 
Reflections of Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*, 1833-2014

Dissertation

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Emily Alane Erken
Graduate Program in Music

The Ohio State University
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Dissertation Committee:
Danielle Fosler-Lussier, Advisor
Alexander Burry
Ryan Thomas Skinner
Abstract

Since the nineteenth century, the Russian intelligentsia has fostered a conversation that blurs the boundaries of literature, the arts, and life. Bypassing more direct modes of political discourse blocked by Imperial and then Soviet censorship, arts reception in Russia has provided educated Russians with an alternative sphere for the negotiation of social, moral, and national identities. This discursive practice has endured through the turbulent political changes of the Russian revolution, Soviet repression, and the economic anxiety of contemporary Russia. Members of the intelligentsia who believe that individuals can and should work for the moral progress of the Russian people by participating in this conversation are constructing the Russian moral project.

Near the end of the nineteenth century, members of the intelligentsia unofficially established a core set of texts and music—Russian klassika—that seemed to represent the best of Russian creative output. Although the canon seems permanent, educated Russians continue to argue about which texts are important and what they mean. Even Aleksandr Pushkin’s Eugene Onegin (1825-1833), a novel-in-verse that functions as the cornerstone of this canon, remains at the center of debate in a conversation about literature that is simultaneously a conversation about Russian life. Pushkin is considered the founder of Russia’s literary language, and Russian readers and critics have endowed him with a saint-like status. His image has become a secular icon of Russian creative potential. The
heroine of his *magnum opus*, Tatiana Larina, has in turn become an icon of Russian morality.

As Russians interpret *Onegin*’s themes and describe its characters, they also express what matters most in their own lives. The history of *Onegin* reception thus reflects the development of Russian ideas about life over the course of the last two centuries. Beginning in 1844, composers, theater directors, and choreographers have adapted Pushkin’s novel for the stage, often challenging the dominant readings of their well-loved source text. For example, Tchaikovsky’s opera adaptation follows Tatiana rather than Eugene, as she develops her own creative voice through the musical romances of her childhood; ultimately, her creative development allows her the moral strength to refuse Eugene. At the Bolshoi Opera Studio in 1922, Konstantin Stanislavsky represented Tatiana as a simple-hearted woman. In 1944, Boris Pokrovsky presented Tatiana as a socialist realist heroine, a strong woman with the integrity to refuse an unworthy suitor.

Since the collapse of state socialism, post-Soviet citizens have continued to negotiate their turbulent world through and with *Onegin*. In 2006, Dmitri Tcherniakov radically reinvisioned Tchaikovsky’s *Onegin* at Moscow’s Bolshoi Theater. Artists, scholars, and critics argued about the merits of Tcherniakov’s staging and indeed its right to exist. Ordinary audience members joined the conversation by posting “spectator reviews” (*zritel’skie retsenzii*) to personal blogs and discussion forums online. When Boris Eifman premiered a choreographic adaptation of *Onegin* in 2009, audience members and critics used these same channels to lambast the corrupt present and to articulate what a better future for Russia would look like. Similarly, audience members
responded to Rimas Tuminas’s 2013 play adaptation of *Onegin* by highlighting what they would preserve for the future. Spectator reviews of *Eugene Onegin* illustrate instances of individual participation in the Russian moral project.
Dedicated to Mom, Margarita Mazo, and Maureen
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Vita

May 2003 ............................................. Marian High School

2007 .................................................. B.A. in Music, DePaul University, Chicago

2008-2012 ........................................... Graduate Teaching Associate, School of

Music, The Ohio State University

2012-2015 ........................................... Adjunct Faculty, Conservatory of Music,

Capital University, Columbus

2012 to present ..................................... Lecturer, School of Music, The Ohio State

University

Publications

“Composing the Musical Self Online: Social Media as Audience Engagement.”

Proceedings of 9th Conference on Interdisciplinary Musicology (CIM14), ed.

Timour Klouche & Eduardo R. Miranda (Berlin: Staatliches Institut für

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Fields of Study

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Chapter 1: *Klassika* and the Moral Project of the Russian Intelligentsia

On September 1, 2006, the elderly soprano Galina Vishnevskaya marched out of the Bolshoi Theater at intermission, declaring that the new production of *Eugene Onegin* amounted to “the desecration of a national shrine.”¹ Set in the Soviet 1930s, Dmitri Tcherniakov’s production recast Tatiana Larina as a fragile, disheveled, wild-eyed girl. Many Russians see the virtues of Pushkin’s fictitious heroine—strength, loyalty, and sacrifice—as the “gendered dimension” of the Russian national character, an icon of Russian morality.² Thus, many audience members found Tatiana’s erratic behavior upsetting, even scandalous, because it contrasted so sharply with their prior knowledge of the beloved character. Spectators took to the Internet to express their shock.

> To change Tatiana from a dreamy young lady into a “downtrodden neurotic” … Really dreaminess and lovingness of Tatiana does not deny her pride and a feeling of self-confidence!!! I categorically disliked this new reading.³ —Svetlana, December 29, 2012

In the first act, Tatiana is a lunatic, a deep introvert, but for some reason, you can feel what a powerful force lies inside her. She does not seek out society—she has a place there, but she sits on the edge of a chair far from

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the table. Whenever possible she leaves. Sitting behind the table in spite of it all, she dreams her own dreams. —Manu_f, April 2, 2007

Tcherniakov took this veil of innocence from Tatiana. Tatiana writes the letter to Onegin because she understands very well what is tormenting her—DESIRE! PASSION awoke, and already Tatiana can’t do anything but talk about it. THIS is the very thing that seems to her most necessary and honest. —Tamara, September 17, 2008

Each commentator uses Tcherniakov’s Tatiana as a springboard to interpret her anew.

For Svetlana, the Russian moral ideal is a loving dreamer. Manu_f’s Tatiana is a dreamer with powerful hidden potential. Tamara’s modern heroine is sexually alive. In making interpretations to post online, these audience members drew upon Tcherniakov’s adaptation; traditional views of Tatiana; and their own present-day experiences and ideas.

Despite Vishnevskaya’s outrage, Tcherniakov’s apostasy belongs to a long tradition of repainting Tatiana’s iconic image to reflect shifting moral values.

Tchaikovsky portrayed her as passionate and creative. Fyodor Dostoevsky consecrated Tatiana as “the apotheosis of the Russian woman.” Soviet authorities depicted Tatiana as a serious woman, capable of understanding Eugene’s deficiencies. Tcherniakov presented her as mentally unstable. The spectators who posted comments online added to this conversation about Tatiana’s identity and significance.

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Almost 200 years after the publication of Aleksandr Pushkin’s novel-in-verse (1825-1831), Tatiana and Eugene’s story continues to present a shared metaphor, a site for dialogue about Russia’s national identity and future. In this conversation, members of the intelligentsia characteristically blur the boundary between life and the arts, often treating the fictional Tatiana as if she were an autonomous person capable of moral choices. By participating in dialogue with each other and with the canonical texts, commentators demonstrate blagorodstvo (generosity of spirit) and reaffirm their commitment to the progress of the Russian people. The conversation about life and art is a significant mode of social engagement for the Russian intelligentsia.

In the years following Vishnevskaya’s Onegin protest, almost every major company in Moscow and St. Petersburg presented its own adaptation of Onegin. Each new Onegin inspires a flood of commentary by professional critics and citizen-commentators, who post what I call spectator reviews (zritel’skie retsenzii). Written by ordinary audience members and posted online, spectator reviews allow us some access to audience members’ perceptions of Eugene Onegin as an opera, a ballet, and a theater piece. By connecting what is seen onstage with other kinds of experience, these reviews reveal how theater-goers synthesize artistic experiences in the construction of social, moral, and national identities.

This study explores a variety of adaptations of Pushkin’s novel-in-verse, including Tchaikovsky’s opera Eugene Onegin, Dmitri Tcherniakov’s production of Piotr

7 The descriptor “ordinary” should be qualified, because members of the Russian intelligentsia still maintain a much higher level of education than is common in Russia. In my interviews, I found that educated Russians claimed the qualifier “ordinary audience member” in order to authorize themselves to discuss the show, detailing their personal opinions, rather than a specialist’s analysis of the performance.
Tchaikovsky’s *Onegin* (2006), Boris Eifman’s ballet *Onegin* (2009), and Rimas Tuminas’s dramatic play *Eugene Onegin* (2013), and the traditions of commentary that surround these works. In addition to professional criticism, each of the recent adaptations elicited well over fifty spectator reviews. By examining how audience members address the presentation of Tatiana and *Eugene Onegin* in their own prose, this project locates individual voices in the larger conversation about society and morality in post-Soviet Russia. Some spectator reviews are clever; others deep; others hackneyed. Each presents a personal and revealing dialogue between the work of art, the self, and society.

**The Moral Imperative of the Russian Intelligentsia**

For almost 200 years, conversations about life and art have played a central role in the social world of the Russian intelligentsia. According to N. J. Enfield and Stephen Levinson, sociality is “the character of social interaction that underpins social life.” Each group of people is defined by a “particularly intense, mentally mediated, and highly structured way of interacting with one another.” The Russian intelligentsia is often described in political terms as liberal dissidents, writers, and artists who suffered political persecution during the Soviet Era, such as physicist Andrei Sakharov or novelist Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Instead, I characterize the intelligentsia as Russians who participate in a conversation that encompasses life, literature, and the arts in the search for moral progress. This conversation has become their main mode of sociality.

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Members of the intelligentsia usually do not describe themselves as *intelligentsia*; rather, they might identify themselves as “educated” (*obrazovanie*) people. In Inna Kochetkova’s words, they feel a responsibility to “preserve, develop, and transmit culture” and “to reform the social order for the well-being of the people.” Masha Gessen likewise asserts that members of the intelligentsia believed it was “their calling in life to bring about the enlightenment of their country.” According to Kochetkova and Gessen, Russians who critically and reflexively use their intellect to engage in the conversation about the most moral way to live life are “being intelligentsia.”

Membership extends far beyond the bounds of ordinary class markers of wealth and status. The intelligentsia does not necessarily occupy positions of economic or political power. Members of the Russian intelligentsia usually trace historical roots to the younger sons and illegitimate children of the nobility late in the eighteenth century. Their nineteenth- and twentieth-century descendants, however, comprised the lower gentry, artists and writers, mid-level professionals, including some Jewish and Turkic minorities. Although many did not have land or power, they were highly educated, some in Western Europe. As Marcus Levitt describes it, people today recall the intelligentsia as a nineteenth-century “small, progressive force” working to remedy “the backward state of the newly liberated masses.”

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responsibility to take “the lead in working for their political liberation and intellectual and spiritual enlightenment.”

These individuals connected the privilege of a liberal education—deep knowledge of historic and current literature, philosophical and social ideas, art, and music—with the need to improve the lives of all Russians. According to this narrative, L. G. Berezovaia and N. P. Berliakova show that through networks of salons, men’s clubs, and the belles lettres, these men and their descendants developed an alternative public sphere. They avoided Russia’s strict censorship by diverting political debates into contemporary literature, philosophy, and critical responses to the arts. Throughout Russia’s history, the government has often suppressed free political discourse; in such circumstances, literature, the arts, and criticism take on additional significance and scope.

In the 1840s, literary critic Vissarion Belinsky provided the model for this conversation. Isaiah Berlin characterizes Belinsky’s work as

the kind of criticism in which the line between life and art is of set purpose not too clearly drawn; in which praise and blame, love and hatred, admiration and contempt are freely expressed both for artistic forms and for the human characters drawn, both for the personal qualities of the authors and for the content of their novels, and the criteria involved in such attitudes, whether consciously or implicitly, are identical with those in terms of which living human beings are in everyday life judged or described.

Whether as writers, artists, salon guests, or readers, members of the intelligentsia were linked by the belief that the arts and ideas were necessary for individual life and for the future of the Russian people. As I define it, the moral project of the Russian intelligentsia

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emerges as a belief that each educated person bears responsibility “to be and stay honorable” as individuals but also to support the spiritual (dukhovnyi) advancement of the Russian people.15

Participation in this moral project is not limited to writers, artists, scholars, and dissident political figures. “Ordinary” educated people who deliberate over the best way to live honorably as individuals and as representatives of the Russian nation are consciously engaging with the Russian moral project. They are “being intelligentsia.” Participation does require effort, however. Members must read widely, attend cultural and artistic events, and contribute to the conversation.

**Russian Klassika**

This conversation begins with the Russian classics. By the late 1800s, the intelligentsia recognized a particular body of Russian literature and art that had answered and fostered this dialogue. As currently understood in Russia, klassika or classical literature “designates the highest point in the development of Russian literature, generally recognized as coinciding with the nineteenth century,” according to Maria Rubens.16 This period is widely termed Russia’s “Golden Age,” although some of the “Silver Age” poets are now included. As Rubens states, klassika encompasses Pushkin to Mikhail Lermontov, Nikolai Gogol’, Ivan Turgenev, Ivan Goncharov, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Lev’

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15 Gessen, *Dead Again*, 14.
Tolstoy, and Anton Chekhov. During the post-Soviet period, *klassika* might also extend to the Silver Age poets, Aleksandr Blok and Andrei Belyi.

Marcus Levitt attributes the rise of *klassika* to the social and political circumstances of late nineteenth-century Russia. The Imperial government wished to strengthen its connection with its newly literate masses in a time of industrialization and urban migration. The late nineteenth century had seen an explosion in literacy and the rapid establishment of a large modern reading public in Russia. The Imperial Russian government harnessed its powerful bureaucracy—schools, rural government assemblies (*zemstvos*), and local city parliaments (*dumas*)—to try to reach the growing population of readers and to “involve the masses in public life.”\(^{17}\) As the Soviet authorities would do thirty years later, the tsarist government emphasized the “vital role of Russian literature in creating a modern Russian national identity.”\(^{18}\) The Imperial government claimed the relatively recent poetry, short stories, and novels from the past ninety years as “Russian classics.” Thus, officials effectively created a new canon out of a century’s worth of literature and commentary, which had often been critical of life in Russia. They re-represented the work of Pushkin, Gogol, Lermontov, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky as the pride of the Russian people.

At the same time, the poets and musicians of the Russian symbolist movement described the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as the Silver Age. By periodizing the great works of Russia’s “Golden Age” (*Zolotoi Vek*), poets and


\(^{18}\) Levitt, “Pushkin in 1899,” 187.
philologists Dmitri Merezhkovsky, Konstatin Balmont, Andrey Belyi, and Aleksander Blok characterized themselves as modern yet reflected a sense of twilight and difference. For example, in 1893 Dmitri Merezhkovsky published a treatise “About the Reasons for the Decline of Contemporary Russian Literature.”¹⁹ Thus, both the government’s needs to foster national pride and an artistic movement’s desire to define themselves as modern descendants of a “Golden” legacy sculpted klassika as a concept and as a canon.

The Bolsheviks solidified the idea of the middle of the nineteenth century as the classical period in Russian literature shortly after they took power 1917. As Maurice Friedberg demonstrates, the Bolsheviks established a state publishing house on January 11, 1918, to print state-supported or state-sponsored literature as an “active tool of government policy.”²⁰ Nineteenth-century Russian literature was republished in inexpensive paperback copies. Texts in which progressive proto-revolutionary tendencies could be discerned received extra attention. By 1923-24, Friedberg asserts, “approximately 85 percent of output consisted of the Russian classics.”²¹ Not only did the Bolshevik publications highlight classic works as the national legacy, they also presented them as proto-revolutionary in ideology.

Musical klassika involves a slightly longer period of time, but like classical literature, Russian classical music remains rooted in the concept of a period of excellence in the nineteenth century. This period begins with Pushkin’s contemporary Mikhail Glinka and his national heirs Piotr Tchaikovsky and the Mighty Handful (kuchka)

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²¹ Ibid., 15.
composers, but extends well into the twentieth century to include Sergei Rachmaninov, Aleksandr Skriabin, and sometimes even Dmitri Shostakovich. Like literature and music, klassika in painting is roughly equivalent to anything produced during the nineteenth century. In dance, klassika has come to mean any work produced according to the Russian danse d’école, the Russian tradition of ballet pedagogy and the Soviet-era pedagogy of Agrippina Vaganova (1879-1951). This category includes twentieth-century ballets such as Spartacus (1956) and Romeo and Juliet (1936).

But before all other creators and art forms, klassika is the poetry and prose of Aleksandr Pushkin. His mythic figure and his works have come to embody the Russian nation, its creative potential, and its moral identity. Pushkin’s magnum opus Eugene Onegin forms the cornerstone of Russian klassika. Written between 1825 and 1831, the novel-in-verse is known for its technical virtuosity, its playful irony, and its evocative, insightful descriptions of all walks of Russian life. Tatiana and Eugene’s love story seems almost banal in comparison to the brilliant dexterity of Pushkin’s rhymes and rhythms. Furthermore, the eerie similarity between the death of Onegin’s character Lensky in a duel and the circumstances of the poet’s own early death in 1837 lends Pushkin an air of prophetic prescience.

In Pushkin’s Eugene Onegin, an unreliable narrator leaves out several years of the title character’s story, and Tatiana barely utters a word. The narrative ambiguity surrounding these characters allows commentators a particularly wide berth for interpretation. In 1859, literary critic Apollon Grigor’ev championed the fictitious Tatiana as the ultimate Russian woman: “pure Russian, and to this day the only full
realization of Russian womanhood.”\textsuperscript{22} His conflation of characters and social reality even extended to Aleksandr Pushkin. Grigor’ev called him: “our spiritual physiognomy, realized for the first time, in outline, but fully and wholly [...] He is our original type.”\textsuperscript{23} In 1880, Fyodor Dostoevsky named Pushkin the ultimate human being, a “universal man.”\textsuperscript{24} As the foremost representatives of the Russian type, Pushkin and Tatiana have become central icons within the conversation about literature, the arts, and life.

Tchaikovsky developed this legacy in his 1879 opera adaptation of \textit{Eugene Onegin}. Structured as “lyric scenes,” the opera emphasized Tatiana’s emotional and moral development from her sheltered childhood in provincial Russia to her new life as a popular member of the St. Petersburg aristocracy. Drawing on musical genres of the early nineteenth century, the composer created a musical language that offers the audience rare insight into the influence of domestic music-making practices on the perspectives young people. Furthermore, Tchaikovsky presented Pushkin’s heroine as dynamic, growing through her creativity. Ultimately, Tatiana’s creativity leads her to maturity, and gives her the moral strength to walk away from Eugene at the end of the opera. Thus, in making his own interpretation of Pushkin, Tchaikovsky joined the literary critics in the tradition of addressing social issues through the interpretation of \textit{Eugene Onegin}. By the middle of the twentieth century, Asafiev asserts, Tchaikovsky’s opera adaptation had become better known than Pushkin’s original. The composer’s characterization of

\textsuperscript{24} Dostoevsky, “Pushkin,” 59.
Tatiana and Eugene, therefore, added to the poet’s original conception in the minds of the reading and listening public.

**The Russian Canon: Between Paradoxes**

In its broadest application to literature and art, canon refers to the rules, principles, or standards to which any discipline implicitly adheres. Professionals, amateurs, and enthusiasts learn to apply a set of aesthetic criteria to their own art, just as they learn how a select collection of great masterpieces best reflects these criteria. In Western Europe and the United States in the 1970s, literary critics influenced by the theories of Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida “took on” the highly privileged canon of “Great Books.” Many scholars and teachers attempted to reveal how the concept of objective aesthetic criteria supporting our English-literature canon privileged certain voices and certain experiences of life (white, male, English). Cultural theorists advocated for recognition of non-white writers and texts, and feminist academics called for the inclusion of more female writers in order to rectify the legacy of exclusion.

Harold Bloom and other a few others pushed against the new focus on underrepresented voices largely because they remained committed to the validity of ostensibly objective aesthetic criteria. They wanted to maintain their ability to issue

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judgments based on intratextual (formalist) analyses in the manner of New Criticism. Harold Bloom’s *The Western Canon* represents one of the last scholarly appeals for the validity of aesthetic objectivity.\(^{27}\) In education and general reading practices, the “Great Books” canon largely remains intact with the inclusion of a few “token” female and non-white writers.

In music, the Western classics continue to dominate the repertoire of orchestral concerts, yet the canon debate inspired musicologists to reconsider the criteria by which analysts evaluate music. Susan McClary’s groundbreaking work on representations of gender in musicology, *Feminine Endings*, encouraged a new awareness of how the subjectivity of the heterosexual male might inform the basic structure of Western art music.\(^{28}\) Katherine Bergeron, Philip Bohlman, and others illustrated how the discipline of ethnomusicology can be seen as an effort to destabilize the European canon.\(^{29}\) William Weber emphasized the newness of the Western musical canon, pointing out that the music we consider classic is as relatively new as the one-hundred-year-old concert halls built for the performance of the classics. Canons are always created in retrospect, shaping the musical values of the present by making judgments about the past.\(^{30}\)

Scholarly consideration of canons has taught American and Western European music scholars and teachers about the histories of power that shape the relative


importance we attribute to musical works and composers, and indeed, the ways we experience musical beauty. The musical canon as taught in college classrooms and performed on concert stages now includes “token” female composers, as well as composers from outside Europe such as Heitor Villa-Lobos and Silvestre Revueltas. While literary and artistic canons continues to reinforce cultural hegemony and dominant social groups, I am interested in the effects of canonizing processes for individuals and small groups.

In Russia as in the West, issues of power, exclusion, and value play a large part in the construction of the canon. At key times in Russian history, political authorities consciously attempted to sculpt citizenship, national pride, and morality through state sponsorship of klassika. Although socially progressive ideas permeate much of nineteenth-century literature and art, both the late Imperial government and the Soviet Department of Education reinterpreted the authors’ political intentions. These authorities concentrated attention on the national content of Russian klassika. They argued that the genius of classic writers, musicians, painters was first and foremost rooted in the Russian spirit. Therefore, all ethnic Russians shared ownership of the Russian classics. Indeed, every time Russians refer to Pushkin as “our great writer” (nash velikii pisatel’), the founder of our literary language, they demonstrate the rhetoric of collective ownership of klassika.

Still, my interest in the Russian canon as a shared practice of major importance to Russian national identity results from much more than the state’s cultivation of its educated citizens. As this dissertation demonstrates, in practice the intelligentsia’s belief
in the Russian canon’s importance tacitly implies an integration of important stories, icons, and sounds into the self. Russian klassika, especially the works of Aleksandr Pushkin, has long been loved and reinterpreted in the negotiation of social, moral, and national identities, and it has been used to distinguish Russia from Western Europe. As Richard Taruskin writes of Russian music, “there has been a great tendency to celebrate or magnify ‘difference,’ in compensation for an inferiority complex that was the inevitable product of [Russia’s] history, but just as often in sincere certainty of Russia’s cultural, even moral superiority and its salvific mission.”31 Major works of literature and music addressed Russia’s otherness, blending signifiers of the folk and representations of real life in Russia with an appeal to the untapped moral potential of the nation.

In the nineteenth century, many writers, artists, and composers self-consciously strove to establish a Russian national tradition through the incorporation of folk images or songs. They frequently cited each other’s work and built upon each other’s fictional characters, forging a highly intertextual tradition. National self-awareness continued throughout the Soviet period, and has perhaps become even more important to post-Soviet writers, composers, and visual artists. In her analysis of contemporary Russian literature, Liudmila Parts describes intertextuality in the Russian tradition as a conversation with myths: “A contemporary text enters into dialogue not with the classic authors as such, but with their myths, and the reactions and perceptions their work engendered.”32 In Russia, she argues, intertextuality is never a game between two

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authors, but engagement in a historic, meaning-laden conversation shared by authors and readers alike.

As in the West, Russians perceive klassika as immutable masterpieces that will last forever. According to Mikhail Gronas, canon is created by popularity over time: we can see a work’s importance by noting “how often a text is read, reread, mentioned, cited, and analyzed over a historically significant slice of time: that is, as a measure of textual recurrence or reproducibility within a culture.”33 This repetition is certainly important in a culture that prizes memorizing poetry and holding knowledge in the mind for ready recall. Adaptation of literature into theater, opera, and now film or television represents another major element in the creation of a canon. That classic works are frequently performed on stage, even in adaptation, adds to the impression that they are permanent and known to all. Furthermore, the persistent presence of klassika on the required reading lists for primary and secondary students encourages at least a minimal familiarity with classic stories among Russian citizens. Most students in Russian post-secondary education take a Russian literature course where they are required to engage with the classics through reading, classroom discussion, and essay writing.34

I approach canon as a shared belief system and a practice that changes with the needs of those individuals, social groups, and states that participate in the conversation. The Russian canon is bounded by a set of paradoxes. Although many ethnic Russians perceive klassika as a body of elite works created by geniuses, they also embrace klassika

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33 Mikhail Gronas, Cognitive Poetics and Cultural Memory: Russian Literary Mnemonics (New York: Routledge, 2010), 53.
in the spirit of collective ownership. *Klassika* is defined by a semblance of permanence, yet the canon changes over time as generations of individuals and state reconsider its many meanings and adapt the canonic works to new purposes. Although governments sponsor canons in an attempt to cultivate certain modes of citizenship, each individual reader also constructs his or her own unique relationship with the classics.

Most importantly, as a person reads, listens, loves, and interprets a selection from the canon, he or she joins a conversation about meaning. Each engagement with a classic work demonstrates that canon is much more than reflection of hegemonic power. Instead, Russian *klassika* provides to participants a set of shared stories and characters; the participants then use these belief-infused stories to negotiate social, moral, and national identities and seek the best way to live. In Russia, the intelligentsia’s continuing dialogue with the classics illustrates an ongoing struggle to locate meaning within the contingencies of human life.

**Reading and Reception in Times of Turbulence**

The canon of *klassika* solidified during the ideological turbulence of the late nineteenth century, when writers, philosophers, political reformers, and clerics vied with each other to promote a wide variety of competing ideologies. Russian interest in the canon only grew during the Soviet era as the state attempted to foster pride by incorporating *klassika* into its ideological project. In January 1918, the Bolshevik government declared a monopoly on the publication of Russian literary classics. As Vladislav Zubok notes, the Soviet government encouraged “the ideals of self-cultivation
and self-improvement through high culture, intellectual work, and scientific knowledge” for people of any background.\(^{35}\) For many young people in the 1920s and 1930s, Russian klassika was the foundation of upward mobility in the new Soviet world. Between the 1930s and the 1950s, Soviet authorities prevented many of the aristocratic children of “old families” from enrolling in higher education, and instead offered those opportunities to the promising children of factory and farm workers. Nonetheless, the “old” intelligentsia connected with the Soviet intelligentsia through the shared conversation about klassika.

Although many forms of social criticism went underground during the Stalin era, the same classics that were appropriated as examples of Soviet morality—including Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*—were still treasured by those who wanted to contemplate life through literature and art. Subtly comparing the treatment of Russian classics during the Soviet period to the Christian relationship to Holy Scriptures, Masha Gessen asserts that “the more the Word was pushed underground, the more it became imbued with mythical, possibly lethal power.”\(^{36}\) While new critical commentary was constrained, the Russian classics became central to intellectual, creative, and moral life.

Poetry memorization had traditionally been an important part of education across Europe and Russia, but it became especially salient under the Soviet regime. Under the auspices of the Department of Education, the memorization of specific poems became a way to cultivate “political-moral” outlook and national pride.\(^{37}\) The “unofficial”

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\(^{36}\) Gessen, *Dead Again*, 10.

memorization of poetry, however, became a prevalent method of distributing unpublishable material during the Soviet era. Educated Russians often held in their minds the officially taught texts of Pushkin, Nekrasov, Lermontov, and Mayakovskyy alongside the censored verses of Osip Mandelshtam, Anna Akhmatova, and other Silver Age poets. When people memorize words and ideas, they have constant access to significant texts that offer them solace during times of stress or explanations as to why the world works the way it does. When words and ideas are learned, especially memorized, individuals begin to see their lives through them. Poetry memorization offered educated Russians a way to make their private collections of literature and art inaccessible to the secret police, and it also fostered the creation of private identity through personal ownership of classical and underground poetry.

Many members of the intelligentsia learned Eugene Onegin by heart. In Evgenia Ginsburg’s autobiographical account of the Siberian labor camps, for example, the author recalls reciting Eugene Onegin from memory while locked in a train wagon. She and her fellow prisoners laughed, cried, and took solace in the fact that no one could strip poetry from their memories. According to Ginzburg, even the guards sat down and listened. Being able to recite Onegin and other poetry from memory offered inmates like Ginzburg a way to connect with the lives they had led before being arrested. Gronas asserts that “nowhere was [poetry memorization] as central to people’s everyday existence as in the labor camps, where state control over the individual’s mind, body, space, and time

38 Gronas, Cognitive Poetics, 90.
39 Ibid.
reached an extreme, thus making memorized poems the last and most treasured private possessions.”

For political prisoners, the memorization of classical poetry became a central component of their humanity.

Even in less extreme circumstances, poetry memorization, as well as knowledge of classical music, songs, art collections, and prose literature, became an important means of creating and maintaining an identity distinct from the one offered by the state. The meanings individuals read into classical poetry—beauty, morality, truth—offered an alternative to Marxist-Leninist narratives of history that blamed the upper classes (including the intelligentsia) for all pre-revolutionary suffering. Memorized knowledge of classical literature and the arts allowed educated Russians to conceptualize their own history as good and moral, and maintain their position as guardians of culture, even under the harsh repression of the Stalin Era.

As Zubok shows, during the 1950s-1960s the process of de-Stalinization allowed a new wave of young intellectuals to speak creatively and critically within a semi-public sphere. While a famous few such as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Andrei Sakharov voiced their opposition to the government on an international stage, the majority of educated Russians struggled for reform from within the system. After the 1940s, the Soviet authorities cultivated obedience among the intelligentsia by granting them access to scarce goods, better quality food, housing and medical care, rather than by threat of exile. As a reward for good behavior, some might even gain the opportunity to travel abroad.

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41 Gronas, Cognitive Poetics, 91.
42 Kochetkova, Russian Intelligentsia, 25.
Yet Vladislav Zubok’s work illustrates that while working with the authorities, the *shestidesianiki* (the 1960s generation of intelligentsia) developed vast underground networks through which they could access new literature, criticism, and the intellectual discourse lacking in official Soviet life.\(^{43}\) Many members of the intelligentsia participated in self-publishing (*samizdat’*); for example, four copies of the new issue of a journal such as the *Chronicle of Current Events* would be passed to trusted friends, who would then read and retype the issue and pass it along again. The editorial staff and the readership remained relatively anonymous and protected from political persecution. Similar networks supported the printing and distribution abroad of new works by Russian writers (*tamizdat’*), and the reimportation of these new works along with foreign literature. Through “underground” channels, Kochetkova argues, Russia’s “educated people” continued to work for the social and spiritual progress of Russia through the development and transmission of culture—the moral imperative of the intelligentsia.\(^{44}\)

**Where are they now? The Post-Soviet Intelligentsia**

Since perestroika, many people have asked if the Russian intelligentsia is “dead.”\(^{45}\) The introduction of capitalism during the “wild ‘90s” brought about the disintegration of state-funded universities and research institutes along with collective manufacturing and distribution. The “intellectual professionals” were forced to adapt to the free market or continue their chosen work in poverty. These circumstances left many


\(^{44}\) Ibid., 33.

\(^{45}\) Gessen, *Dead Again.*
people feeling that the world and their way of life had ended. In Kochetkova’s words, they feared that their values of “intellect, critical and reflexive thinking, perfect morality, and outstanding creative talent” were dying.\footnote{Ibid., 33.}

In post-Soviet Russia, the idea of a national canon remains powerful. Individual readers and audience members continue to self-consciously select their personal favorites from among the greats. If the Russian intelligentsia is primarily characterized by a conversation that incorporates life, literature, and the arts in the search for moral progress, then it certainly still exists today. In the 1990s, Tatiana Tolstaya’s novel \textit{The Slynx} (2000) and theater pieces by Yuri Liubimov (\textit{Evgenii Onegin}, 2000) highlighted the influence of Soviet authorities in the construction of the Pushkin myth.\footnote{Tatiana Tolstaya, \textit{The Slynx} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003).} In reaction to these attempts at self-awareness, a wave of conservative nationalism that Wendy Slater terms “national patriotism” sought to strengthen national pride by insisting on Russia’s indisputable prowess in literature and the arts.\footnote{Wendy Slater, “The Patriot’s Pushkin,” \textit{Slavic Review} 58, no. 2 (1999), 407.} The interpretation of Russian \textit{klassika} as a whole body of work remains a major contested ground in the debates over national identity.

As this dissertation demonstrates, the debate between traditionalists and modernizers among the Russian intelligentsia has thrived since 2000. Fraught arguments between those who support “traditional” treatments of \textit{klassika} and those who welcome “new readings” on the stage are only the most recent iteration of the conversation that blurs the boundaries of Russian literature, art, and life. As spectator reviews reveal,

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\footnotetext[46]{Ibid., 33.}
\footnotetext[47]{Tatiana Tolstaya, \textit{The Slynx} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003).}
\end{thebibliography}
However, each person’s opinions do not fall into a neat binary; instead, each review represents a multi-faceted engagement with social, moral, and national identities in Russia and the resulting opinions are equally heterogenous.

Quite recently, Russia’s largest search engine, Yandex.ru, published a study that analyzed searches for Russian poetry between April 2014 and March 2015.\(^49\) Not surprisingly, the number of searches for Pushkin and specifically *Eugene Onegin* topped every chart. As *The Moscow Times* notes, “The most sought after poem — or part of a poem — was Tatyana’s letter to Onegin in ‘Eugene Onegin.’”\(^50\) Furthermore, those who searched by typing in a line of poetry from *Onegin* used 45,000 different search entries, unique lines from the novel.\(^51\) Clearly, Pushkin’s masterpiece remains important to many post-Soviet Russians. Each Yandex search for poetry demonstrates an individual need to remember the rest of a poem on a given day, one person’s creative engagement with Russian *klassika* and their daily lives.

**Post-Soviet Adaptations of *Eugene Onegin***

During the 1990s, theater directors Yuri Liubimov, Andrei Vasiliev, and German Entin attempted to peel away layers of meaning that the Soviet authorities had given to

\(^49\) The study by Yandex employees incorporated data from searches that took place from April 2014 to May 2015. The unnamed authors organized the data into specific charts including: “Number of questions about a poet,” “Works organized by individual authors,” “the 50 most searched works,” “Popular works which were searched by means other than the title,” and “The most popular lines from the most popular works searched.” In every category, Pushkin and *Eugene Onegin* rank first. The study can be found at: https://yandex.ru/company/researches/2015/ya_poetry.


\(^51\) Ibid.,
nineteenth-century klassika. In adaptations of *Eugene Onegin*, they focused particular attention on the belief that Aleksandr Pushkin represents the best of Russian culture. The Russian intelligentsia now terms this belief the “Pushkin cult” (*kul’t Pushkina*), whereas American academics call it the “Pushkin myth.” All three adaptations repurposed music from Tchaikovsky’s opera, and all three highlighted the role Pushkin’s figure played in the construction of national consciousness during the Soviet period. These 1990s performances directly addressed *Eugene Onegin* as part of the Pushkin myth, and thus, of Russian cultural history. For example, Yuri Liubimov opens his *Eugene Onegin* (2000) with five actors dressed as marble Pushkin statues (all in white with top hats) reciting the opening strophes. Andrei Vasiliev’s play *From the Travels of Onegin* (1995/2005) showed variations in productions of Tchaikovsky’s opera in different cities during the twentieth century. Performed in the theater museum section of the Ermolova Theater in Moscow, German Entin’s musical play, *Is It Really the Same Tatiana?* (2003), combined recitation of Pushkin’s strophes with vocal renditions of Tchaikovsky’s arias from *Onegin*, sometimes performing both at the same time. Disgruntled audience members often derisively (and inaccurately) termed the trend “post-modern deconstruction” of the classics. Nevertheless, even negative reception of these adaptations encouraged conversations about *Eugene Onegin* and life in contemporary Russia.

Adaptations of Russian klassika have maintained an important place on the opera, ballet, and theater stages of Moscow and St. Petersburg since Russians began to canonize

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53 For a selected list of adaptations of *Eugene Onegin* in Russia, see appendix C.
their national literature at the end of the nineteenth century. But the practice of infusing these adaptations with commentary on the story and its cultural history has become increasingly prominent since 2000. Adaptations of klassika also appear in film and made-for-TV movies, but this dissertation will focus on live performance on the major stages of Moscow, including the genres of opera, narrative ballet, and evening-length drama. This dissertation isolates spectator reviews of just three Onegin adaptations: Tcherniakov’s opera production (2006), Eifman’s ballet (2009), and Tuminas’s play (2013).

In all three productions I examine how the artists transform Pushkin’s image of the shy and bookish Tatiana Larina. Tcherniakov’s Tatiana is mentally unstable; Eifman’s Tatiana is jaded and trades her chance at love for a luxurious lifestyle. Tuminas’s Tatiana resembles Pushkin’s modest heroine until the last five minutes of the play. Her final rejection of Eugene “in a harsh tone of voice” provoked many spectators and professional critics to call her a “bitch” (sterva). Whether negative or positive, the overwhelming audience response to “repainted” images of Tatiana in Tcherniakov’s, Eifman’s and Tuminas’s adaptations reveals the continuing importance of Eugene Onegin and its characters among Russia’s educated people.

In this context, adaptations of Eugene Onegin on the opera, ballet, and drama stages of Moscow and St. Petersburg illustrate the potency of the Russian classics in the discourse among the post-Soviet intelligentsia and the federal state. Although this dissertation examines only adaptations of Pushkin’s and Tchaikovsky’s Eugene Onegin, reinterpretations of klassika extend to the works of Chekhov, Tolstoy, Turgenev, and others. In these adaptations, even small alterations appear to challenge national, social,
and moral identities, precisely because the original works bear the weight of the canon. Moreover, in addition to enacting one creative director’s ideas, they also act as catalysts for further debate among audience members. My dissertation examines this debate through the reception of contemporary adaptations of Onegin. As individual audience members describe and evaluate each performance, they also articulate who they are and who they would like to become as educated Russian citizens. Once again, the moral project of the intelligentsia is again taking place through and with the classics.

**Chapter Outline**

In this dissertation, I demonstrate how contemporary Russians negotiate social, moral, and national identities by engaging with Eugene Onegin. In Chapter 2, I present a theoretical framework and method for analyzing contemporary reception histories through sources I call “spectator reviews.” The social expectations of the Russian intelligentsia often require audience members to present their reviews (retsenzia) of an artistic event. Traditionally, these informal presentations take place over the kitchen table or at the workplace, within circles of family, friends, and colleagues. Since the year 2000, some people have shifted the conversation to online writing forums: platforms such as discussion forums, blogs, consumer-information sites, and lately to message boards hosted by the theater itself. I draw on phenomenology, linguistics, communication, and media studies to re-envision “reception” as the process of perceiving a production and integrating it into one’s individual experience of the world, one’s self.
In Chapter 3, I describe how Russians have mythologized Aleksandr Pushkin as the founder of the Russian literary language and the embodiment of the nation’s creative potential. This process began with praise from Pushkin’s contemporaries: fellow writers Mikhail Lermontov and Vladimir Odoevsky and literary critics such as Belinsky, Apollon Grigor’ev, and Dmitri Pisarev. The myth was also advanced by adaptations of Pushkin’s works as operas, ballets, and dramas, especially settings of *Eugene Onegin*. These include Grigori Kugushëv’s 1844 stage play and Tchaikovsky’s eponymous 1879 opera.

By the 1880 “Pushkin Days” festival, almost every important member of the Russian literati celebrated Pushkin’s genius and his beloved works. It was a unique moment in Russian cultural history when both the state and the intelligentsia celebrated the same figure together. Since then, politics has infused Pushkin festivals (1899, 1921, 1937, 1999), reprinting of his literary works, and adaptations as opera, ballet, theater, film, and choral music. Both man and myth, Pushkin remains uniquely intertwined with Russian national identity.

As I show in Chapter 4, adaptations of *Eugene Onegin* take on great power because the author and content of the “original” have been so explicitly integrated into moral and national identity. I pause the conversation about national processes of identity in Russia to examine how Tchaikovsky’s opera adaptation highlighted Tatiana’s agency as a writer. By repainting the icon to emphasize Tatiana’s creativity and moral responsibility, the composer joins the tradition of reading, commentary, and creative experimentation with the text: Tchaikovsky’s reading adds an emphasis on the development of agency and the self. Since Tchaikovsky’s opera became as well-known
as Pushkin’s novel during the early Soviet period, Tatiana as an icon began to represent the virtues of creativity and responsibility.\textsuperscript{54}

Multiple productions, recitations, films, and other musical works followed Tchaikovsky’s popular opera. In Chapter 5, I discuss how Pushkin’s novel-in-verse has been adapted into (at least) three ballets, a choral song cycle, countless theatrical productions, and a few films. These include Soviet opera productions of Tchaikovsky’s \textit{Eugene Onegin} by Konstantin Stanislavsky (1922) and Boris Pokrovsky (1944). During the past ten years, almost every major theater, ballet, and opera company in Russia has produced a new version of \textit{Onegin}. As of 2015, the Bolshoi Theater currently runs a ballet called \textit{Onegin} by John Cranko (1967) and Tcherniakov’s opera production; the Stanislavsky Musical Theater regularly performs its production of Tchaikovsky’s opera directed by Aleksandr Titel’ (2007) alongside John Neumeier’s new ballet \textit{Tatiana} (2014). The Mariinsky Theater currently has two productions of Tchaikovsky’s opera \textit{Onegin} in its repertoire—one traditional staging (1984) and one contemporary staging (2014). St. Petersburg’s Mikhailovsky Theater currently even performs two competing contemporary productions of the opera, one staged by Andrei Zholdak (2012) and another by Vasili Barkhatov (2015). New \textit{Onegins} are also appearing in the spoken theater as well. T. Kuliabin’s play \textit{Onegin} (2014) at the Krasnyi Fakel Theater recently joined Rimas Tuminas’s production (2013) for the Vakhtangov. The three \textit{Onegin} adaptations I examine in detail are only a selection from this outpouring of productions.

\textsuperscript{54} Boris Asafiev, \textit{Evgenii Onegin: Liricheskie Stseny P.I. Chaikovskogo: Opyt Intonatsionnogo Analiza Stiliia} (Leningrad: Muzgiz, 1941-42), 73.
In Chapter 6, I focus on Dmitri Tcherniakov’s revisionist opera production at the Bolshoi (2006) as it was understood by audience members. My study analyzes professional and amateur reception from September 2006 to March 2014. Many reviews of this production explicitly addressed issues of Russian national identity, including a prominent fear that Western aesthetics and moral frameworks are transgressing into Russian culture. At the same time, audience members also described intensely personal responses to Tcherniakov’s presentation of mental illness and social cruelty.

Tcherniakov’s Tatiana demonstrates a series of psychological issues, which spectators identified variously as autism, neurasthenia, or social anxiety. Some fans identified patterns of human behavior onstage that related directly to their own experience of life. In describing Tatiana’s expressions of loneliness, love, and mental illness, a few reviewers rewrote their own stories, blending interpretations of Onegin into demands for a more compassionate world.

In Chapter 7, I examine the response to Boris Eifman’s ballet Onegin (2009), set during the “wild 1990s.” Eifman’s choreography and score emphasized the contrast between dualities—past and present, province and city, virtue and corruption—through artistic binaries of ballet and hip-hop, musical klassika and rock. The choreographer combined recordings of Tchaikovsky’s music with that of a progressive rock guitarist Aleksandr Sitkovetsky. Tatiana marries a violent mafiozi; corrupted by her own materialistic desires, she stays with her husband out of fear rather than virtue. Despite Eifman’s attempt at iconoclasm, his balletic Onegin elicited much less outrage than Tcherniakov’s opera production did only three years before.
Much of the professional and amateur criticism of Eifman’s production focuses on the transformation of the Russian-Soviet past into the contemporary New Russia. My corpus of spectator reviews demonstrate that Russians have distinct ideas about what perceptions and emotions are possible in “contemporary time”—as if the present were a genre with its own unique laws of time and space (Bakhtin’s concept of chronotope). Within this framework, I explore how both negative and positive critiques of Eifman’s Onegin simultaneously become statements of moral belief. As reviewers describe and evaluate Eifman’s themes of sex, homosexuality, corruption through materialism, and violence, each writer re-defines the moral ideal. In other words, by defining what is wrong about Eifman’s Tatiana or about the world she lives in, individuals clarify their own sense of a moral self.

In Chapter 7, I examine Rimas Tuminas’s dramatization of Pushkin’s verses (2013). The Latvian theater director incorporates iconic music from Shostakovich and Tchaikovsky, folk songs, city romances, as well as ballet and folk dance, landscape painting, and material objects associated with Russian folk life. Professional and spectator reviewers alike delighted in naming the multitude of cultural citations Tuminas presented. Amid this welter of references, Tatiana’s image and her letter become the holiest icons within Tuminas’s “encyclopedia” of Russian culture. The eagerness with which spectators describe each object, song, or gesture demonstrates the affection and pride members of the intelligentsia continue to hold for their artistic, musical, and literary canons.
Furthermore, this shared space allowed Tuminas to draw multiple new themes into *Onegin’s* already layered narrative. Spectators engage with Tuminas’s themes of innocence, death, and the disciplining of women’s bodies as Tatiana, Olga, Lensky, and Eugene move through their familiar story. After watching Eugene fondle her sister and murder Lensky, the adult Tatiana travels to Moscow and learns social graces while stoically hiding her emotions. When Eugene confesses his love for her, she rebukes him with a much sharper tone of voice than previously imagined by readers and audiences. Some audience members defended Tatiana’s anger, while others congratulated Eugene on avoiding marriage to such a woman. Collectively, their comments reveal many facets of the contemporary female ideal among Russians today.

In Chapter 8, I describe the role of *Onegin* in Russian culture and its function as a site for the negotiation of social, moral, and national identities. As audience members engage with adaptations and confront the network of meanings that the canonic idea of “Eugene Onegin” holds, they also contribute their unique voices to a larger discussion for the social and moral direction of Russia’s future. Spectator reviews of *Eugene Onegin* allow ordinary “educated” people to fully participate in the conversation about life and art, and to reimagine the world around them.
Chapter 2: Singing the World through Spectator Reviews

“In its live and creative state, language is the gesture of renewal and recovery which unites me with myself and others.”
—Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*

In the Summer 2014 volume of *Ethnomusicology*, Harris Berger asked a group of panelists:

How do we know if any musical experience matters once the audience leaves the concert hall or club? What kind of evidence could we imagine would help us to really answer that question, and is it possible, in practice, for anyone to collect it?¹

I propose online *spectator reviews* as new sources for reception studies in musicology.

The spectator review (in Russian *zritel’skie retsenzii* or *zritel’skie otyzy*) developed with Web 2.0 culture of the early 2000s, just in time for the *Onegin* adaptations. Discussion forums, such as Forumklassika.ru (founded in 2000), hosted virtual “book clubs,” where Moscow’s classical music and opera fans interpreted and argued about Tcherniakov’s *Onegin*. Other audience members authored “think pieces” about the *Onegins* on personal blogs throughout the last decade. Spectator reviews blend the description and evaluation of newspaper reviews and book reports with the intimacy and first-person voice of diary entries. In addition to forums and blogs, ticket-selling websites Afisha.ru and Teatr.ru

host “forums” where audience members continue to post reactions and positive or negative recommendations along the lines of an Amazon.com consumer review.

What exactly is happening when people write online? Why do they choose to write, and how do their online reflections about an artistic event affect their lives? Every comment, blog entry, or audience review of Onegin reflects an individual engagement with social, moral, and national identities in Russia. Studies in the nascent field of computer-mediated communication present online writing as a exploration of the self, a journey of self-knowledge. Borrowing Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s term, I further posit that the practice of writing spectator reviews is one example of human expression. The posted comment or blog entry, therefore, documents a moment in time, one individual’s engagement with social, moral, and national world.

In this chapter, I present my corpus of reviews of three Onegin adaptations that I collected using the search engine Yandex.ru. I show how I collected, organized, and translated the reviews, and how I dealt with the ethical questions of research on Internet writing. I draw on research in linguistics, media and film studies, and marketing to establish a theoretical understanding of Internet writing. By comparing spectator reviews with professional arts criticism, I show how the spectator review’s emphasis on the author’s individuality and biases, prohibited in “objective” criticism, makes the spectator review valuable and powerful. I then draw on phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of expression to explain the processes of engagement that occur when an audience member authors a review.
My dissertation explores reviews written by individual members of the Russian intelligentsia, people who might describe themselves as “ordinary” audience members (obychnye zritel’ia). As these individuals interpret and evaluate Eugene Onegin, my analysis reveals how they construct their own identities through interaction with a work of art, their social world, and themselves. Spectator reviews allow researchers to explore the importance of opera, ballet, and drama in the lives of Russian fans after they leave the theater.

Reception Studies in Literature and Musicology

My dissertation is a subject-centered study of Western art music, blending approaches from reception history in musicology with ethnomusicological interviews. Musicology’s reception histories of the 1990s stem from reader-response theories articulated in literary criticism of the 1980s. In the early 1980s, literary critics Hans Robert Jauss and Stanley Fish attempted to democratize literary criticism by emphasizing the active construction of meaning by recipients—readers or audience members. In theory, “readers of any social group, age, or level of education” could “become makers of the text’s meaning, validating their experience of a text, however idiosyncratic, provided

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2 The word “ordinary” appeared frequently in my ethnographic interviews in 2013. Subjects used the term “ordinary” to separate themselves from professional critics or specialists within the field. Thus, they absolved themselves of the responsibility to provide me with special knowledge, and permitted themselves to relate their personal rather than professional opinion of performances.

it be intelligible and supportable.” In practice, however, professional critics and academics never truly released authority to the masses. Instead, reader-response theory inspired academic subfields in literature and the arts dedicated to studies of historical groups of readers, history of the book and of print culture, and histories of the audience’s response to particular works: musicology’s reception history.

Since the 1980s, arts and literature scholars have emphasized context, the culturally and socially formed expectations that surround the performance of any work. These expectations establish the framework through which the work of art will be interpreted. It is important for scholars to explore the musical or literary context, therefore, in order to grasp the significance of any work, especially when the work is from a distant time or geographic place. Stanley Fish coined the term “interpretive communities” in 1980 to describe groups of people who share strategies for understanding literary works. Musicologists call these socially-formed expectations “conventions”; studies of music in its cultural context describe musical conventions as they operated within their historical and social circumstances. Many “cultural” studies in musicology focus on establishing the meaning of a specific musical work or performance by discovering how the composer or performers embedded cultural and political signifiers in the music, and interpreting them in light of conventional meanings that would have been familiar to original or later audiences.

5 Fish, *Is there a Text in this Class?,* 147–174.
The scarcity of audience reception sources, however, continues to challenge musicologists who are interested in the audience. Critical reviews in newspapers and music journals provide the most common sources. Occasionally, historians might find a few letters or diary entries that discuss a particular concert experience. Due to the difficulty of locating a large body of reception sources, musicologists most often integrate as much audience documentation as they can find into an account of contemporaneous political events, cultural and musical signifiers, notes on the performers, and circumstances of composition. Therefore, studies of musical audiences most often remain “work”-based histories.

Unlike musicological studies that begin their exploration of music and meaning with a specific composer or musical work, studies in ethnomusicology typically begin with specific groups of people. In the 1950s, ethnomusicologists called for the expansion of musical scholarship in non-Western cultures and emphasized an anthropological approach.\textsuperscript{7} The field quickly moved beyond the classification of instruments and notation of folk songs toward showing how musical practices were shaped by society: indeed, that musical practices were themselves part of the social structures.

These studies relied primarily on participant-observation and extended series of interviews with respected musicians or tribal elders in far-off places. This approach to fieldwork involves listening and close friendships or mixed social contracts that allow free-form dialogue and storytelling. According to Jeff Todd Titon, ethographers should seek to convey the experience of musical “being-in-the-world” and human relationships

among “people-making-music.”

By becoming a part of musical being-in-the-world rather than an analytical witness to it, ethnomusicologists “enter the world of interpretation… which turns sound into music, being into meaning,” according to Jeff Todd Titon. Yet, as in historical musicology, ethnographic studies of musical meaning still typically rely on the testimony of a relatively small group of expert listeners.

Over the last twenty years, the technology of the Internet has radically reshaped ordinary patterns of communication. Conversation, diary and letter writing, news reading, and social networks now also appear in the virtual world in the form of discussion forums, blogs, Internet news sites, consumer review sites, and social networking sites. The documentary capability of online communication offers music researchers new access to the words that people use to connect with each other and to process the world around them. Posts on blogs and discussion forums allow musicologists to examine conversation about music that might once have take place face-to-face. Collecting a large corpus of “amateur” analyses of particular performance, as I have done for this dissertation, is one example of how Internet sources might support reception studies.

**Primary Sources: Discussion Forums, Consumer Reviews, and Blogs**

The spectator review, as I define it, is a genre appearing in blogs, discussion forums, and consumer review formats. Although these formats developed before the term *social media* entered the vernacular, they correspond to Ruth E. Page’s definition of

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9 Titon, “Knowing Fieldwork,” 32.
social media as “Internet-based applications that promote social interaction between participants.” Each format fosters interaction between writers and readers, but their primary purpose is to provide a place for people to post opinions.

Discussion forums (also called message boards) are structured to promote conversation-like posts on specific topics, much like a book club discussion. A forum “moderator” posts a prompt, or begins a “thread.” Interested forum participants answer the moderator’s prompt, and then respond to each other by copying and linking to each other’s posts or “comments.” Unlike book club gatherings, however, these conversations tend to play out over the course of a few days or weeks, rather than during one evening. For example, members of Forumklassika.ru commented on the discussion thread “Contemporary Eugene Onegin” from July 2006 to January 2007. Since then, just as members of a face-to-face book club setting would move on to another topic after a while, the conversation has died down. Toward the end of the 2000s, Facebook and other social networking sites appropriated the club-like environment of many discussion forums, and ultimately eclipsed the format.

In the later 2000s, commercial websites developed forum-type platforms to elicit feedback and foster a sense of community among consumers, now called online consumer reviews. In this study of musical reception, the consumer review platforms hosted by Teatr.ru, Afisha.ru, and Teatromania.net link audience members to those who are considering attending a production through the same kinds of “threads” used in discussion forums. These companies also sell tickets to performances, provide theater

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schedules, advertisements for shows, and offer their own professional reviews. Consumer review posts are often about one paragraph in length. They usually offer a clear positive or negative characterization of the performance and a quick description of the worst or best features. The consumer review format allows for responses to other spectator reviews in the thread, but the main purpose of the thread is to strengthen connections between audience members, performance companies, and ticket distributors. Audience members provide personal reflections and recommendations to future “consumers,” prospective audience members of *Eugene Onegin*.

Most recently, the Vakhtangov Theater website has begun to host its own forum where members who have seen a particular performance can post their own spectator reviews. These vary in content and genre; some “comments” are lengthy and personal interpretations of the production, while other comments simply thank the troupe for an satisfying performance. Thus, the Vakhtangov Theater forum connects audience members directly to public relations staff and to each other. Individuals are allowed to ask the “moderator” questions which he or she answers anonymously on behalf of the theater. The moderator is also allowed to remove posts that he or she deems unhelpful to the goal of the forum—a strengthened bond between the troupe and audience.

Unlike the forum posts, which are often one to two paragraphs in length, the blog format offers an unlimited space. As a genre, the blog has developed as a “think piece” or a diary entry about the length of a newspaper column. Most often, the post is followed by a “comments” section, which allows readers to respond. In this study, however, few spectator review posts elicited more than a few comments, and in general these comments
simply thank the post’s author for his or her effort. Spectator reviews in the blog format, therefore, are less conversational than discussion forums or even consumer reviews.

**Blogging as a Genre and Practice**

Invented in 1999, Blogger software offered free templates that allowed a user to create a personal blog without knowing how to code with html. The technological ease and low expense of Blogger software fostered the creation of online diaries that quickly became the main use for the format. Blogging surged in popularity between 2000 and 2004 when an average of 12,000 new blogs appeared every day on servers like Blogspot, LiveJournal, and Wordpress.\(^\text{11}\) As a format, the blog is characterized by entries called “posts” which appear time-stamped in reverse chronological order, similar to a ship captain’s navigation logs. Blogs include the ability to insert links to other webpages and audio and image files directly into the text.\(^\text{12}\) Blogs are open formats. Ignatio Siles describes the blog as a “content-agnostic medium,” emphasizing its openness, yet contrasting the flexibility of the blog entry’s length to the limited capacity of the book’s page.\(^\text{13}\)

Even in the vast openness of the Internet, however, early bloggers developed the genre of a blog post, blending conventions from multiple historic genres. Like seventeenth-century collections of exotic treasures (*Wunderkammer*), bloggers collected small items of beauty—photographs, audio and video clips, and short essays—to display

\(^{11}\) Greg Myers, *The Discourse on Blogs and Wikis* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 16.
for their readers. Not unlike the political blogger, pamphlets and opinion-editorial writers sought “as large an audience as possible.” Bloggs maintain a similarity with the nineteenth-century domestic album, a home-made book into which women wrote serious and simple poetry, or riddles. Like bloggers, album authors reread their personal entries to their close circle of friends in a highly performative practice. The album’s intimacy was not secret, but meant to be shared (aloud) with close friends. Despite the blog’s multiple antecedents, Carolyn Miller and Dawn Shepherd assert, “it is the diary’s personal perspective that makes its relationship to the blog so recognizable.” Like diaries, blogs are “written in the present about the present” in order to reflect “the actual experiences of the writer.” As Catherine O’Sullivan claims, blogs became “a space where an individual’s identity was actively conceived and constructed.”

For Rebecca Blood, a communications scholar and author of the early blog Rebecca’s Pocket, blogging is a process of becoming, of creating the self. She suggests that writing a blog is a journey of self-discovery. Blood writes,

> Shortly after I began producing Rebecca’s Pocket I noticed two side effects I had not expected. First, I discovered my own interests…. More importantly, I began to value more highly my own point of view. In composing my link text every day I carefully considered my own opinions and

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16 Ibid.

ideas, and I began to feel that my perspective was unique and important.¹⁸

According to Blood, blogging results in a strengthening of confidence in one’s worldview and ability to contribute to the public. The practice of writing about one’s life and defining one’s own opinions inherent in social media often draws accusations of narcissism, yet the focus on “writing the self” is also a part of the process of identity construction.

While most bloggers hope to elicit at least some commentary, each also has the ability to disable or enable the comments function. In one example from my corpus, the blogger Manu_f prefaces her review with an explanation of why she chose to disable the comments function for her review of Tcherniakov’s Onegin. Manu_f opens her post by insisting that she stay out of “the debate… I do not want to, nor [do I have] the strength nor time. I like the show—it's a matter of my personal perceptions, that’s all.”¹⁹ Manu_f's explanation of her unusual choice to prevent comments explains her preference for using the blog as a diary, public but outside the open forum for debate. Manu_f's type of diary-style blog entry providing lengthy description and evaluations of Onegin performances forms the basis for this reception history.

Research Methods

The design of this research has evolved—theory and method continue to inform each other, as my research questions have evolved during the process of research. The corpus of reception materials used in this dissertation was located with simple Boolean searches on yandex.ru in March 2014. I performed several searches using the terms “Onegin + Tcherniakov,” “Onegin + Eifman,” and “Onegin + Tuminas” in Russian and all in the nominative case. All three searches yielded over 300 links, including newspaper reviews, press releases, transcribed and video recordings of interviews with the directors, news clips, a few papers written by academics, and of course, blogs and discussion forums. I sorted the material into categories: scholarship, blogs, and discussion forums. The newspaper reviews came from electronic copies of the Moscow and St. Petersburg daily newspapers as well as online-only news cites such as Musecube.org, and one “thick” monthly magazine, Peterburgskii Teatral’nyi Zhurnal. I chose not to address any press releases, interviews, or previews in order to focus on reception written by critics and audience members who had already attended the performance.

The data corpus in any Internet-based study belongs to, as Annette Markham and Nancy Baym put it, an “endless and jumbled network of links.”20 Some posts link to each other’s reviews, especially to the bloggers Lev Semiorkin and Slava Arlekin; these spectator reviewers are so prolific that they have posted reviews about each performance used in this study and many other Moscow operas, ballets, and dramas. Throughout the

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project, I made choices about what to include and what to leave behind. My study, therefore, focuses almost entirely on the verbal content of spectator reviews, although almost all of them are mixed-media texts. Blogs and discussion forums are text-based genres that often incorporate inserted video and clips, JPEG photographs, and links to other sites. In most blogs, spectator reviewers either link to or embed an mp4 video clip of the performance taken from news sites. In many, the audience members have snapped photographs of the performers taken during the bows, or copied directly from the press. In some cases, the photographs overshadow the verbal text of the blog, and the blog becomes primarily a platform for posting pictures from the evening, and interpretive analysis of meaning-making becomes difficult. In these cases, therefore, I have included the text they do use in the transcription of the posts, but I have chosen to focus on the reviews from reviewers who communicate with words.

Because spectator reviews appear in a variety of formats, posts vary in length. Some authors, especially those posting in consumer review formats, offer only a few sentences. Spectator reviews appearing in personal blogs tend to be much longer—Liudmila Guseva’s essay about Tcherniakov’s opera production was 9,000 words long. In the course of research, I often prioritized the longer blog-style posts because authors explained their opinions more thoroughly. When synthesizing the commentary into chapters in this dissertation, however, I freely mixed comments from reviewers who wrote short consumer reviews to those who offered lengthy, in depth interpretations.

Almost all of the blog-format spectator reviews were located on Livejournal.com. Founded in 1999, Livejournal remains the predominant blogging site in Russia. It also
maintains a special role in Russian political life. Since its servers are located outside of Russia, Livejournal blogs have become preferred medium for political opposition voices as epitomized by the blogger Alexei Navalny. In addition to Livejournal blogs, some spectators posted to blogs hosted by their personal websites, as well as alternative blogging sites such as lj.rossia.org, velikayakultura.ru, and artrepriza.ru. A few spectator reviews appeared on Proza.ru, an personal publishing website which hosts contemporary poetry and prose written by Russian amateur and professional writers. Proza.ru plays an important role in Russian intellectual life as one of the best outlets for the distribution of contemporary literature, connecting readers to works that would not be accessible through print media.

A few spectator submissions do not quite fit the mold of the post in a journal-style blog. These include a school essay from a ninth grade student about Tcherniakov’s *Onegin*, which her teacher posted on the teacher’s Livejournal blog. The student remains anonymous, so instead I use the teacher’s handle, Filorema. Proza.ru hosted a spectator review in the form of an excited email-essay written to and posted by the singer-poet Alla Gozun. The author “Tamara,” perhaps Gozun’s young relative or protégé, shapes her email to resemble both a college essay and a breathlessly written letter like the one Tatiana writes in *Eugene Onegin*. Her insights are among the most creative of the group.

Other spectator reviews appear in discussion forums. The largest thread was found at forumklassika.ru, established by the cellist Boris Lifanovsky in 1999. Lifanovsky contributes to the forum thread called “Contemporary *Eugene Onegin*”
(Sovremennyi ‘Evgenii Onegin’) which garnered 339 individual posts, as well as authoring a blog on his personal website. In 2009, Boris Eifman’s production of Onegin did not inspire similar levels of dialogue on discussion forums; I found only one post on one forum, Elegos.ru. Still, I did find a number of blogs that reviewed his Onegin. Tuminas’s Onegin elicited more spectator reviews on two major forums, including one hosted by the theater on its own website.²¹

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**Table 2.1 Reception Materials for Tchernaikov’s Eugene Onegin (2006-2014)**

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<td>Alternative Blogging Sites</td>
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<tr>
<td>Afisha.ru</td>
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</table>

²¹ The relative decline in numbers of forum posts between Tcherniakov’s adaptation of Onegin and the adaptations by Eifman and Tuminas probably reflects the overall decline in popularity of the discussion forum format at the end of the 2000s. The Vakhtangov Theater Forum began to solicit reviews shortly after its 2013 premiere. Its thread dedicated to Eugene Onegin garnered sixty-six responses. Many of these reviews are strongly influenced by the growing practice of online consumer reviews.
Table 2.2 Reception Materials for Eifman’s *Onegin* (2009-2014)

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<td>Alternative Blogging Sites</td>
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<td>Discussion Forums</td>
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Table 2.3 Reception Materials for Tuminas’s *Eugene Onegin* (2013-2015)

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<td>Artepriza.ru</td>
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Ethical Considerations

Internet research presents new ethical issues for qualitative studies. In many ways, the interpretive approach I use resembles the analysis of ethnographic interviews. In most forms of human-subject research, the researcher must obtain informed-consent waivers from research participants and obscure the names and identities of the participants in order to protect them. Analyses of published literature including the study of critical reception written by intellectuals and newspaper critics do not require consent; since the author chose to publish her work, she has tacitly consented to the analysis of her work by researchers. Spectator reviews, published online in blogs and discussion forums, are publicly-available material. Furthermore, bloggers always have the choice to limit their readership to their network of “friends” or “friends-of-friends.” I expect that some writers of spectator reviews limited access to their blogs in this way. If they did so, my simple Boolean searches would not have located their reviews. I included only publicly-available sources in this study. In addition, these writers have already chosen whether or not to veil their identities. Each reviewer has chosen a “handle” and decided on the amount (and veracity) of information included in the reviewer’s profile page. Therefore, in this study, I will use the author’s handle as if it were the full name of a printed author and cite their words as if I were attributing credit to a published work in the footnotes. The Chicago Manual of Style directs writers to include blog citations in the footnotes, but not in the full bibliography.

This study draws on material that was publicly available at the time of search. I did not make use of web-trackers searching through material posted and removed before
March 2014. I wanted to respect the choice of online review writers to (attempt to) remove their material from the public sphere. In two cases, the blogs were taken down after I performed my initial search in March 2014. Since I had copied the text from these blogs, I chose to keep the information, but to obscure the name of the author as in ethnographic interviews. In the list of spectator reviews, I substitute a coded name for the formerly public identifying information and URL.

Since 2012, social media in Russia have increasingly come to the attention of government officials as sites for political opposition. A 2013 law, for example, requires blogging sites to report the authors of blogs receiving more than 2,000 “hits” or readers per day. Although Livejournal at least has simply ceased recording the daily number of hits, I must remain highly aware of the changing environment for bloggers.

In the summer of 2013, I conducted ethnographic research in Moscow and St. Petersburg. None of my interview participants hesitated to give informed consent for the transcription of their words; many of them laughed and expressed doubt that their opinions about life and art in contemporary Russia would elicit trouble. My discussion of national identity and artistic authority in Russia is not outside the realm of politics, even if my interviewees do not see it that way. Indeed, “post-modern” adaptations of classical Russian literature in theater and film are currently undergoing scrutiny from Vladimir Mendinsky’s Ministry of Culture, as does any piece of theater that uses curse words or
symbols of traditional religions (Christianity). Therefore, I continue to be cautious about my use of this material.

**Relationship to the Author**

My research question and findings have been shaped by my own perspective as an American interested in Russian culture and fascinated by the artistic processes of adaptation. I have spent time in St. Petersburg in the summer of 2008 and in Moscow during the 2009-2010 academic year. In 2013, I conducted ethnographic interviews and asked questions about theatrical attendance in Moscow and St. Petersburg among people who described themselves as “educated people.” I also attended many productions of *Eugene Onegin*, including the three in this study. My position was that of a foreigner, an American graduate student, and an audience member who loves the artistic practice of adaptation. In some ways, this stance situates me among the writers of spectator and professional reviews.

I could certainly write my own spectator review of each production, as well as critical analyses of them as multi-media adaptations in dialogue with the thickly intertextual heritage of Russian *klassika*. It is impossible and perhaps undesirable to completely remove the perspective of the researcher. Instead, my own voice and perspective appear in my summaries of each production and in the brief descriptions of the action on stage I use to explain the reviewers’ comments.

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Moreover, my own interests as a scholar, foreigner, and lover of Russian music and culture strongly influence how I create themes from the corpus of reviews and how I interpret them. Another scholar would certainly make different choices, and my task has been to ground my own representation of the themes and issues I present with long quotations from Russian audience members. To further address the issue of the subjective stance of the qualitative researcher, I have included links to the original spectator reviews in Russian.

My selection of source material from discussion forums, consumer reviews, and blogs reflects my interest in long-form analysis of Onegin adaptations from the past ten years (2006-2014). Other reception projects might seek out sources in other formats such as Facebook and Twitter, visual “bulletin-board” sites like Tumblr or Instagram, or music streaming software such as Pandora, Soundcloud, and Spotify, which also include the capacity to write reviews. The theoretical framework and methodology that I present, if not the format and search procedures, will help musicologists explore processes of listening and identity construction through online writing. Whichever sources a researcher selects, the technology of the Internet that supports spectator review writing offers musicologists new access into the processes of audience engagement.

**Spectator Reviews in the Semi-Public Sphere**

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the Internet seemed to offer new and almost unlimited access to arenas of public discourse, and thus, the promise of greater democratization of power. In Western liberal democracies, the concept of freedom is
directly tied to a well-functioning public sphere—a social space where, as Craig Calhoun writes, “matters of common interest can be discussed, political issues deliberated, and the force of public opinion brought to bear on the political system.” The philosopher Hannah Arendt, for example, has described how the early democracies in Greece established the public spaces of the polis, where (male and landed) citizens met each other as equals to debate and create the government. Although identity was defined through kinship ties and personal wealth belonged to the private, domestic sphere, the public sphere was a place where citizens would participate in rational dialogue, unbiased by their personal situations. What Arendt describes was an ideal, of course, since in fact only certain people were allowed to participate. Arendt observes that the political organization of liberal democracies in Western Europe and the United States recreate the ideal of the public forum through political discourse and writing. In this view, the level of access to public places where citizens meet for rational debate, unmitigated by government censorship, is perceived as a measure of the freedom of the society.

Contemporary sociologist Jürgen Habermas presents the public sphere as a social space that allows for controversy over political issues among a “more or less rational” media, well-known figures, and individual citizens. In this space, citizens weigh “bundles of topically-specified public opinions” and offer an affirmative or negative response. An active public sphere can “not only detect and identify problems, but also convincingly and influentially thematize them, furnish them with possible solutions, and

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dramatize them in such a way that they are taken up and dealt with by parliamentary complexes.” If the public sphere is healthy, it results in legislation that reflects the majority of public opinion. For Arendt and Habermas, the public sphere is the key to a democratic government of the people.

In order to control the unpredictability and power of public opinion, however, authoritarian governments usually suppress critical political commentary. In Habermas and Arendt’s presentation, a censored public sphere is the ultimate marker of dictatorship. Yet it would be misguided to assume that under authoritarian rule, all political opposition disappears or is completely stifled. Instead, as Alison Furlong points out, speech moves to alternative spheres. She describes how punk music audiences in the German Democratic Republic subverted official censorship to construct their identity in protected religious spaces. Similarly, in Russia, the conversation has at times moved from direct public discussion into literature, the arts, and arts criticism. Art and the conversation surrounding it became vested with great importance as critics and audience members considered issues of national identity, morality, and the future of the Russian people through the arts. Spectator reviews represent the continuation of this tradition.

Russia has witnessed a sharp rise in Internet usage between 2000 and 2010. According to Sarah Oats, Internet access grew twenty-fold by the end of 2010. She attributes this growth to several factors: a significant rise in income during the early Putin era; government policy that encouraged Internet access on personal computers; and a lack

26 Habermas, “Public Sphere,” 358.
of overt state controls on the Web. Moreover, Russians developed a wide array of Internet platforms and websites that played “to a strong cultural interest in reflective discussion and networking among friends […] as well as a well-educated and attentive media audience.”

The statistics on current usage and access to the Internet in Russia suggest that by 2010, at least forty-seven percent of Russians had access; by 2015, that number had grown to between fifty and sixty-six percent of citizens.

Although the majority of computer users live in cities, especially those who access the Internet on a daily basis, many people in rural Russia also have access. By 2010, more than a third of Russia’s Internet users lived in small towns and villages, where sixty-five and seventy percent of residents had access, respectively. These statistics somewhat contradict Oats’s own assumption that Russia’s “Internet citizens” among the urban elite are separated by a vast gulf from Russia’s “television citizens” in the provinces, who do not have access to the highly critical political discourse available online. Although this dissertation examines mainly spectator reviews written by urbanites, educated although often impoverished people, the expansion of Internet access in Russia opens the door for a much larger percentage of citizens to join the conversation

29 “Internet: Roditel’skii Kontrol’” [Parental Control of the Internet], FOM Group, June 3, 2015, http://fom.ru/SMI-i-Internet/12181; “VTsIOM: Rost Chisla Pol’zovatelei Interneta v RF Prekratilsia,” Ekonomika Segodnia: Federal’noe Biznes-Agenstvo, October 13, 2014, http://rueconomics.ru/12025-vtsiom-rost-chisla-polzovateley-interneta-v-rf-prekratilsya/; In a 2015 article, the FOM Group in Moscow suggests that fifty-two percent of Russians currently go online at least once each week, and sixty-three percent go online once each month; VTsIOM Russian Public Opinion Center claims that between 2013 and 2014, Internet access remained at sixty-six percent, after having steadily from forty-seven percent in 2010 to 2013. However, the VTsIOM study suggested that a lower number of people accessed the Internet every day at forty-six percent versus only a few times each week at nineteen percent.
online. The Internet offers the potential, at least, for ordinary citizens to fully participate in an online public sphere.

**Blogging: Simultaneous Construction of Public and Private Selves**

Indeed, the meteoric growth of social networking sites as well as the writing of spectator reviews occur in social spaces that purposefully blur the delineation between public and private. Carolyn Miller and Dawn Shepherd argue that the tell-all *kairos* of the 1990s fostered the breakdown of private and public spaces, as epitomized by reality TV, personal memoirs, the democratization of celebrity, and the open-access blog. Although most social media sites allow the individual to control who has access to their writing, many users allow anyone with a connection to the Internet to view their page. Miller and Shepherd assert that in this environment, the construction of identity moves to the “intersection of the private and public realms, where questions about identity are most troubled.” As the popularity of social networking sites demonstrates, the Internet allows for public political and social debate that freely mingles with the construction of individual identities.

Blogging as a genre and format demonstrates this multiplicity. As Ignatio Siles has noted, the breadth of the blog’s scope allows the format to be “means for presenting introspective thinking, a record of daily events.” It can also be a “a tool for political

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mobilization, a journalistic project, an open-ended literary experiment, a constant
exhibition of images and videos and, in many cases, a combination of all of the above.”

As Siles explains, bloggers and other social media users mix posts about their own
experiences with commentary on outside events. Social media deepen the connection
between the personal life of the writer and the public sphere, while blurring the
boundaries of both.

Some scholars and activists welcome this decentralization, arguing that the
Internet democratizes power by distributing the means of speech. Writing about blogs,
Greg Meyers asserts that “institutions such as the press, academia, medicine and law
develop hierarchies of credibility, and the blogosphere flattens them out, so that anyone
can say anything.” Blood, as well, sees the free-form blog as the best method of
combating corporate control with critical evaluation. She writes, “weblogs are no panacea
for the crippling effects of a media-saturated culture, but I believe they are one
antidote.” Blood believes that blogging gives ordinary people without the authority or
influence of the media or other “authorized” institutions a platform to make an argument
in the public sphere.

Blood published those words in 2000, when she and many others hoped that
online forums would be able to flatten hierarchies of authority. Fifteen years later, the
Internet has become a common portal for voicing opinions through social media and
reading alternative news and criticism. Yet, as Blood cautioned, the Internet has not

33 Myers, Blogs and Wikis, 126.
completely overturned those hierarchies, and bandwidth is dominated by the consumption of video media on Hulu and Netflix.  

**The Internet and Virtual “Sphericles”**

Daniel Drezner and Henry Farrell argue optimistically that “the decentralized interactive exchange of opinions and information that blogs exemplify is becoming a basic element of social interaction.” This decentralization has continued as other social media services like Facebook and Twitter became an important part of daily life in the West, and in Russia as well. I would argue, however, that the decentralized exchange Drezner and Farrell describe has always been present in the form of conversation and private letters. According to the linguist Camilla Vasquez, the portrayal of a confident, *reasonable* self through specific linguistic markers can “contribute to a sense of affinity or co-membership.” Spectator reviews reflect this democratization of artistic authority by allowing “ordinary” audience members a public voice, as they add their own interpretations to those of professional artists, critics, and scholars. Although some writers laud the Internet’s possibilities for the redistribution of knowledge and power, the vast majority of users do not have a large enough number of readers to challenge institutional sources of information.

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In fact, the small size of the social media user’s audience characterizes the Internet. Many authors of spectator reviews seem satisfied with hosting micro-communities of participants. In this sense, as Greg Myers argues, “the community of bloggers is not so much a public sphere as a set of little sphericles … multiple publics that pursue their own discussions without reference to a single unified national or global ‘public.’” In scope at least, the blogosphere—the public sphere of spectator reviewers and their readers—imitates the patterns of face-to-face communication between small groups of like-minded people at the water cooler, kitchen table, or café.

Media scholars mark the 2000s-era shift in the use of the Internet from as a platform for content consumption to a dynamic space shaped by users’ contributions as Web 2.0. Social networking sites (SNS) like Facebook and Twitter dominate the discussion of Web 2.0’s impact on contemporary culture, but the trend also includes consumer reviews on websites like Amazon.com and Netflix, Youtube remixes, and Wikipedia articles. Philip Seargeant and Caroline Tagg suggest that in this “prosumer” environment, “previous dichotomies such as author/audience and amateur/professional become porous,” just as the division between private and personal communication becomes less concrete.

Spectator reviews developed within this media environment. The democracy of the online world allowed ordinary audience members to enter a public critical arena once reserved for professional newspaper critics and established artists. This process began on

38 Myers, Discourse on Blogs and Wikis, 24.
40 Ibid., 2.
discussion forums and blogs; thus, the language and purpose of the nascent social media shaped the spectator review as a genre. Although these formats have been overshadowed by Facebook, Twitter, and other media sites, they remain popular among their original subscribers who are now in their 30s, 40s, and 50s. In Russia, these users still present their writing on the Livejournal server.

**Crafting an Authorial Voice in “Amateur” Reviews**

Why would someone choose to offer a spectator review online? Thorston Hennig-Thurau presents a typology of motives for writing consumer reviews online based on a survey of Deutsche Bank AG customers. Their eleven motives for writing emphasize the connection between the companies, the community around it, and the consumer’s need for advice or approval.\(^{41}\) The consumer may feel that she “adds value” to her community by providing her commentary; she may want to help the company do well in return for good service; or she may want to contribute to the exertion of collective power over the company as a kind of protest. In addition, the Hennig-Thurau study also proposes a “homeostase utility,” positing that any extremely positive or negative emotion creates a psychological tension that individuals seek to resolve through writing reviews as a kind of catharsis.\(^{42}\) In this sense, consumer “rants” are simply an outlet for expressing an individual’s undesirable emotional energy, rather than an attempt to affect the community or company.


\(^{42}\) Hennig-Thurau, “Electronic Word-of-Mouth,” 44.
Conversely, Paul Manning points out that these online forums often provide a space for “rants” or “vents,” human expression so intense and context-specific that these opinions “have no other venue: they are hidden transcripts made visible.”\textsuperscript{43} If the Internet did not provide an outlet for highly emotive rants, then they might pass through the mind of the individual without being recorded for examination. Spectator reviews incorporate this highly emotional stance, allowing individual thoughts and word-of-mouth conversations to be documented digitally. Indeed, the varied language and bold stances employed in Internet discourse reveals how this new technology has shaped twenty-first century discourse.

Yet the genre of spectator review also aligns with the online movie reviews discussed by Maite Taboada, who works in the field of systemic functional linguistics. Taboada distinguishes online amateur reviews from professional reviews by the inclusion in the amateur reviews of “emotional content and personal experience” as well as spontaneity. The online reviews, she proposes, are self-edited, unrevised, and posted without the mediation of an editor or institution.\textsuperscript{44} Similarly, media studies scholars Sergei Davydov and Maria Davydova agree with Taboada’s distinction, arguing that amateur critics actively construct a “figure-of-the-author” in their texts. Instead of supressing the author’s voice as professional critics do in the name of objectivity, “amateur” critics emphasize the personal nature of their evaluative stances.


\textsuperscript{44} Maite Taboada, “Stages in an Online Review Genre,” \textit{Text \& Talk} 32, no. 2 (2011): 247-269.
Furthermore, in Davydov and Davydova’s typology of twelve basic topics, they located in their corpus of online movie reviews the author’s “situation of viewing,” “emotions connected with viewing,” as well as a “recommendation to view (or not to view).” These three topics appear far more than topics typical of professional film criticism such as description of artistic methods and technical aspects of the production. Whereas professional criticism strives for some kind of objectivity based on specialized knowledge of film, the main generic feature of amateur criticism is the description of the author’s personal experience of the film. This is also true of spectator reviews.

Of course, before the Internet existed amateurs expressed their personal experience of an artistic event in face-to-face conversations or written correspondence between colleagues, friends, and family members. Thorston Hennig-Thurau and others assert that online consumer reviews resemble traditional word-of-mouth talk manifested in electronic text. Electronic word-of-mouth simply widens traditional networks for word-of-mouth communication from face-to-face interaction among acquaintances to written discourse among strangers on the Internet. Spectator reviews offer the researcher unprecedented insight into the “dinner table conversations” of audience members as they reflect on the performance and try to describe it to their friends.

Like newspaper reviews, spectator reviews usually focus on a single event and provide evaluation through description. They are similar in that they begin with a title and date. The most salient difference between professional criticism and spectator

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reviews, however, is that the blogger is perfectly free not to write—her own impulse to
author a review is her fundamental motive. In a sense, professional reviews are more
constrained than online spectator reviews, because their authors must conform to word
limits, deadlines, and the authoritative language expected by the newspaper’s readership.
Unlike some forms of professional criticism, spectator reviews are highly subjective and
the author’s voice is personal, even playful. Yet it would be a mistake to consider them
amateur attempts at writing a professional criticism.

In spectator reviews, audience members reveal how the personal and highly
emotive stances of Internet discourse become integrated into individuals’ perceptions and
experience of the arts. The main difference between professional and spectator reviews is
the cultivation of a highly subjective, playful voice full of emotion. The highlighted
authorial voice allows the reader and researcher insight into the processes through which
one individual perceives and makes sense of an artistic event. As bloggers and
commentators offer their “personal” opinions about a performance, they are
simultaneously constructing their own voice, stance, and identity.

Writing the Self Online

As Miller and Shepherd argue, the tendency towards personal disclosure enacted
in journal-style blogs supports “an intensification of the self, a reflexive elaboration of
identity.”47 In the 1980s and ‘90s, Paul Ricoeur shifted the discussion of narrative from

47 Miller and Shepherd, “Blogging as Social Action,”
http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/blogging_as_social_action_a_genre_analysis_of_the_weblog.htm
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its focus on a typology of stages to narrative story-telling’s connection with identity.48 When people tell stories, including recounting their experience of an artistic event, they are actively involved in constructing their own identities, their selves. Seargeant and Tagg define identity as a “set of resources which people draw upon in presenting and expressing themselves via interaction with others.”49 The same process occurs in spectator reviews, whether they are posted to personal blogs, discussion forums, or consumer review forums. As Ana Deumert asserts, “how we communicate (through text, sound, and images) conveys important information about who we are, how we want to be seen, and how we perceive the world.”50 The author’s projected identity, however, “should not be understood as the simple unveiling of a pre-existent or perdurable self, but rather as a constitutive effort.”51

Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps point out that all narratives contain a tension between the author’s “desire to construct an over-arching storyline that ties events together in a seamless explanatory framework and the desire to capture the complexity of the events.”52 As people tell stories, the identities they construct during the process of storytelling fluctuate between fixed identities and cohesive narratives. The centrifugal energy of multi-faceted arguments and shifting stance reveal the author’s flexible

developing identities. In a blog, that construction is an ongoing event—the self that is being disclosed constantly changes.

Furthermore, Miller and Shepherd suggest, “the self that is ‘disclosed’ is a construction, possibly an experimental one, which takes shape as a particular rhetorical subject-position.”

The screen name, handle, or “nick” epitomizes this projection of a possible alternative identity or, as Ana Deumert argues, a “second imagined self.”

Nicks can become a kind of carnival mask, and they allow the social media user the “joy of change, of stepping out of the everyday, of being someone else, and even avoiding taking responsibility for one’s actions.”

These nicknames are often playful. (Examples from this research include “Neboticelli” (Rus. Not Botticelli), “Naivetetral” (naïve theater-goer), and “Farbensymphonie” (Ger. Color symphony).

Other bloggers simply use their real names. Other than the required creation of a handle, the SNS user always has a choice about what to include and what to leave blank. Of course, the user could also enter false information, but more often than not, users simply omit information or offer self-consciously humorous evasive answers. Whereas Ana Deumert theorizes social media as a playful, life-creating alternate world, other linguists highlight the strength of the connections between online and real-life identities. For example, Camilla Vasquez argues that online identities are “constructed and

interwoven within the fabric of the actual online review.” In her study of online consumer reviews, she describes how reviewers often offer demographic information in order to support the construction of a reliable self. Her linguistic study of consumer reviews from Amazon.com, Netflix, Epicurious, and Yelp reveals that reviewers self-consciously construct experience and expertise by offering information about their identity as consumers, their lifestyle, taste and travel experience. Indeed, Vasquez argues that the playfulness that Deumert portrayed as a carnivalesque is really a technique of constructing reasonableness. By playing with references to popular culture, inserting non-complainer clauses “I’m usually not one to complain, but…,” the reviewer shows that she does not take herself too seriously, “especially in a negative review.” According to Vasquez, the construction of reasonableness is a strategic attempt to create a dialogic rapport similar to that between actual acquaintances.

In addition, writers of blogs, discussion forum posts, and consumer reviews use a set of involvement-creating linguistic techniques. These include the use of second-person pronouns and first person plural (“as you know…” or “we usually…” or “if you…” clauses), field-specific jargon, vividly detailed passages, and humor, clauses. This kind of speech diverges further from the essay-like rhetoric of newspapers and school essays in its use of discourse markers (“oh, well, you know,” “where do I begin…” and “right?”), emoticons such as smiley faces, and imagined dialogues. Even though the generic model of the spectator review is the highly formal school essay or pseudo-objective

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56 Vasquez, “‘Usually Not One to Complain,’” 68.
57 Vasquez, “‘Usually Not One to Complain,’” 83.
professional criticism, reviewers use the strategies of online writing to enhance the involvement of prospective readers.

Cultural Intertextuality in Presenting the Online Self

Another involvement strategy present in online communication is intertextuality. Julia Kristeva theorized that all verbal communication “takes up” what has been said before, and reuses it. References to other literature, art, or popular culture in spectator reviews contribute to the engagement between the writer and her anonymous readers, whether consciously or unconsciously. The texts or phrases cited establish the writer to create credibility with the projected reader.

In spectator reviews, conscious intertextual references are plentiful; writers frequently compare the reviewed work to other literature, plays, opera stagings, or movies. Their use of pre-existing material not only establishes the author’s credibility as educated and well-read, but it helps the reader to understand the author’s perspective regarding how the performance relates to the greater artistic and cultural scene. For example, the prolific blogger Lev Semërkin employs a reference to Aleksandr Griboedov’s play Woe from Wit (1825) in order to highlight a feeling of “foreignness” in Tcherniakov’s production for his prospective Russian readers, and play with the shared cultural knowledge of his readers. The blogger titles subsections in his blog “From the

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60 Vasquez, *Discourse of Online Consumer Reviews*, 115.
Ship to the Ball 1” and “From the Ship to the Ball 2.” The phrase appears in Pushkin’s Chapter 8 and was maintained in Tchaikovsky’s libretto, but it actually refers to Chatsky, a character from Griboedov’s play. Somewhat like Eugene, Chatsky is a character who is out of sync with society, because he’s more intelligent and empathetic than the other characters. Also like Eugene, Chatsky has been out of the country. He has just come directly from the ship to the ball in order to meet his childhood sweetheart. Semërkin uses the well-known phrase to highlight how Tcherniakov’s Eugene always stands out from the crowd.

The blogger further develops the reference to foreignness to criticize the Bolshoi’s casting of a foreign (Polish) baritone to sing Eugene. According to Semërkin, the baritone Mariusz Kwiecień’s accent audibly sounds foreign in a Russian opera produced by and for Russians. Citations of shared cultural knowledge like these link the audience to the author, while enhancing the reader’s ability to place the writer, reader, and performance in context.

Greg Myers, a linguist, delves deeper into this issue by examining the blog author’s voice and projection of an imagined audience, a technique found in almost all spectator reviews. Myers describes the “audience-in-the-text as a specific, hypothetical group of interlocutors. As the writer constructs his or her blog entry, he or she imagines “a friendly but sometimes mocking circle of people who share the blogger’s interests and views.” The projection of the “audience-in-the-text” allows the blogger to establish a

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62 Myers, Discourse on Blogs and Wikis, 77.
virtual dialogue with an unseen listener, narrowing his or her audience from the whole world to a small group of like-minded individuals. Thus, even the projection of an imagined audience is a reflection and development of the author’s self, the creation of a group of friends who echo or challenge the author’s statements. The projection of a reasonable authorial identity through the use of playfulness, humor, intertextuality, and other involvement strategies strengthens the blogger’s (and spectator review writers’) sense of communication with virtual communities, both real and imagined.

Each Internet-based research project requires the balancing of dialectical tensions. These include messiness versus neatness of the corpus selection; the depth or breadth of analyses; and the local or global contextualization of themes, virtual social practices and “real-life” interactions. The two published research projects that most resemble my own analysis of spectator responses to artistic productions are Davydov and Davydova’s study of online amateur reviews and Taboada’s study of consumer reviews of films. Both of these studies focused on establishing the generic markers of spectator reviews, rather than locating individual reviews in a specific culture and contextualizing the interpretations. My own analysis delves into “small stories,” as Vasquez terms the reviews, illustrating how each positive or negative opinion is also one person’s engagement with social, moral, and national world around them. In the emergent field of digital humanities, there is a growing interest in sentiment analysis, computational digital analyses of spectator and consumer reviews as positive or negative. As Vasquez argues, however, neither

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language, stories, nor identity can be simplified enough so that a computer could accurately determine their significance.\textsuperscript{64} In my research, I hope to further support Vasquez’s claim about the complexity of narratives and identities represented in online “small stories” as I highlight the multiple modes through which spectators connect to an artistic experience.

**Reception as Singing the World**

Phenomenology can help us understand the individual’s experience because its main theorists aimed to reconceive the human in philosophy. In the twentieth century, philosophers Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty explored life as it is experienced rather than as it is conceived through reason. Merleau-Ponty observed that individuals use language to grapple with the endless possibilities for what each small element of life might mean. Using language, individuals infuse their lives with meaning and attempt to engage others. My presentation and theorization of spectator reviews—bodies of verbal text written about an artistic experience and posted online—connects this everyday practice among educated Russians with Merleau-Ponty’s theory of *expression*.

Phenomenology’s main premise is that human being-in-the-world is located in the interaction between an individual’s consciousness and objects in the world around them (intentionality).\textsuperscript{65} Whereas Edmund Husserl focused on the cognitive elements of  

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\textsuperscript{64} Camilla Vasquez, *The Discourse of Online Consumer Reviews* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 5.  
experience, Martin Heidegger argued that most of the time, humans are caught up in their
day-to-day needs.\textsuperscript{66} They must not only secure food and shelter, but also negotiate their
moods, interpersonal commitments and plans for the future, with the goal of making
themselves whole.\textsuperscript{67} Intellectual activity and the awareness of one’s being-in-the-world,
Heidegger claims, occur only at rare moments in life when one is “feeling positive,” to
put it in conversational parlance, or able to cope with the cares of everyday living.\textsuperscript{68} Only
then can a person begin to question and examine his or her own being-in-the-world. The
spectator reviews appear to be written during those rare moments of life when an
audience member begins to question and examine her own being-in-the-world. In this
case, the artistic event provides the stimulus for reflection on herself and her relationship
to the social, cultural, and aesthetic world around her. Authors of spectator reviews often
weave in reflections on their personal lives and their own place in Russian culture as they
narrate their experiences of \textit{Eugene Onegin}.

In phenomenology, speech, dialogue, and even art are presented not as structures
dissociated from the individual, but as part of the very processes through which the
individual experiences and creates his world. According to most phenomenologists after
Husserl, such as Hans-Georg Gadamer, people are not simply products of their time,
place, and culture.\textsuperscript{69} Individuals and groups of people consciously and constantly create
themselves; they refashion their world even as they experience it. For the present project,
the potential in this approach lies in the new access into audience response. Within the

\textsuperscript{68} Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, 34.
framework of phenomenology, spectator reviews function as a kind of Husserlian \textit{noesis}—an act by which a consciousness (a person) engages with an object (an artistic event) and constitutes it in experience (“figures out” what it means, and how it relates to his or her life).\textsuperscript{70} Spectator reviews may be a record of how the spectator returning from the new production \textit{intends towards} the artistic object, but they are also a part of the person’s active intending. Husserl discusses intentionality as the primary mode of perception. As a consciousness “intends toward” an object, she sifts through all the possibilities of what it means, and ultimately locates its meaning, the “truth.” Husserl discussed intentionality as sifting through a multitude of choices until one found an absolute, a truth that could not be further sifted.\textsuperscript{71} The concept of intentionality has remained at the core of the phenomenological tradition, even as later philosophers such as Heidegger, Gadamer, and Merleau-Ponty grappled with the importance of cultural background and language use.\textsuperscript{72} As the spectator reviewer locates photographs and links online, reads others’ responses, and drafts her ideas in a verbal narrative, the audience member actively engages the work and constitutes its meaning.

Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of \textit{expression} demonstrates the continuously-occurring process of being and meaning-making.\textsuperscript{73} According to the philosopher, when a person perceives the world by focusing on any object or event, she perceives a multitude

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\textsuperscript{72} David Detmer, \textit{Phenomenology Explained: From Experience to Insight} (Chicago: Open Court, 2013), 1-36.
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of relational possibilities for what that experience might mean. In order to “make sense” out of numerous possibilities, the person then must consider the possibilities and ultimately fix on one truth. Taking into account previous knowledge of that object given to her by her specific social group, the person then sublimates the experience, ultimately deciding how this object relates to her and thus, her world. This process is called expression. Merleau-Ponty compared expression to the composition and performance of a song. A person begins “singing the world” by making an organized (metaphoric) song out of the babble of possible meanings that the world offers. Spectator reviews capture this process of meaning-making as it relates to musical performance, and the evaluative stances used by the reviewers reflect their processes of singing the world—organizing their own relationships to the artistic event as they describe, evaluate, and consider its artistic meaning.

Once a result is settled upon, the person undergoing expression feels relief in finding the “right” answer, and in being able to feel temporarily that a stable truth is possible. Although human being-in-the-world is a constant process of expression, most people prefer to feel the results of that process as offering stability rather than the intimidating openness of possibility. Merleau-Ponty called this relief-giving misconception Fundierung. (He did not use an English or French equivalent; the closest English word might be grounding.) Even in cases of artistic creation, artists tend to abandon the memory of the traumatic contingency, and focus on the resulting work. Only during the conscious taking-up of the world with the purpose of finding a solution to a
problem, a decision, or a new creation does the person become aware of the infinite possibilities of the world. Expression is both scary and exhilarating.

Perhaps Merleau-Ponty’s most interesting contribution to epistemology is that he did not separate ideas from the process of finding them. Husserl discussed experiencing possibility as sifting through a multitude of choices until one found an absolute, a truth that could not be further sifted. By contrast, Merleau-Ponty argued that all knowledge and all thought are built through the process of expression. Language, according to the philosopher, is not a semantic code, but develops through and relies upon expression. Any writer, speaker, or even a person thinking to herself is engaged in a creative grappling with possibility, reworking previous sedimented (canonic) knowledge, and then remaking truth.

Merleau-Ponty believed that words and language are directly integrated into this process. He wrote:

> this power of [linguistic] expression […] does not merely leave for the reader and writer himself a kind of reminder, it brings the meaning into existence as a thing at the very heart of the text […] it [establishes] it in the writer or the reader as a new sense organ, opening a new field or a new dimension to our experience.⁷⁴

The practice of writing online reviews of artistic events embodies expression. While people have always engaged in these human processes of reorientation, some people now choose to publish their thoughts (and thought processes) online. Following Merleau-Ponty, the anthropologist Thomas Csordas would label the writing of a spectator review

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part of human “self-processes,” the continuous process of creating the self.\textsuperscript{75} Csordas insists that individuals and groups “thematize” elements of the world. They classify the world around them, bestowing meanings according to cultural situation, personal experience, and social pressures. Spectator reviews are a mode of thematizing the world into understandable, comprehensible components. Although online reviews are not entirely spontaneous, they are certainly mediated in a different way than professionally written newspaper reviews, and they are subject to less editorial scrutiny before publication. Furthermore, the process of engagement is also part of a process of identity creation. Just as blogging in general fosters a strengthened sense of self, narrating one’s experience and interpretation of a performance requires a repositioning of the author’s self, a refashioning of identity in relationship to the performance. As authors offer evaluations of event, they also re-orient themselves within their own worlds by revisiting their construction of her identities in relationship to the artistic event.

Spectator reviews capture self-processes in action. The writing of the spectator review is an act of intending towards the performance as an object. The practice involves acts of perception, imagination, memory, judgment, and anticipation. Authors declare their own identities even as they evaluate the artistic event. In examples of online reviews identities may include “Russian,” “educated,” a “fan of klassika” or a “non-expert lover of the arts.” Thus, the published review becomes evidence of the process of reorientation. To borrow the words of Thomas Csordas, spectator reviews “capture that moment of

transcendence in which perception and objectification begin, constituting and being constituted by culture."\textsuperscript{76}

As the spectator reflects on the adaptation of \textit{Onegin} during and after the performance, the individual integrates those meanings into the context of his or her own experience of life. “Amateur” interpretations of \textit{Onegin} reveal meanings that are worthy of our attention, in as much as the writer herself has value as an individual human being. It is not my goal to downplay the artist’s creative role or the systems of cultural significance through and with which an audience member constructs meaning. Rather, this kind of project highlights the individual’s agency in the conversation about artistic meaning, and illuminates the diversity of ways in which individual people connect with art, music, and theater.

\textsuperscript{76} Csordas, \textit{The Sacred Self}, 9.
Chapter 3: Pushkin and Tatiana, Secular Icons

“It is not so much Pushkin, our national poet, as our relationship to Pushkin that has become our national characteristic.”
—Andrei Bitov, 1986

Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin (1799-1837) exists in the Russian cultural imagination as both a man and a myth. A writer of poetry, short stories, literary criticism, and letters, Pushkin made an enormous contribution to the catalogue of world-class Russian literature during the early nineteenth century. In addition to his literary legacy, Pushkin has become an secular icon in Russian culture since the poet’s premature death in 1837.

As a young aristocrat in the early nineteenth century, the precocious Pushkin flirted with revolutionary politics, but by his 30s, Pushkin had found a way to compromise with Tsar Nicholas’s autocracy. Following the Decembrist Uprising in 1825, Tsar Nicolas I ordered the young poet to stay away from Russia’s cultural capitals. While living in exile, Pushkin continued to write and publish while living in Southern Russia. He composed *Eugene Onegin* from 1823 to 1831 in Odessa and at his estate.

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Mikailovskoe in southwestern Russia. Already the leading literary figure in his 30s, Pushkin became Russia’s first professional writer.

Ultimately he was allowed to return to Moscow where he married a young aristocratic beauty, Natal’ia Goncharova. As a well-known personality, Pushkin also joined the Imperial court. In 1837, the poet quarreled with a Frenchman named Georges-Charles de Heeckeren d’Anthès, another man-about-town. D’Anthes was the adopted son of the Dutch ambassador to the Imperial court, and a close acquaintance of Pushkin and Natal’ia. Following rumors about d’Anthes’s sexual relationship with his wife, Pushkin challenged him to a duel, a practice relatively common to the poet’s class. Pushkin died of a bullet wound at age 37.

Western scholars call the widespread belief that Pushkin and his works represent the best of Russian culture and the embodiment of Russian creative achievement the “Pushkin myth.” Indeed, the novelist Andrei Bitov’s words above, written in the 1980s, reveal a growing awareness among educated Russians that the network of meanings surrounding Pushkin’s name has become more important than the actual person. In this chapter, I address the processes through which Pushkin and his character Tatiana entered the realm of cultural memory. From the middle of the nineteenth century to the present day, each generation retunes its images of Pushkin, Eugene, and Tatiana in a delicate negotiation between the state and Russia’s educated people.

Pushkin’s longest work, *Eugene Onegin*, is a tour de force of literary play. Widely considered the author’s *magnum opus*, Pushkin’s *Onegin* has the scope of a novel, but it

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is presented in patterns of rhymed metrical poetry. Pushkin’s genius lies in the way he fills the story with word play, ironic asides, and the alternation of authorial voices. As did many nineteenth-century novelists, the author makes use of inserted personal letters to convey the romantic internal life of his characters, but Pushkin also uses dream sequences to explore their unconscious, unstated desires. His lengthy descriptions of daily life in the city and country, of the dancing feet of a famous ballerina, and the unique beauty of the Russian winter paint the Russian landscapes in prose and create detailed portraits of Russian life in the capital and in the countryside. The scope, story, and brilliant technique of Pushkin’s masterpiece play a large role in the Pushkin myth. When Russians learn about Pushkin, they begin with *Eugene Onegin*.

*Onegin*’s plot is relatively simple. Pushkin’s title character, Eugene Onegin, is a wealthy playboy from St. Petersburg. Jaded with high life, he comes to the countryside, but quickly becomes bored and purposeless there. He does begin a friendship with a rather naïve young poet named Lensky, who drags Eugene to the neighboring estate of the Larins, a modest family of rural gentry. Lensky introduces Eugene to his cheerful fiancée, Olga Larina, and her silent sister, Tatiana. Olga’s conventional prettiness contrasts with Tatiana’s introspective nature, shyness, and love of sentimental literature.

The novel’s plotline moves forward in fits and starts. After long sections containing evocative descriptions of local life, people, and culture, Pushkin begins the romance plot. The shy teenage Tatiana sends a passionate letter declaring her love for the sophisticated Eugene. In the garden of her estate, Eugene explains that he is not interested in marriage or in her. Tatiana gives up hope, but has a vivid and somewhat erotic dream
in which Eugene, as the master of animals and monsters in the forest, kills Lensky and then takes possession of Tatiana, body and soul.

In January, the Larin family hosts a name-day party for Tatiana and Lensky brings Eugene back to Tatiana’s home. At the party, Eugene is disturbed by how deeply he has hurt the young girl, and by their neighbors’ careless gossip about the awkward situation. Unable to comfort Tatiana, Eugene vents his discomfort on Lensky, monopolizing Olga’s dance card in order to obtain a little revenge on her fiancé. Unfortunately, Eugene only realizes the extent to which his casual actions angered and hurt his friend when Lensky challenges him to a duel. The men duel, and the more experienced Eugene hits his mark. Lensky dies. Eugene flees Russia, and the narrator leaves Eugene’s activities during the subsequent years unexplained.

Chapter 7 follows Tatiana’s transformation into a grand dame of the St. Petersburg aristocracy. Mourning for Lensky and for her own lost love, Tatiana visits Eugene’s rural estate and looks through his books. By reading his marginalia, she discovers that the actual Eugene was never the Byronic hero she imagined him to be. Acquiescing to social norms, Tatiana goes to the Moscow “marriage mart” where a stout, respectable general marries her. A few years later, Eugene returns to the Russian capital. Finding Tatiana transformed into a genteel aristocrat of St. Petersburg high society, the Princess Tatiana, Eugene seeks to renew their attachment by writing a love letter of his own. Because Pushkin has not followed Eugene over the intervening years, the reader

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3 In Russian peasant culture, children are named after the saint’s day closest to their date of birth, and they celebrate their birthday each year on the saint’s day (name day) rather than their actual date of birth. Since St. Tatiana’s day is January 25, the reader can place the time of Tatiana’s name-day party in the dead of winter.
never learns why Eugene finally falls in love with Tatiana, or whether the character has matured. Eugene visits her palace, only to be scolded and disappointed. Although Tatiana asserts that she still loves him, she remains with her husband. *Onegin* is a sentimental romance in which the romance never happens. Eugene and Tatiana fall in love at different times, and thus never actually begin an affair.

The relative simplicity of the plot allows Pushkin to play with content and form for the length of a novel. The poet constructs his novel-in-verse using his own complex metrical design. The “Onegin stanza” is similar to a sonnet, but with fourteen lines instead of twelve, following the rhyme scheme: AbAbCCdEffEgg. As A.D.P. Briggs describes it, the three quatrains are usually followed by a “snappy terminal couplet” (gg) that often finishes off the verse with an ironic twist. Pushkin establishes and then playfully interrupts his own periodic form, much in the manner of Mozart or Haydn. In the words of Caryl Emerson, “the Onegin stanza is both fixed and pliable: in places the rhyme groups are blurred, full stops are hopped over, the whole column of sound picks up speed—and reader find themselves disoriented, excited, and surprised each time the terminal couplet snaps the sonnet shut.”

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4 Pushkin’s novel was composed serially, that is, he published only a chapter at a time before he had completed the next. Perhaps for that reason, there seems to be a missing chapter. After Eugene kills Lensky, the narrator follows Tatiana’s development and only alludes to Eugene’s travels out of the country. While Tatiana’s character deepens as she matures, the reader never learns whether Eugene has also changed. Instead, when Eugene returns to St. Petersburg and encounters Tatiana in society, his love appears unconvincing, because neither Tatiana nor the reader are privy to Eugene’s emotional development. Pushkin left drafts of an additional chapter, following Eugene’s travels in the Caucasian mountains. What Pushkin intended to say with his unpublished chapter continues to be a source of speculation.


Pushkin’s exquisitely structured verses demonstrate a dazzling command of different Russian speaking styles (*heteroglossia*), wordplay, irony, and intertextual references. Pushkin moves smoothly among different types of language, including the Russian used by the lower classes and the French used by the nobility. He also writes monologues for Eugene and then Tatiana to speak that resemble the letters in length and intimacy. These emotional and direct passages present unrealistic patterns of communication, especially for a society that privileged flexible dialogue and light banter. Written serially and published chapter-by-chapter, Pushkin’s *Onegin* is complex and layered in concept and delivery.

The story is told from the point of view of a playful, omniscient yet unreliable narrator. The narrator tells Eugene’s and Tatiana’s story in past tense, even narrating Tatiana’s erotic dream and Eugene’s solitary discontent, but he also presents himself as Eugene’s intimate friend. According to the narrator, he and Eugene belong to the same aristocratic social set as Pushkin the author did in the 1820s. Indeed, there are many similarities between Eugene’s background and Pushkin’s own publicly-known biography. Eugene is a precocious young rake who left the capital, lived in the countryside, and ultimately returned to Russian high society. Further obfuscating the narrator’s identity,

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7 Russian critics have argued that there are few writers in the world literature with such a command over their own language as Pushkin. Indeed, *Eugene Onegin* is notoriously difficult to translate. Vladimir Nabokov, a twentieth-century novelist of Russian origin who emigrated to England, France, and the United States, attempted to translate *Onegin* into rhyming English, but ultimately burned his draft. He argued that translating *Onegin*’s rhyme was impossible, and only a painstakingly literal translation supported by footnote explanations of the novel’s cultural references would do the work justice. This dissertation draws on two translations: James Falen’s (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) and Olivia Emmet and Svetlana Makourenova’s (Moskva: Reka Vremen, 2009).
Pushkin occasionally refers to contemporaneous literature and even counters critical reviews of previously published chapters of *Onegin* in the narrator’s voice.

This unreliable, puckish narrator also professes love for Tatiana, who is at once a girl, a Muse, and an ideal wife. After Eugene rebukes Tatiana, the unreliable narrator rages at Eugene’s coldness on her behalf. The narrator praises Tatiana’s love for the Russian winter, connecting Tatiana’s particularly “Russian soul” with the unique natural landscape of rural Russia, and thus, the feminine conception of Russia as a mother. Yet, although the narrator spends so much attention on her perfection, the major and minor details of her existence remain unaddressed; the reader never learns the color of her hair or the shape of her figure. Even Tatiana’s motivations for staying with her husband are unclear. Pushkin leaves the heroine’s image vague and wide open for interpretation. As Caryl Emerson writes, “Starting with the narrator who tells her story and ending with many generations of critics, almost everyone who touches this image falls in love with it—or with its unrealized potential.”

The ambiguity of Tatiana’s character and the narrator-author’s changing voice opened the novel for widely disparate interpretations by Russian critics, writers, composers, and stage directors over the following 200 years.

In the early twentieth century, Dmitri Merezhkovsky asserted that “in *Eugene Onegin* Pushkin described the horizon of Russian literature, and all subsequent writers had to move and develop within this horizon.” He meant that later nineteenth-century Russian writers treated *Eugene Onegin* as the foundation of their intertextual dialogue.

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with each other’s works, characters, and themes. Almost all later writers explored and developed *Onegin’s* themes of Russianness, feminine sacrifice and masculine sin, reflection versus action, and the moral opposition of the country and city life, civilization, and purity. Characters based on Eugene or Tatiana appear throughout nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century literature. The place of Pushkin as the founder of Russian literature is founded on his vast and virtuosic contribution to literature, but also on the engagement of later Russian writers and artists with his creative legacy.

**Pushkin the Cultural Hero**

As Leslie O’Bell has shown, historians and literary critics have constructed a narrative of Pushkin’s life and death that can be “read” like a text.10 Early accounts of the poet’s life and work incorporated the religious genre of hagiography. Drawing on the Medieval formulas to teach believers about the lives of Orthodox holy men, they presented Pushkin as a secular saint and martyr.11 According to O’Bell, the poet led a good life, serving the Russian people by significantly expanding the written Russian language and composing stories about its people. Because Pushkin died at the hands of a foreigner in a duel fought for the sake of honor, his death took on echoes of martyrdom. Accordingly, literary scholar Paul Debreczeny argues that Pushkin was being portrayed as a *staroterpets*, a saintly martyr whose suffering had collectively redeemed the Russian

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11 O’Bell, “Writing the Story of Pushkin’s Death,” 393.
nation. Writing near the end of the twentieth century, S. G. Bocharov asserted that “Pushkin occupies something like the role of the Holy Spirit for Russian culture.”

The Russian idea of narodnost’, the spirit of the people, became one of the most important constructions of identity in nineteenth- and twentieth-century in which members of the intelligentsia and politicians negotiated the perceived tension between Europe and their homeland. Many of Pushkin’s literary contemporaries associated the author and his work with the Romantic presentation of the national spirit. After his death in 1838, the poet’s colleagues Vladimir Odoevsky and Mikhail Lermontov strengthened the attachement in literary obituaries. Odoevsky declared that with Pushkin’s death, the “Sun of Russian Poetry has Set!” Mikhail Lermontov lamented his loss in a tragic ode, “On the Death of a Poet,” expressing anger at Russian society in general and even at the autocracy. Both writers asserted that every Russian should mourn the loss of Pushkin’s genius because Pushkin embodied Russia’s creative potential. Indeed, Gogol’s, Odoevsky’s, and Lermontov’s memorable praise became stock phrases. Later literary critics and scholars cited their words in the prefaces to publications of Pushkin’s literature. Ultimately, Pushkin’s image as a national genius became more important than the memory of the living person.

15 Mikhail Lermontov, “On the Death of a Poet,” Izbrannyia Stikhotvoreniiia, (New York, 1900), 12-14. “Солнце нашей поэзии закатилось! Пушкин скончался, скончался во цвете лет, в середине своего великого поприща!.. Более говорить о сем не имеем силы, да и не нужно: всякое русское сердце знает всю цену этой невозвратимой потери, и всякое русское сердце будет растерзано. Пушкин! наш поэт! наша радость, наша народная слава!. Нужели в самом деле нет уже у нас Пушкина! к этой мысли нельзя привыкнуть!” Lermontov was ultimately exiled for publishing this poem.
In 1844, only seven years after Pushkin’s death, the foremost literary critic, Vissarion Belinsky, brought Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*, and its characters into the foreground of discussion about the Russian national character. In “*Eugene Onegin: An Encyclopedia of Russian Life,*” Belinsky argued that Pushkin represents “a newly awakened national consciousness,” and that “more narodnost’ finds expression in [Eugene Onegin] than in any other national Russian work.”\(^{16}\) Sona Stephan Hoisington asserts that Belinsky “elevated Pushkin’s work to the status of national epic and forged a link between *Onegin* and Russian identity.”\(^{17}\) *Eugene Onegin* too became intertwined with the developing Pushkin myth and the ongoing conversation about Russia’s unique national spirit and its relationship to the West.

**Interpretations of Eugene Onegin as a Realist Novel**

Belinsky’s seminal reading of *Onegin* and his other critical writing in general laid the foundation of a tradition in which the boundary between life, literature, and the arts is blurred. Overlooking *Onegin*’s many ambiguities, Belinsky read it as a realist novel. Robert Stam describes nineteenth-century realism as “a movement in the figurative and narrative arts dedicated to the observation and accurate representation of the contemporary world.”\(^ {18}\) Realist writers emphasized the everyday activities and banal aspects of human life, foregrounding the activities of middle- or lower-class people.

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Following in Belinsky’s footsteps, many critics approached Onegin’s characters as realistic representations of Russian people and set them up as models for actual persons to emulate. By the middle of the 1850s, critics and readers began to approach Pushkin the author as a model Russian, in the same category as his characters, Eugene and Tatiana. In 1859, literary and social critic Apollon Grigor’ev declared Pushkin “our spiritual physiognomy, realized for the first time, in outline, but fully and wholly […] He is our original type.” After establishing Pushkin, Tatiana, and Eugene as both “typical” and “ideal,” critics could better articulate their ideas about national identity, social reform, and Christian morality through their interpretations of the novel.

Indeed, the social democrats of the 1850s and 1860s, including Dmitri Pisarev, Aleksandr Herzen, and Nikolai Dobroliubov’, refuted Belinsky’s praise of Pushkin, especially his emphasis on the poet’s positive representation of narodnost’. In his essay “Pushkin and Belinsky: Eugene Onegin,” Pisarev censured both poet and critic for ignoring the painful realities of life in tsarist Russia, painting Pushkin’s interest in the aesthetic as an inability or unwillingness to work for social change. According to Hoisington, Pisarev accused Pushkin of duping his readers into thinking that Russia was Arcadia. His criticisms extended even to the character Eugene. Fusing Pushkin the author with the laziness of the character Eugene, Pisarev criticized the protagonist’s

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20 Hoisington, Russian Views, 5.
“disorderly life” and Pushkin’s inability to hold “real and deeply felt convictions.”

For Pisarev, both Onegin’s protagonist and its author embodied the wasted talent and ability of the educated classes, which rendered them “superfluous” to their own society. Instead of being the apotheosis of Russian life, Pisarev argued, Eugene Onegin is “nothing more than a vivid and glittering apotheosis of the dreary and senseless status quo.”

Already in 1860, Pushkin’s figure had been disconnected from the life of the actual man, and it existed in national consciousness almost as a character in his own fiction. In the semi-real world of cultural myths, Eugene and Pushkin had become equally potent as models of the Russian character.

In 1880, the “Pushkin Days” Celebration—three days of speeches, banquets, church service, and musical performances—framed the unveiling of the Pushkin monument in Moscow’s Tverskaia Square and consecrated the Pushkin myth. In a talk about Pushkin during the festivities, Fyodor Dostoevsky offered one of the most enduring interpretations of Eugene Onegin. In his “Pushkin Speech” he veered away from the presentation of Pushkin as a writer to one in which the poet is a “prophetic phenomenon.”

In direct opposition to Pisarev and the social democrats who sought social and political change, Dostoevsky held art and beauty as the highest human achievement.

According to Hoisington, the “men of the soil” believed that artists and writers, like Pushkin (and Dostoevsky himself), had a “special intuitive, synthetic understanding

22 Pisarev, “Pushkin and Belinsky,” 53.
of life and truth.” Dostoevsky insisted that Pushkin’s greatness was a sign of Russia’s future greatness, and the nation’s ability to lead the world in a universal brotherhood of mankind. As Hoisington writes, Dostoevsky’s Pushkin speech “is actually a speech about Russia – her spiritual identity and her destiny.” It might also be a sketch of Dostoevsky’s own heroine from Crime and Punishment, Sonya Marmeladova. Like Belinsky and Pisarev, Dostoevsky invoked a reading of Eugene Onegin in order to illustrate his ideas. The writer particularly emphasized Tatiana’s moral strength and her decision to remain with her husband as the ultimate sacrifice. In Dostoevsky’s reading, Tatiana became a secular saint, an icon of Russian moral potential, just as Pushkin the author embodied Russia’s creative and intellectual prowess as a national myth.

Realist Interpretations of Tatiana

As Hoisington has demonstrated, Belinsky’s Onegin essay forged a meta-literary tradition marked by Russians’ willingness to “read their own social and spiritual history into the lives of their literary heroes.” Perhaps because so much about Tatiana’s character is left unsaid, the heroine holds a unique place in the Russian canon. Belinsky characterized Tatiana as the “ideal Russian woman.” Two decades later, Apollon Grigoriev championed Tatiana as “pure Russian, and to this day the only full realization of Russian womanhood.” According to Dostoevsky, Tatiana “embodies positive beauty;

24 Hoisington, Russian Views, 5.
26 Hoisington, Russian Views, 4.
she is the apotheosis of the Russian woman.” As an cultural icon, her image is highly valued and even loved. Yet, just as each generation of critics invests its own ideas into critical interpretations of *Onegin*, everyone who writes about Tatiana repaints her image, as a specialist might restore a famous icon.

Discussions of Tatiana’s moral strength usually emphasize her rebuff of *Onegin’s* advances when he declares his love to her at the end of the novel. In the eighth chapter, Tatiana reveals that although she still loves Eugene, she will not leave her husband or begin an affair with Eugene. James Falen translates the two lines thus:

> But I am now another’s wife,  
> And I’ll be faithful all my life.

> No ia drugomu otdana;  
> Ia budu vek emu verna.

Beyond this phrase, Tatiana does not clarify her reasons for remaining faithful to her husband. Its ambiguity opens the door wide for interpretive readings. According to Belinsky, Tatiana refused to begin an affair with Onegin because of “pride of virtue.” Pisarev argued that Tatiana understood Eugene’s shallowness by the end of the novel, and that she would not risk her social position for such a man.

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The real “icon-painting,” however, came at the hands of Dostoevsky. According to the novelist, she would have had the courage to elope with Eugene because “the Russian woman will boldly pursue what she believes in,” but she did not leave her husband because it would “bring down shame on him and kill him.” Tatiana’s moral soul, the Russian soul, says, “I do not want to obtain happiness at another’s expense.” Tatiana’s decision, therefore, was one of self-denial rather than self-preservation. In order to protect her good and loving husband, Tatiana denied her own need for love. Of the nineteenth-century interpretations of Pushkin’s heroine, Dostoevsky’s portrait of Tatiana had the strongest influence on twentieth-century readings of Onegin as a morality play. Dostoevsky’s reading epitomizes the use of the Pushkin myth and Onegin interpretations as a way to recruit the Russian intelligentsia into belief and action. His technique continues to mark Russian intellectual discourse by emphasizing Tatiana’s moral strength as the core of her identity, and as the ultimate theme of Eugene Onegin.

Stage Adaptations of Onegin in the Nineteenth Century

Composers and playwrights participated the Pushkin myth by adapting Pushkin’s stories into opera, theater, or ballet. Operatic examples include Aleksandr Dargomyzhskii (The Stone Guest, 1872), Modest Mussorgsky (Boris Godunov, 1869/1872), Piotr Tchaikovsky (Evgenii Onegin, 1879 and The Queen of Spades, 1890), and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (Mozart and Salieri, 1897). Tchaikovsky’s famed 1879 opera

34 Dostoevsky, “Pushkin,” 61.
35 Dostoevsky, “Pushkin,” 62.
adaptation of *Eugene Onegin* thus appeared within a long line of operas adapted from the “Sun of Russian poetry.” I will present my own interpretation of the composer’s dialogue with Pushkin and his contribution to the Russian moral project in Chapter 4.

Tchaikovsky’s adaptation of Pushkin’s masterpiece was by no means the first attempt to transfer the famous novel-in-verse to the stage. Following Belinsky’s glorification of Pushkin’s work in 1844, a sizable audience for dramatizations of *Eugene Onegin* developed in the Russian capitals and provinces. In April 1846, the playwright and belletrist Grigorii Vasilievich Kugushëv (1824-1871) presented *Eugene Onegin* “in three acts and four sections, in lines taken from the novel by A. S. Pushkin, saving many lines.”

Adding interpretive context, Kugushëv dramatized five scenes: Tatiana’s letter, Eugene’s reply, the duel, the meeting of Tatiana and Onegin in St. Petersburg, and Tatiana’s rebuff. Thirty-one years later, Tchaikovsky would expand these five scenes to seven.

Soviet theater scholar Sergei Durylin writes that Kugushëv altered the storyline of *Onegin* to make the interaction between Eugene and Lensky a bit more intense. The playwright presents Olga as a flirt who does not intend to marry Lensky. At Tatiana’s name-day party, Kugushëv’s Eugene sets out to reveal her insincerity to his friend, rather than hurt his feelings. In this adaptation, the playwright interprets Eugene as more considerate than in the original. Furthermore, Tatiana’s character aligns more clearly with sentimental heroines of the period, projecting her desire for Eugene clearly to the

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37 Unfortunately, Kugushëv’s adaptation of *Onegin* is rarely discussed. Since I have not yet seen the script or located any other scholarship about it, I must rely on Sergei Durylin’s description.
In the final scene, Tatiana recites a monologue added by Kugushëv, wishing that Eugene would come to her and that he would kiss her.\(^{38}\) Despite or because of the emphasis on sentimentality, this dramatization was a great success. It satisfied the interpretive expectations of Kugushëv’s audience (Russian readers of the 1840s-1850s), and it put his name on the map as a director.

Kugushëv’s play was performed in Russian theaters throughout the rest of the nineteenth century alongside other dramatizations from Pushkin’s verses. Among other adaptations, the productions of “scenes from” Pushkin included gestures, sets, and costumes, but no additional verbal content. For example, in 1849, the Alexandrinsky Theater produced a dramatization called “Eugene and Tatiana.” It included two scenes in the garden, Onegin’s answer to Tatiana’s letter, and Tatiana’s refusal of Eugene in her St. Petersburg parlor. In her dissertation on adaptations of Onegin, Galina Golovataia also writes that the Kugushëv dramatization was sometimes performed with incidental music, composed by Aleksander Verstovsky in Moscow performances and by A. L’vov in St. Petersburg.\(^{39}\) Clearly, the “scenes from” approach to Onegin had become standard long before Tchaikovsky began work on his libretto in 1877.

Indeed, Durylin writes that there were so many dramatic recitations of Eugene Onegin during the 1850s and 1860s that most dramatic actresses were able to try performing Tatiana. Moscow’s Maly Theater presented “Scenes from Eugene Onegin” with I. V. Samarin and G. N. Fedotova-Poziakova in 1862. Other readings of Onegin

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\(^{38}\) Vasilii Andreevich Karatygin, a major star of nineteenth-century Russian theater, played Onegin alongside the lesser-known actress V. V. Samoilova. She ultimately became defined by her quality stage performance of Tatiana.

\(^{39}\) Golovataia, 21.
include one for the Pushkin Days in Odessa in 1888 and in St. Petersburg in 1886-87. In 1899, during the Pushkin Jubilee, the famous actress V. F. Komissarzhevskaia played Tatiana at the Alexandrinsky Theater.

Even more often, adaptations of *Onegin* dramatized only the last scene in which Tatiana refuses Eugene’s love, reflecting theater producers’ and audiences’ interest in Tatiana’s rebuff of Eugene.\(^4^0\) As Golovataia puts it, “The most intense moment which became the dramatic climax was, of course, the final conversation between the heroes.”\(^4^1\) In Pushkin, the “conversation” is quite mysterious. When Eugene inadvertently finds Tatiana crying over his love letter, she rebuffs his attention in a monologue, and Eugene never utters a word. It is possible, therefore, that the staged “conversation” dramatized parts of Eugene’s letter, as Tchaikovsky would do in 1879. Certainly, the popularity of the performances including only the last scene emphasizes the importance of Tatiana’s moral sacrifice for nineteenth-century audiences.

**The State Co-opts the Pushkin Myth**

The tension between the state and the intelligentsia over ownership of *klassika* and the field of literature and criticism has marked Russia’s twentieth century. The 1880 Pushkin Celebration was attended by so many important literary figures that its list of speakers represented a “who’s who” of Russian arts and letters. According to Marcus Levitt, the Celebration confirmed the intelligentsia as an “independent yet publicly

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\(^4^0\) Durylin, *Pushkin na Tsene*, 43-47.

acknowledged contributor to society.” 42 The Pushkin myth became a “neutral zone” in which conservatives and liberals, politicians and citizen-commentators could speak and interact. Levitt describes the 1880 event as “a brief intoxicating moment when it seemed as if the long and painful conflict between state and nation would be happily and peacefully resolved, the moment when modern Russian identity consolidated around its literature, with Pushkin as its focus.” 43 The 1880 gathering would be followed by a series of Pushkin Celebrations sponsored by the Imperial government and later the Soviet state. Each Pushkin commemoration recruited Russians to collective ownership of Pushkin and other Russian classics. Throughout the twentieth century, the Pushkin myth offered an intellectual forum in which the tension between state and the people (narod), intelligentsia and authority, individualism and community could be negotiated.

Whereas the Celebration was created by and for members of the intelligentsia with private donations, the 1899 Pushkin Jubilee was entirely a state affair. As Levitt notes, the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAN) cooperated with the Ministry of Education to present Pushkin as a “staunch supporter of autocracy and the favorite son of the Russian tsars.” 44 They expunged Pushkin’s connections to the Decembrist revolutionaries from his biography. Still, the government did not entirely relinquish its control over Pushkin’s work. The Office of the Censor determined which texts could be used for public readings. 45 The new “official nationality” of 1899 was founded on

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44 Levitt, Russian Literary Politics, 158; and Levitt, “Pushkin in 1899,” 188.
Russian literature, that is, secular rather than religious texts, enhancing the potential to connect the state to the literate masses and the “semi-intelligentsia” through literature. Pushkin’s work became the center of this secular canon.

Although many artists participated in gala performances and art exhibitions, for the most part the intelligentsia stayed away in 1889. As Levitt notes, its members generally rejected the celebration as “trashy, artificial, and false”: commercial entrepreneurs produced a variety of Pushkin-themed merchandise. For instance, the May 1899 issue of Mir Iskusstva, dedicated to Pushkin, “rejected the public manipulation of the poet,” embracing instead Dmitri Merezhkovsky’s 1896 representation of him as the “personification of the best in Russian culture” and a “spiritual aristocrat.” Indeed, the Pushkin volume of Mir Iskusstva can be read as a symbolist manifesto, an outline of the movement’s claims of modernity constructed in relationship to the classic poet of Russian’s “golden” past.

**Pushkin and the Construction of Soviet Moral Persons**

Even as early twentieth-century poets, such as Anna Akhmatova, Aleksandr Blok, and Nikolai Gumilev mourned the passing of the Silver Age with their own Pushkin Celebration in 1921, the Pushkin myth was soon co-opted by the new Soviet state. In the early twentieth century, the figure of Pushkin and his works appeared near the center of the struggle for the hearts and minds of the Soviet-Russian people. The state consciously manipulated the reception of Pushkin’s myth and literature to suit its changing needs.

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46 Ibid., 192.
47 Ibid., 194.
When the Bolsheviks issued a monopoly on klassika in 1918, the Department of Education began to redirect the reception of Pushkin through literary criticism, newspaper articles, public readings, and prefaxes to publications. The Minister of Culture and Education, Anatoly Lunacharsky, revised Pushkin’s biography for the new state. In 1924, authorities sponsored a Pushkin Celebration at the poet’s rural estate, Mikhailovskoe, as well as festivities and readings in Leningrad and Moscow.48

Following Lunacharsky’s lead, Soviet critics and educators emphasized Pushkin’s “democratizing sentiments” in poems such as “The Upas Tree” and “The Bronze Horseman.”49 Bolshevik scholar Dmitri Blagoi presented the author and his work through a Marxist-Leninist lens. His 1927 pamphlet, “Pushkin’s Class-Consciousness,” offered newly literate members of the population a brief summary of the text’s moral significance, its protagonists’ manifestation of Russianness, and how its author had laid the groundwork for the Revolution.50 Rather than abandoning the Pushkin myth and the practice of social commentary embedded in literary criticism, the Bolsheviks selected and promoted a different set of works to highlight Pushkin’s revolutionary leanings.

In the 1930s, literary scholars similarly re-tuned the Pushkin myth to accommodate the state’s changing emphasis on nationalism over class-consciousness. According to the guidelines of the All-Union Committee for the Pushkin Jubilee scheduled for 1937, Pushkin was to be celebrated as a great Russian poet, the creator of

50 Dmitri Blagoi, Klassovoe Samosoznanie Pushkina (Moscow: Izd Vserossiskogo Soiuza Poetov, 1927), 6.
the Russian literary language, the progenitor of the new Russian literature, and lastly, as a
Decembrist. J. Douglas Clayton suggests that the Committee presented Pushkin—an
aristocrat!—as a “people’s poet” (*narodnye poet*).⁵¹ For Soviet-era critics and readers,
Pushkin not only represented ideal types in his literature, but was also himself a
progressive and national type. As Stephanie Sandler describes it, “The national poet was
seen anew, transformed into a hero that the new Soviet man could admire, if not
emulate.”⁵²

The integration of Russian classic literature, literary criticism, and nation-building
politics reached a fevered pitch in the 1936-1937 Pushkin Jubilee, led by Maxim Gorky,
the head of the Soviet Writers’ Union. The Jubilee was a yearlong celebration that
successfully established Pushkin’s image and works into the everyday lives of Russian
citizens. The February 11 anniversary of Pushkin’s death was celebrated with exhibitions,
concerts, “one-day newspapers,” and special editions of journals ranging from children’s
magazines to fishing guides. In addition, the major stages in Moscow and St. Petersburg
offered performances of ballet and opera adaptations of his works.

Angela Brintlinger has described how throughout the Jubilee, stock phrases
sanctifying Pushkin as the “creator of a Russian literary language, the father of the new
Russian literature, and a genius who enriched humanity with his works” rang across the
country. Brintlinger’s words, “Pushkin, the sun of Russian poetry, in the official Soviet
view had become one with the sun of socialism.”⁵³ By reworking Pushkin’s image into

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⁵² Sandler, *Commemorating Pushkin*, 107.
that of a simple-hearted (prostoi) Russian, Soviet authorities created a “usable past,” a history that supported the rise of the Soviet state. The state created the image of Pushkin as a remarkable but real person whom ordinary citizens could look up to and imitate. By linking ethnic pride, morality, and Russian literature during the festivities, the Department of Education cultivated citizens in whom national pride and patriotic loyalty to Russia formed the center of their moral selves.

After the 1937 Pushkin Jubilee, a group Soviet scholars presented Onegin as a realist novel, but also one that accurately depicted the tropes of socialist realism—the pictorial representation of nationality with socialist moral content. In Onegin, Soviet critic Ivan Vinogradov argued, Pushkin laid the foundation for the nineteenth century’s critical realism and Soviet-era socialist realism. A. Tsetlin depicted realism in writing as the depiction of byt’ (mundane everyday-ness) in the landscape, the spirit of the Russian people (narodnost’), and realistic passages about Russian folk culture.

Critics D. Dmitri Blagoi, G.A. Gukovskii, S.M. Bondi, and G. Makogonenko in the 1930s-1940s conveyed this reading in numerous works about Pushkin and Onegin, presenting Tatiana and Eugene as socialist realist heroes. This group of scholars presented three basic tenets about Eugene Onegin as a masterwork of Russian literature and culture: realism, narodnost’ (the spirit of the people), and proto-revolutionary

54 Brintlinger, Usable Past, 165.
55 Brintlinger, Usable Past, 5.
politics. They cited Pushkin’s drafts about Eugene’s journey in the Caucasian mountains as revealing Pushkin’s original idea to make Eugene a Decembrist who ultimately dies in the foreign region. Clayton presents the Soviet reading, Pushkin had been required by the Imperial censor to cut out that chapter and downplay his main character’s revolutionary sympathies. Yet, as Wendy Slater explains, the literary criticism propagated during the Pushkin Jubilee in 1937 emphasized the poet’s realism, narodnost’, and humanism, above any imputed political intent. This is the interpretation that sustained Pushkin studies throughout the Soviet era.

It is noteworthy that the Jubilee festivities occurred during two of the most tragic years in Russian history; the centennial anniversary of Pushkin’s death in 1937 marked the height of Stalin’s purges, as well as a growing fear of invasion from Germany. Sandler asserts that the “historical experience of collective trauma lay just beneath the public performances of happiness and achievement.” The Pushkin Jubilee was both a distraction from the terror of the purges and a way to unite the country through nation-building in peace-time. The legacy of Onegin among conservative opera patrons today, as exhibited in the rhetoric of “pure beauty” and the national spirit, reveals that, in some ways, authorities achieved the goal of national unification and distraction.

During the Second World War, Maurice Friedberg notes, secular hagiographies of the authors of klassika became particularly important. Historical Russian writers, composers, and artists were portrayed as “illustrious representatives” of the strength and

endurance of the Russian people. Friedberg argues that nineteenth-century writers’ “portrayal of Russian national characteristics” became their ultimate quality, redeeming any ideological or aesthetic issues. National unity became the foremost priority. As the Soviet state cultivated the reception of Pushkin, literary critics transferred the same themes to their readings of *Eugene Onegin*, especially in a socialist realist reading of Tatiana.

**Tatiana’s Russian (and Soviet) Soul**

In the 1930s, Soviet critics used the ideals of socialist realism to modify Dostoevsky’s characterization of Tatiana as an icon of Russian (Christian) morality. In 1932, socialist realism was proclaimed the “official method” of art. In 1933, Maxim Gorky articulated the criteria for socialist realism as “national in form and socialist in content.” The moniker usually refers to stories, operas, and films about proletarian heroes who battle selfish bourgeois in order to create a better socialist world. Katerina Clark explains that the typical socialist realist story as a parable, describing a Manichean struggle between forces of good and evil. In most stories, a “bad seed” character does evil until the naturally good character matures and recognizes the need to confront the corrupt antagonist.

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61 Friedberg, *Russian Classics*, 130.
62 Ibid., 136.
Eugene Onegin’s romance of missed chances hardly evokes a Manichean struggle. Yet the same scholars who represented Pushkin as a proto-revolutionary found a way to attribute socialist realist virtues to Tatiana. Soviet critics made Tatiana a socialist realist heroine, a Russian woman who remained close to the Russian people and their traditions. Eugene Dobrenko has pointed out that Onegin’s narodnost’ is best expressed in Tatiana’s character, “her love of the Russian countryside and of the superstitions and folkways of the Russian peasantry.”

Pushkin’s phrase, “Tatiana—Russkaia dushoiu,” provided the foundation for a national reading of her character (Chapter 5, Canto 4). Falen translates the couplet as “Tatiana (with a Russian duty that held her heart, she knew not why),” whereas Emmet and Makourenko translate it as “Tatiana (Russian in her soul without herself quite knowing why).” This tenuous understanding contrasted the Russian Tatiana with the Westernized Eugene, although it fails to account for the fact that Tatiana speaks and writes her love letter in French and eventually marries into the Francophile aristocracy.

During the 1930s, Tatiana’s image—now itself of iconic importance—was repainted in socialist realist colors. Certain positive adjectives can be found in most socialist realist literature to describe characters who have achieved socialist transcendence. Katerina Clark’s list of socialist realist virtues include: “‘determined’ (upriamyi), ‘serios’ (serioznyi), ‘stern’ (strogii), ‘calm’ (spokoinyi), ‘simple’ (prostoi),

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‘gentle’ (*miagkii*), and ‘radiant’ (*siiaiushchii*). The Soviet image of Tatiana invokes all of these virtues. As A. Gurstein asserted in 1939, “Tatiana is the personification of simplicity and sincerity; her feeling is strong and direct.” The aristocratic maiden became a simple-hearted girl despite her family’s wealth, and although the novel tells of Tatiana’s nighttime passion, she was represented in Soviet criticism as a calm, steadfast person.

Though the socialist hero began as an inherently positive figure, he or she still needed to undergo a personal transformation, much like those found in the hagiographies of medieval saints. Tatiana is transformed when she finally understands Eugene’s inferiority and abandons her old flame in favor of a simple life guided by personal integrity. Thus, although socialist realism was a method and doctrine created to guide writers and artists of the Soviet period in making new works, its values and clichés can be seen in the re-presentation of Tatiana and Pushkin. After the 1930s, Tatiana came to represent the ideal moral person just as Pushkin came to represent the highest achievement a Soviet-Russian could imagine. Although the words of Pushkin’s *Onegin* were not altered, the state’s cultivation of Pushkin significantly altered the national understanding of Pushkin and his masterwork.

Western critics and many contemporary Russian scholars judge the Soviet presentation of *Eugene Onegin* as a realist novel rather harshly. In order to create a unified front and present the “simple” Soviet reader with a comprehensible realist reading

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67 Clark, “Socialist Realism with Shores,” 32.
of Onegin, Soviet critics virtually ignored the delightful intricacies of Pushkin’s artistry. In the 1970s, the Moscow-Tartu school of linguistics led by Yuri Lotman and Boris Uspensky turned their attention towards Onegin’s form and revisited some of the valuable insights of the Russian formalists whose ideas had been excluded from publication since the 1930s. This reading of Eugene Onegin was strongest in the 1950s, and only in the 1970s did Yuri Lotman’s work begin to emphasize structural and stylistic issues.

**Tatiana in the New Russia**

Tatiana remained a classical heroine in socialist realist clothing throughout the twentieth century. Indeed, the Soviet presentation of Pushkin did not lose its centrality in Russian daily life until Perestroika, when some members of the intelligentsia turned their attention to the state’s role in constructing the Pushkin myth (Kul’t Pushkina). Cultural critics and writers paid special attention to the state-sponsored interpretation of Pushkin. Pushkin’s image, represented most iconically in the statue of Pushkin at Pushkinskaya Square in Moscow, became the central image of this dialogue. Artists and intellectuals attempted to remove layers of Soviet dogma, as if Pushkin’s national image were an old painting that an expert could restore. Scholars in the West as well began to study the mythologization of Pushkin in the 1980s and 1990s, even as Russian intellectuals and academics turned their attention towards the role the “Pushkin Cult” and the state appropriation of Russian klassika played in the construction of a national and Soviet mythology.
Nonetheless, during this period, other Russians, including highly educated ones, clung to what Wendy Slater calls “national patriotism” in response to the collapsing sense of identity that accompanied perestroika and the end of the Soviet Union. The national patriots began to think of themselves as conservatives sharing traditionally Russian values.70 According to Slater, the national patriots deplored the intelligentsia who had, in their eyes, caused the collapse of the USSR. The group feared degradation by the “mass” consumer-driven culture that seemed to be seeping in from the West. Above all, the national patriots accused liberal voices of being “anti-Russian.” Thus, the “wild” 1990s saw the return of militant Russian nationalism and xenophobia, combined with a fear of “modernizing” (read Westernizing) movements.71

As ever, Pushkin remained at the center of the debate over national identity. In particular, Andrei Siniavsky’s 1989 novella, Strolls with Pushkin, inflamed the national patriots and many members of the Russian literati, who perceived it as an attack on Russia itself.72 The binary opposition of national pride versus modernity has characterized much of domestic politics during the now fifteen-year regime of Vladimir Putin. On the more conservative end of the spectrum, people often rail against “anti-Russian” modernizers for “destroying” classical beauty, including the image and works of Pushkin. This rhetoric continued through the 2000s, and it provides the language of contrast between “conservatives” and “modernizers” in the reception of adaptations of Pushkin’s Eugene Onegin on the contemporary Russian stage.

71 Ibid., 419.
72 Ibid., 411.
An Icon’s Layers

Today Eugene Onegin remains at the center of a vibrant and dynamic process of reception that brings out old colors from Pushkin’s original text, but also adds new ones to serve present-day purposes. Contemporary readings reflect modern needs, issues, and ideals as Russians engage with Onegin and its history as a site for the negotiation of social, moral, and national identities. After almost 200 years, Pushkin, Eugene Onegin, and Tatiana remain open to interpretation. When professional critics and ordinary audience members participate in this conversation, they also interact with the legacy of Belinsky, Dostoevsky, and the Soviet critics. As I demonstrate in the following chapters, interpreting, adapting, and re-performing Onegin is a living tradition in Russia.

In 1937, Roman Jakobson lamented: “Onegin had become an icon, to be painted and repainted in versions ever more remote from the original and darkened by the votive lamps of the reverent.”73 From Jakobson’s perspective, the existence of so many Onegin interpretations and the Pushkin myth itself diminishes the original work. Jakobson’s metaphor of a painted icon accurately highlights the historical reception of Onegin, because as each generation of critics, readers, and audience members interpret the work and argue over its meaning, they add their own voices to Pushkin’s. Indeed, contemporary literary critics such as Douglas Clayton and Olga Peters Hasty likewise find the historical mis-reading of Onegin threatening to Pushkin’s original.74

74 Clayton, Ice and Flame, 1-10; Olga Peters Hasty, Pushkin’s Tatiana (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 1-10.
After two centuries, *Onegin* exists simultaneously as Pushkin’s original text and as a site for the negotiation of Russian identity, just as Pushkin exists in cultural memory as both man and myth. To ignore *Onegin*’s reception in favor of a “pure” reading denies the fact that readers also contribute to literary meaning. This critical bias similarly disregards the complex interaction between individual members of the intelligentsia and the state over the last 200 years, as they vie with each other to re-envision morality in Russia. *Onegin*’s powerful meaning within Russian culture only grows during these processes. Indeed, *Onegin* remains highly potent because new readers, critics, and artists can interpret Pushkin’s original, and then adding their own voices to the ever-growing conversation. After all, in the eyes of believers, a darkened icon is no less beautiful than its original.
Chapter 4: The Creative Development of Tchaikovsky’s Tatiana

Although Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin* quickly gained popularity with audiences and opera producers after its 1879 premiere, many music and literary critics belittled the adaptation as an awkward adulteration of Pushkin’s original. In an 1884 review, Cesar Cui denigrated Tchaikovsky’s setting as “the same ariosos, with perfectly worthless phrases, thickly accompanied, with the text obscured and squeezed in, designed merely to heighten the cheerless uniformity of *Onegin’s* music.”1 This real issue, however, may be that the interaction between Pushkin’s original text and Tchaikovsky’s score is multi-faceted. The composer includes arrangements of early nineteenth-century romances and character dances, as well as self-citations, leitmotives, and distinctive submediant modulations. While many scholars differ in their interpretations of Tchaikovsky’s opera, they generally agree that the composer created a dialogue with Pushkin’s original by infusing his setting with layers of musical subtext.2

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My own reading highlights how Tchaikovsky’s Tatiana, Olga, Lensky, and Eugene draw on musical and literary languages in order to navigate the most emotionally intense moments of their lives. Each character confronts the chasm between their adolescent expectations of romance and the norms of adult sociality with different musical languages, and they emerge from this conflict with four distinct results.

Tchaikovsky’s Tatiana matures through the creative transformation of sentimental literature and music by the end of the Letter Scene. Olga, influenced more by light folk songs, fails to grow in this way. Her limited perspective does not prepare her to understand Lensky’s embodiment of Romantic idealism. Unwilling to transcend his youthful idealism, Lensky fatalistically welcomes death in his pre-duel aria, even as he begins to broaden his own literary and musical forms in that number. Eugene confronts his first experience of deep feeling late in the opera, but he fails to develop his own musical language. By the end of Tatiana’s interaction with Eugene, she gains her own musical voice, and thus, control over her fate. Creative, passionate, and self-sacrificing, Tchaikovsky’s Tatiana embodies the Russian moral ideal as it was articulated in literary criticism of the 1870s.

The Russian Romance as Topic

Throughout the opera, Tchaikovsky borrows, alludes to, and recomposes the Russian domestic (*bitovoi*) romance, a salon genre that upper-class girls of Pushkin’s
time would have sung. Tchaikovsky’s allusions to the romance are persistent and meaningful. At the time Tchaikovsky composed *Onegin*, the musical and textual features of the romance would have been heard as old-fashioned, much in the way that Tin Pan Alley tunes call up a nostalgic, period connotation for twenty-first century Americans. Aleksandra Shol’p calls Tchaikovsky’s technique a “parodic stylistics” of the Russian romance, a nineteenth-century genre with its roots in folk songs set to a simple galant accompaniment. As Vera Vasina-Grossman notes, the short settings of contemporary poetry had broad appeal because they were easy to understand and to sing. The simplicity of the melodic and harmonic material, however, contrasts with the intense content of the lyrics, which often deal with heartache and longing. As Nikolai Findeizen noted in 1904, “All of the songs of that time were replete with sighs for ‘her’ or ‘him,’ and in all of them one heard of ‘unattainable happiness,’ ‘a lover’s glance,’ ‘the torture of cruel passion,’ and of ‘an empty and dead heart.’”

Taruskin, Shol’p, and Frey demonstrate that the romance’s melodic material is characterized by a specific set of pitches, winding between the submediant and the tonic, sometimes highlighting the fifth and a lowered third. Boris Asafiev called this prevalence melodic “sixthiness” (*sextovost’*), and he demonstrated how it appears in Tchaikovsky’s

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3 The main representatives of Russian romances and Russian folk songs arranged for classical instruments from the first third of the nineteenth century are Titov, Abiyev, Gurilev, Verstovsky, and Varlamov. For an excellent collection of nineteenth century Russian romances, and early descriptions in English, see James Walker, ed. and trans., *The Russian Art Song* (James Walker, 1993), 17; See also, Richard Taruskin, On Russian Music (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 105-113.


music for Tatiana, Lensky, and sometimes even Olga. Richard Taruskin finds sixty allusions to romance melodies in Tchaikovsky’s use of submediant (IV/vi) harmonies, as in the modulation to the submediant at the end of the D-flat major Letter Scene.

Although much of Tchaikovsky’s music contains sextovost’, in Eugene Onegin the composer clearly connects the domestic romance as a musical genre to the characters who sing it through the prevalence of the characteristic melodic material at key moments. Indeed, when Tatiana and Lensky experience intense ecstasy and anguish, they sing melodies descending from scale degree six to one.

Tchaikovsky establishes his referent in the first number when Tatiana and Olga sing “Have you not heard?” (Slykhali li vy?). The melody, rhythm, and galant accompaniment of the duet closely resemble Aleksandr Alabiyev’s setting of the same Pushkin poem, “Pevets;” Emily Frey calls it a “quotation, assimilation, and reinterpretation.” Indeed, in a letter to Nikolai Rubenstein, the composer himself called the opening number “Have you not heard?” a “sentimental duet.” Furthermore, throughout the opera, musical allusions to the romance appear prominently in Tatiana’s and Lensky’s solos. For example, Lensky sings about his love for Olga as a romance, “I love you Olga.” His pre-duel aria also displays the characteristic descending melody of the romance, a lilting descent from the sixth scale degree to the first. When Tatiana bares

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8 Taruskin, On Russian Music, 111.
her soul to Eugene in a love letter, she sings a series of ariosos that Taruskin calls a “string of drawing room romances linked by recitatives.”

Tchaikovsky’s clear allusion to the romance in the opening quartet allows him to establish a musical thread throughout the opera. The frequent allusions to the romance emphasize how the sentimental and romantic genres that Tatiana and Lensky read and sing direct their sociality—the ways that they relate to others and to the world around them. Tchaikovsky’s opera then depicts how the main characters use this language to confront the reality of imperfect people and arranged marriage with their adolescent expectations of life.

In the opera’s opening quartet, Tchaikovsky establishes the romance as a topic by dramatically contrasting the melodic and verbal material of the two younger girls and the two older women as they sing the opening quartet. Interspersed between Tatiana’s and Olga’s lyrical, arching phrases with wide ranges and long held notes, their Nanny Filipievna and their mother, Madame Larina, “talk.” Madame Larina ruminates on the vast difference between her teenage dreams of romance and her married life. With deep insight, she suggests that her girlish passion was at least partially modeled on the novels of Richardson. Nanny counters that she never even developed romantic feelings because she was already married by age thirteen.

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Madame Larina:

How I adored those Richardson novels! Как я любила Ричардсона!
Not that I read them for myself. Не потому, чтобы прочла.
No, it was just because my cousin— Но в старинку княжна Алина,
Princess Aline who lived in Moscow— Моя московская кузина,
Would talk of Richardson all day. Твердила часто мне о нем.
Ah, Grandison! Ah, Grandison! Ах, Грандисон! Ах, Грандисон!

Nanny:

Yes, I remember. Да, помню, помню.
You’d only become engaged! В то время был еще жених
But I knew it wasn’t a love-match! Супруг ваш, но вы поневоле
For you had set your heart on someone Тогда мечтали о другом,
More romantically inclined, Который сердцем и умом
And dreamt you might elope together! Вам нравился гораздо боле!

Madame Larina & Nanny:

God sent up habit from above Привычка свыше нам дана,
In place of happiness and love. Замена счастию она.
The proverb’s true! Да, так-то так!

Madame Larina:

And so corset, album, Princess Pauline, Корсет, альбом, княжну Полину,
And books of sentimental verse Стихов чувствительных тетрадь,
Were all forgotten.12 Я все забыла.

As the girls sing their sighing romance, the older women “speak” to each other in syllabic
sixteenth notes moving stepwise. As Taruskin notices, their melody is about as boring as
their daily lives.13 In just the opening number, then, Tchaikovsky thematically

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foreshadows the final result of the opera—Tatiana forsakes romance for the stability of her arranged marriage.

**Tatiana’s Sobbing Leit motive**

Tchaikovsky further develops the conflict between romantic expectations and adult realities with a leit motive that trails Tatiana throughout Acts I and II. Introduced by the orchestra in the first four bars, the languid descending motive strongly resonates with the “sixthy” melodies of the romance. (See examples 4.1 and 4.2.)

Example 4.1: Final Arioso from Act I, no. 9, the Letter Scene

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Example 4.2 Act II, No. 17: Lensky’s Aria.

Cui accurately depicted Tatiana’s leitmotive as “sobs.”¹⁵ Not only does the motive show that Tatiana’s whole world has been shaped by the genres she reads (sentimental literature) and that she sings (Russian romances); also, Tchaikovsky will use it to reveal how the adolescent heroine matures.

Tatiana sings her own leitmotive four times during the opera. It first appears in her vocal line as a phrase in the opening duet “Have you heard?,” and shortly thereafter, at the beginning of Olga’s Scene, No 3. Tatiana reflects on her own dreaminess over its strains, connecting the previous romance to her predilection for fantasy. The composer’s allusions to the romance in Tatiana’s prominent leitmotive are key to understanding how his heroine’s music and books have shaped her concept of self. Sentimentality offers the

sheltered adolescent a model for the expression of love. As in Pushkin’s novel, Tchaikovsky’s Tatiana reimagines herself as the late eighteenth-century heroines, “Julie, Clarissa, or Delphine” every time she sings romances or reads books. (See example 4.3: First measures of the Introduction.)

Example 4.3: Tatiana’s “sixthy sobs” in the First Violin part from first measures of the Introduction

Tatiana’s predilection for romantic fantasy brings her to an emotional crisis as soon as a stranger walks into her cloistered world. The composer highlights Tatiana’s collision with reality in the first act. By Act III, however, Tchaikovsky reveals how much Tatiana has learned. The married Tatiana anxiously remembers her adolescent passions with her leitmotive, when she sings “I feel like a girl again.” It is the last time the leitmotive appears in the opera. After two years of marriage, however, Tatiana’s romantic dreams are no longer her most important means of understanding the world. Tchaikovsky shows that she has followed in her mother’s footsteps, becoming a much wiser, pragmatic woman.
Tchaikovsky’s Tatiana matures creatively through the process of writing a love letter. By the end of the Letter Scene, the heroine acknowledges the role that romances and sentimental literature have played in constructing her expectations. Yet she chooses to risk a declaration of love anyway. Tchaikovsky’s audience hears Tatiana develop her thoughts, a process rather than a finished product. Scrapping her first draft, “Let Me Perish,” Tatiana moves between romance-like arioso sections and recitatives in which the heroine reflects on her writing and her emotional state. As Emily Frey describes it, “the letter scene seems to depict a dynamic internal process; this is a heroine whose reflection generates her actions.”16 By the end of the Letter Scene, Tatiana becomes self-conscious enough to take responsibility her fate.

Tchaikovsky’s Tatiana sings Pushkin’s metered and rhymed text, which 19th-century audiences and many contemporary Russians might well know by heart. Arranged in four sections rather than as a single aria, the twelve-minute Letter Scene is the most musically and thematically complex “number” in the entire opera. It can be broken down into four sections and a coda, each section organized around a statement and a restatement of romance-like melodic material. Taruskin notes this division.17

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16 Frey, "Nowhere Man,” 218.
17 Taruskin, On Russian Music, 110.
The sectional structure notwithstanding, Tchaikovsky’s Letter Scene also develops like his orchestral music. Periodic statements of long lyric melodies break into shorter and shorter pieces and upward sequences. They reach melodic climaxes in waves, only to be “cooled off” in order to make space for the next build. These melodic waves are separated by accompanied recitatives that “pause” the melodic development, allowing Tchaikovsky to create a statement on developing the person through creative expression.

Tatiana begins the letter scene with a “false start.” Tellingly, Tatiana’s first attempt at expression, “Let Me Perish” (*Puskai Pogibnu Ia*), is not part of Pushkin’s novel, but an insertion by Tchaikovsky and Shilovsky. It consists of only two eight-bar periods. The first states the leaping melody, outlining an inverted tonic chord. Its quick allegro tempo forces the notes to rush by. By the end of the second period, the melody is already fully developed, reaching its climax in the last bar as if it were the end of a dramatic aria. Although the arpeggiated accompaniment played by the harp and strings

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**Table 4.1: Diagram of Form in Tatiana’s Letter Scene**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Db Maj:</th>
<th>D min:</th>
<th>C Maj:</th>
<th>Db Maj:</th>
<th>Bb Maj:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Section 2</td>
<td>Section 3</td>
<td>Section 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>First Draft</td>
<td>Orchestral Intro</td>
<td>Romance: “Puskai Pogibnu Ia”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Arioso A—</td>
<td>Arioso B—</td>
<td>Orch plays Final Arioso melody</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>“Ia k Vam Pishu”</td>
<td>“Net, nikomu na svete”</td>
<td>Final Arioso sung—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Kto Ty, Moi Angel li Khranitel’”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>T leitmotive</td>
<td>Marked Recitative (text by composer)</td>
<td>Unmarked Recitative</td>
<td>middle section is fully developed, Includes Tatiana’s leitmotive in vocal melody</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Recit.</td>
<td>Arioso A’</td>
<td>Arioso B’</td>
<td>Final Arioso restatement Orchestra repeats the final Arioso</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Coda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Recit:</td>
<td>Kon chaiu!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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and the simple construction of phrases do resemble the Russian romance, the hurried tempo spoils the requisite melancholy affect. (See example 4.4: Section 1, the romance-like “Let me Perish!”)
Example 4.4: An allegro tempo spoils the melancholy affect of “Let me Perish!”
According to the stage directions, after Tatiana completes the sixteen-measure segment of “Let me Perish!,” the soprano “goes to the writing table and sits down, writes for a little while, then stops.” The orchestra sounds seven measures of her leitmotivic material in a scoring identical to the introduction played at the beginning of the opera. As if the leitmotivic has inspired her to expand beyond her first draft, she expresses her dissatisfaction in a recitative, rips up her draft, and begins again: this time with Pushkin’s elegant and famous stanzas.

The stage directions Tchaikovsky included in the autograph score depict Tatiana’s creative flow as one of excitement and hesitation, or as Frey calls it, “calculation as well as inspiration.”18 Tchaikovsky specifically directs the soprano to move between singing and writing, with the orchestra playing the heroine’s melodic material as she writes. This allows the audience to assume that Tatiana is singing the material she has just written, or is writing the material she will then sing in the next section.

Even as each melodic section resonates with the romance genre, however, the Letter Scene’s recitatives reveal that Tatiana maintains a strong element of agency in her own expression. Rather than introducing a short development section after the statement of primary melodic material, as would be typical in a romance, Tchaikovsky sets the “middle sections” of each arioso as accompanied recitatives. In them, we hear Tatiana deliberating whether or not to continue her letter. The text for the second recitative which divides the statement and recapitulation of Arioso A (“I write to you” [Ia k Vam pishu]), certainly appears hackneyed compared to Pushkin’s elegant words and playful meter.

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Section 2, Recitative text dividing the ariosos in sections 1 and 2

Oh yes, I’d sworn that I would hide my love, and not betray the madness that consumes me. But now I cannot hide my passion anymore; Fate has decreed whatever lies in store. I shall declare myself and trust my confession!

О да, клялась я сохранить в душе признанье в страсти пылой и безумой! Увы! Не в силах я владеть своей душой! Пусть будет то, что должно со мной! Ему признаюсь я! Смелей, он все узнает!

Nevertheless, Tchaikovsky’s insertion highlights the push and pull between creation and reflection. Furthermore, the last line shows a heroine taking responsibility for her feelings and her choices.

In the first arioso (section 2), the musical climax is moderate: although Tchaikovsky marks the music *stringendo* and adds a *crescendo* during the last four bars of the restatement of arioso 1, the vocal line does not grow. In section 3, however, Tchaikovsky simply creates an unmarked recitative by lightening the accompaniment of both the upper strings playing *tremolo* and the lower strings playing *pizzacato*. This time using Pushkin’s text for the recitative, Tchaikovsky’s Tatiana again pauses her letter to reconsider the legitimacy of her feelings for “Him,” a man she has met just once.

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19 According to Polina Vaidman's thematic catelogue of Tchaikovsky's works, Konstantin Shilovsky's main contribution to *Onegin* are Triquet's couplets in Act II. Though Tchaikovsky completed the libretto while a guest at Shilovsky's country estate, the actor-librettist minimized his own contribution to the libretto. Polina Vajdman, Ljudmila Korabel'nikova, and Valentina Rubcova, eds., *Thematic and Bibliographical Catalogue of P.I. Tchaikovsky's (P.I. Cajkovskij's) Works*. 2nd ed. (Moscow: P. Jurgenson, 2006), 74-83.
Section 3, Recitative text

And then … No, it was not a dream!
For when we met, at once I knew you,
And in that instant, beating wildly,
My heart cried out to me: Its him!

Давно… нет, это был не сон!
Ты чуть вошел, я вмиг узнала,
И в мыслях молвила: вот он!

Example 4.5: Unmarked Recitative in Tatiana’s Letter Scene, between sections 1 and 2.

Although in Pushkin’s text these words do not depict a moment of reflection, Tchaikovsky sets them as a recitative. Since the creation and reflection structure has already been established, Tatiana’s words when sung seem to illustrate her growing self-awareness.

During the final arioso (section 4), Tatiana answers her own doubts about the influence that her musical and literary consumption has had on the development of her feelings in a fully-formed aria. “Who are you, my guardian angel?” includes a middle section that musically and verbally highlights Tatiana’s agency in her own risk-taking. In
the first statement of the final arioso, Tatiana asks if Eugene is her “guardian angel” or an
“insidious seducer,” wondering how he fits into her model of a hero or villain from a
sentimental novel. As Taruskin describes it, the statement of the final arioso demonstrates
how Tatiana’s “most private and spontaneous emotions at once touchingly and ironically
adhere to the conventions of thought and behavior that govern them.”

Tchaikovsky’s heroine is in pursuit of a hero from a romantic novel, rather than a real lover.

Yet in the final arioso, Tatiana at last sings an extended solo song, and its
structure is even more expansive than opera’s standard *da capo* form. Tchaikovsky
reveals Tatiana’s growth into a confident, though still naïve, young woman ready to take
the risk of her life. In order to ascertain whether or not her visions of love can come true.
Her love letter becomes a moral choice—what matters most to the teenage Tatiana is the
pursuit of love, however misguided.

Indeed, the girl follows her rhetorical question about Eugene with words that
almost show recognition of her own folly.

Section 4, Text for Final Arioso

| Are you an angel sent to guard me, Or will you tempt me and then discard me? |
| Resolve these doubts I can’t dispel. Could all my dreams be self-delusion? Am I too innocent to tell? Has fate prepared its own conclusion? |
| Кто ты, мой ангел ли хранитель, Или коварный искушитель: |
| Мои сомненья разреши. Быть может, это все пустое, Обман неопытной души! И суждено совсем иное... |

20 Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, 243.
According to Roland John Wiley, Tatiana “realizes that Onegin is in large part a vision conjured up by her own musings, and with commanding perspective on her own emotions of the moment […] she intuitively understands the emotional risk she is taking.”

Tatiana reaches a self-actualized awareness of her own desires.

As Tatiana sings her antecedent phrases during the statement and restatement, the orchestra offers the consequent, musically “answering” her literal questions. The first two phrases of the A section are almost identical balanced periods (example 4.6). In both the statement of primary material and the modified restatement, the periods shrink and become sequences of shorter phrases leading upwards until they reach a climax.

Example 4.6: Tatiana sings an antecedent phrase in the Final Arioso, and the clarinet and strings literally answers her with a consequent

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In addition to the question and answer conceit, Tatiana’s singing is framed by large orchestral sections that repeat each of her phrases verbatim. As Wiley notes, in much of the Letter Scene “the orchestra introduces important themes as if presenting thoughts that come into Tatiana’s mind before she gives them verbal expression.” At the end of the section, though, the orchestra completes her thoughts. As Tatiana jots down the conclusion of her love letter, the orchestra depicts how Tatiana’s feelings have grown beyond her person and her pen. While the melody resembles the descending sixth line of the Russian romance, the form expands into the realm of the symphonic through Tchaikovskian motivic development, reminiscent of his orchestral music.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.2: Diagram of Form within the Final Arioso “Kto Ty Moi Angel li Khranitel?” in Tatiana’s Letter Scene</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Orchestra states A</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Db major 13 m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phrases: 5+8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, the development section of the final arioso (Section 4) also conveys a personal development. Earlier in the opera, Tchaikovsky associated Tatiana’s leitmotive with his heroine’s interest in novels and romances. In the letter scene, after Tatiana acknowledges the possibility that she has been completely misled by her romantic

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fantasies, she decides to act anyway. Singing her leitmotive to Pushkin’s words “I’m resolved to lay my empty life before you,” Tatiana welcomes Eugene’s decision.

Section 4, Text for Final Arioso development section using Tatiana’s leitmotiv

No, come what may, I’m now resolved to lay my empty life before you.
Pity my burning tears and grant me your protection, I implore you...

Но так и быть! Судьбу мою
Отныне я тебе вручаю,
Перед тобою слезы лью,
Твоей защиты умоляю,

Yes, sentimental novels and songs have instilled her desire for romance, but through the process of writing and sending her love letter, she learns to act as an independent woman. Although Eugene turns down her proposal in the third tableau, desire and creativity have already pushed Tatiana to grasp her own agency. (See Example 4.7: Development Section from the Final Arioso, “No, Come what may.”)
Example 4.7: Tatiana sings her own leitmotive in the Final Arioso, “No, Come what may”

Caryl Emerson characterizes the Letter Scene in this way: “Tchaikovsky, usurping the function of Pushkin’s narrator with subtlety and enormous persistence, slowly reveals [Tatiana’s] inner self to us.”23 I argue further that the Letter Scene contradicts the idea of Tatiana as Pushkin’s “perfect Muse.” Tchaikovsky’s Tatiana is a complete human being: vulnerable, yet strong, influenced by her cultural environment yet capable of self-awareness. In the Letter Scene, Tatiana gains agency through creative development. Though still chasing an adolescent fantasy, she has made her own “moral” choice to pursue Eugene. Because of her growing maturity, Tatiana will later have the strength to resist him.

**Olga’s Background in Folk Song**

To illustrate an alternative mode of developing the self through music, Tchaikovsky contrasts Tatiana’s romances with the folk tunes associated with Olga and the other girls of the Larin estate. This foil underscores Tatiana’s exceptionality. Most analyses of *Eugene Onegin* characterize these passages as scene-painting or decorative numbers. Soviet musicologists Boris Asafiev and Nadezhda Tumanina argue that the folk choruses and dance music in each tableau “sing” the setting.\(^{24}\) Similarly, Taruskin asserts that in *Onegin*, “the folkish is obviously nothing more than an aspect of décor.”\(^ {25}\) Indeed, the musical composition of the folk songs does provide a light *divertissement*, and they are presented in complete units that are otherwise not integrated into the score. Nonetheless, the verbal content of these “folk songs” establishes of romantic expectations and courtship patterns in Tatiana and Olga’s social sphere.

Unlike Tatiana, who develops her expectations of love by reading sentimental literature and singing romances, Olga and the peasant girls on the estate have learned more coquettish ideas. Many songs “of the people” provide prescriptions for how to love and how to marry. For example, the second folk song of No. 2, “Over the little bridge” (*Uzh po mostu, mostochku*), has a predictive function much like a Greek chorus. A group of young girls dance in a circle as a peasant chorus describe a young man approaching a house of maidens. In the song, the youth carries a musical instrument, but also a cudgel. One of the maidens must leave the safety of the house to greet him. As Wiley notes, the

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tune directly precedes Eugene’s appearance at the Larin estate, and his meeting with the young Tatiana who must “come out to meet him” has life-long consequences.²⁶

Across the little bridge, 
across its wooden planks,  
passed a youth,  
ruddy as a raspberry.  
A cudgel on his shoulder,  
A bag-pipe beneath his coat,  
a whistle on the other side.  
Come out yourself or else send out Sasha or Masha  
Or dear little Parasha […]²⁷

The song also hints at Olga’s relationship to Lensky, who appears at the Larin estate along with Eugene to sing of his love. The final words of the song describe how one of the girls emerges from the house and shyly (read: flirtatiously) apologizes for appearing only in a very light dress.

Parasha went out and
With a sweet voice said:
Vainu, Vainu, Vainu, Vainu,
With a sweet voice said:
Don’t be angry, my dear one
Because I went out, I came out
In a thin shirt-dress
With holes in it.
Vainu, Vainu, Vainu, Vainu,
In a thin shirt-dress
With holes in it.
Vainu!  

Furthermore, in the next Scene and Olga’s Arioso, No. 3, Tchaikovsky separates Tatiana from her light-hearted sister with musical self-quotations. Tatiana sings the words, “How I love to dream to the sounds of these songs and be taken somewhere far away” as the first violins play her sixthy leitmotive. Olga, however, quickly distances herself from the heroine (as sisters are wont to do) by connecting her own lively temperament to the previous song, “Over the Little Bridge.” Olga even repeats a phrase of the circle dance before she launches into an aria, singing about her inability to dream sadly of romance.

Although Olga sings “Have you heard?” with her sister during the opening quartet, Tchaikovsky characterizes her as a musical foil to Tatiana. Instead of sixthiness, Olga’s melody prioritizes the narrower intervals of a fourth, a characteristic shared with Tchaikovsky’s “Over the little bridge,” though not with Russian folk music in general. Gleaning her own ideas about romance from the girlish folk-tunes, Olga is slightly more prepared for society’s expectations of a young woman. Unfortunately, Olga’s folk-

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28 My translation.
29 “Как я люблю под звуку песен этих мечтами у носиться иногда-то, куда-то далеко.” My translation.
influenced understanding of flirtation does not help her understand her fiancé Lensky’s idealism.

Tchaikovsky reinforces the association between female coyness and girlish folk songs in the third tableau. By framing Eugene’s rejection of Tatiana with a folk-like tune about coquettish flirtation, the composer emphasizes the ill-advised nature of Tatiana’s proposition compared to the social norms of the folk, and then her pain. Tchaikovsky takes the song text straight from Pushkin (Chapter 3, Canto 39). Tchaikovsky’s peasant girls sing this “Maidens’ Song,” No. 11, as Tatiana waits for Eugene’s arrival. Though the pentatonic melody and smooth part-writing evoke a lovely calm, the verbal content of the song instructs young maidens to flirt shamelessly. They should attract a boy’s attention with their beauty, and then pelt him with cherries and fruit.

Pretty maidens, dear companions
Dear companions, come this way,
Join us in the games we play.

Choose a happy melody
Suited to our revelry.
If a handsome lad comes near,
Let us try to lure him here.
When he’s seen us from afar
He’ll discover where we are.
If he follows in pursuit,
Pelt him gaily with your fruit;
All the berries you can find,
Summer fruit of every kind.
As the lad is chased away,
See that he is teased and say,
‘Never come again to spy
On the girlish games we play.’

Девицы, красавицы,
душеньки, подруженьки!
Разыграйтесь, девицы,
разгуляйтесь, милые!
Затяните песенку,
песенку заветную.
Заманите молодца
к хороводу нашему!
Как заманим молодца,
как завидим издали,
разбежимся, милые,
закидаем вишеньем,
вишеньем, малиною
красною смородиною!
Не ходи подслушивать
песенки заветные,
не ходи подсматривать
игры наши девичьи!

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Sung both before and after Eugene leaves the heartbroken heroine, the song creates bitter irony. Obviously, Tatiana has been “daydreaming to the folk songs” rather than learning from them. As Eugene exits, Tchaikovsky’s lyric women’s chorus dramatizes Tatiana’s misreading of the kind of behavior actually expected of her. The lyrics of the chorus proscribed a method by which Tatiana might have successfully “lured” Eugene, if she had only listened instead of daydreaming. While Olga learned how to flirt, as her behavior at the name-day ball demonstrates, Tatiana’s predilection for fantasy led her astray.

**Lensky’s Music**

Like Tatiana, Lensky loves musical romances. Tchaikovsky also connects his character to the literary Romanticism of the early nineteenth century. Pushkin’s Lensky is a young man recently returned from his education in Germany, where he becomes an idealist under the influence of Goethe and Schiller. Pushkin’s narrator makes fun of Lensky’s overly dramatic attitude toward life and intimates that his worldview is derivative and unnecessary:

> He sang life’s bloom gone pale and sere—
> He’d almost reached his eighteenth year.\(^{31}\)
> Он пел поблэклый жизни цвет
> Без малого восемнадцать лет.

(Pushkin, Chapter 2, Canto X)

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Pushkin illustrates Lensky’s idealism early in the novel, portraying the young man as totally convinced of the sincerity of the people around him, a black and white worldview which did not allow for human failing.

He knew a kindred soul was fated
To join her life to his career,
That even now she pined and waited
Expecting he would soon appear.
And he believed that men would tender
Their freedom for his honor’s splendor
That friendly hands would surely rise
To shatter slander’s cup of lies.  

(He veril, что душа родная,
Соединиться с ним должна,
Что, безотрадно изнывая,
Его вседневно ждёт одна;
Он верил, что друзья готовы
За честь его принять оковы,
И что не дрогнет их рука
Разбить сосуд клеветника;
(Pushkin, Chapter 2, Canto VIII)

In both Pushkin’s and Tchaikovsky’s tale, Lensky becomes deeply offended by Eugene’s behavior during Tatiana’s name-day party. Furthermore, Olga’s inability to understand his anxiety devastates him. Their mild flirtation fractures his belief that the people close to him are morally perfect. In Tchaikovsky’s version, Lensky sings a lyric farewell to childhood while he waits for Eugene to arrive at the duel. As the young man meditates on the loss of his idealism, the metaphoric golden days of his youth.

Where, oh where have you gone,
golden days of my youth?

Blessed is the day of care,
blessed, too, the coming of darkness!
Early in the morning the dawn-light gleams and the day begins to brighten,
while I, perhaps, will enter
the mysterious shadow of the grave!
And the memory of a young poet
will be engulfed by Lethe's sluggish stream.

Куда, куда, куда вы удалились,
Весны моей златые дни?

Благословен и день забот,
Благословен и тьмы приход!
Блеснет заутра луч денницы
И заиграет яркий день,
А я, быть может, я гробницы
Сойду в таинственную сень!
И память юного поэта
Поглотит медленная Лета.

Under the composer’s own Romantic pen, Pushkin’s silly and misguided romantic becomes a sincere young man, the epitome of creativity, and the male analogue to Tatiana. Although in Pushkin, Lensky’s poem is shallow and derivative, Taruskin argues that Tchaikovsky makes it beautiful.³³ Lensky’s aria, No. 17, is indeed the most expansive in the opera in scope, range, and length and lyricism; connected by a melodic allusion to the romance, it is the twin to Tatiana’s final arioso in the Letter Scene. Although Cui calls the main melody a “doleful diatonic moaning on a descending scale,”³⁴ the line has become the most memorable line from Tchaikovsky’s opera. (See Example 4.2: Lensky’s Aria, at the beginning of the A section.)

Indeed, No. 17 is the “largest” aria of the opera in its scope. Tchaikovsky builds a second development section upon the standard ABA form contains, added after the recapitulation. In addition, Tchaikovsky places a framing device as a short introduction and conclusion, to the lament: “Where, where have you gone, my springs?” (Kuda, kuda, vy udalilis’?). The C section added after the recapitulation of the opening plea, presents the climax of the aria. Lensky cries out for Olga, his ideal beloved who alone understands his heart. Sequencing through the phrase “beloved friend, desired friend” (serdechnyi drug, zhelannyi drug), the tenor reaches a high A-flat on the word “desired.” Through form and sequencing, Tchaikovsky emphasizes Lensky’s plea to regain his ideal beloved, who symbolizes his lost belief in an inherently good world. The focal point of the aria, therefore, represents Lensky’s vain attempt to regain his idealism. When the framing

device, “Kuda, kuda,” repeats, Lensky realizes that he cannot return to his idealistic perspective on life.

Example 4.8: Lensky’s calls out to his “beloved friend” through sequencing in Lensky’s Aria, section C.
In addition to the aria’s striking beauty and scope, No. 17 also hints at a literary subtext that connects Lensky to Tchaikovsky’s discussion of romantic expectations built through the assimilation of music and literature. Regardless of his level of talent, Tchaikovsky’s Lensky strives toward the Byronic image of the wanderer-poet. As Aleksandra Shol’p points out, the famous descending melody line for which the “Lensky sixth” is now named was borrowed directly from movement VI of Franz Liszt’s *Années de Pèlerinage*, First Year for solo piano. The melody line, here in the left hand, even uses the exact same pitches.

Example 4.9: Lensky’s melody in the left hand part of Franz Liszt’s *Années de Pèlerinage*, First Year, no. 6 for solo piano

Liszt composed the set of suites between 1848 and 1854, and published it in 1855. He prefaced Movement VI, entitled “Vallée d’Obermann,” with two quotations from

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35 Many scholars have addressed Pushkin’s own allusions to Byron’s *Childe Harold*. Both Byron and Pushkin use metered verse as they follow the development of a young wandering hero—Pushkin presents Eugene as a caricature of a Byronic type. Like Harold, Eugene acts like a world-weary soul, disillusioned with life’s pleasures. (Tchaikovsky makes sure to keep this character trait in his adaptation. Eugene sings of his boredom in the first tableau as he introduces himself to Tatiana, and in the six tableaux at the Gremin’s ball.) In Chapter 7, however, Pushkin’s Tatiana notes the resemblance as she reads Eugene’s superficial notes in his library, and begins to understand her beloved’s flawed character. Eugene is actually a rather ordinary man whose disillusioned attitude toward life is only a fashionable posture.

Étienne Pivert de Senancour’s novel Obermann (1804) as well as one from Byron’s *Childe Harold Pilgrimage.* As Shol’p demonstrates, Tchaikovsky creates an intertextual link between the overly-romantic Lensky and the poet-wanderer from Senancour’s novel, *Obermann* (1804). In Senancour’s semi-autobiographical novel, the narrator—Obermann—writes meditation-like letters to an unnamed and unseen friend, a person who understands his soul. The narrator has left his family in France and secluded himself on long hiking trips in the Jura valley of Switzerland. (Indeed, the wandering romantic passes through Clarens, the town where Tchaikovsky lived during the fall of 1877 as he completed the drafts for *Onegin.*) Giving voice to many of the philosophical commitments of early Romanticism, Obermann declares that “to be what he ought to be, is of the highest importance to man,” and that “our troubles come chiefly from our being out of place in the social order.” These ideals are shared by Tchaikovsky’s Lensky.

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37 Liszt includes Byron and two quotes from Senancour as his program. First quote: “Que veu-je? Que suis-je? que demander á la nature? …. Toute cuase est invisible, tout fin trompeuse; tout forme change, toute durée s’épuise . . . . . . . . je sens, j’existe pour me consumer en désirs indomptables, pour m’abreuver de la séduction d’une monde fantastique, poer rester attéré de sa volupteuse erreur . Obermann – Lettre 53.” (What do I want? What am I? What can be asked of nature? Every cause is invisible, every ending is misleading; all forms change, all periods run out....I sense, I exist to self-consume in indomitable desires, to drink myself of the seduction of a fantastic world, to stay appaled by it’s voluptuous error. Translation by Rita Thoopul.)
Second quote: “Indicible sensibilité, charme et tourment de nos vaines années; vaste conscience d’une nature partout accablanle et partout impénétrable, passion universelle, indifférence, sagesse avancée, volupteux abandon; tout ce qu’un coeur mortel peut contenir de besoins et d’ennuis profonds, j’ai tout senti, tout éprouvé dans cette nuit méémorable. J’ai fait un pas sinistre vers l’age d’af faiblissement; j’ai dévoré dix années de ma vie. – Lettre 4.” (“Unspeakable sensitivity, charm and torment of our fruitless years; vast consciousness of a nature everywhere overpowering and everywhere impenetarable, universal passion, indifference, advanced wisdom, voluptuous abandon; everything that a mortal heart can contain of needs and deep troubles, I have felt everything, everything experienced in this memorable night. I made a sinister step towards the age of weakening. I have devoured ten years of my life.” Translation by Rita Thoopul.)
Near the end of the book, though, Senancour’s hero proposes that passion for a woman is unnecessary, as is the search for happiness itself. The narrator asserts that early disappointments can lead a good man on the path out of society, where he neither needs to struggle for happiness nor wallow in his lack of it. Senancour reveals in the final sentences that Obermann’s “friend” is actually the inanimate “thing” nature, which can “belong to us more fully. […] Inanimate things] are the joys of mediocrity, limited but certain.”

Like Senancour’s Obermann, Lensky recognizes his own inability to be who he wishes and to live his life as an idealist. Lensky calls out to his “friend”—whom we understand to be Olga. Unlike Obermann, however, Lensky rejects Senancour’s disillusioned peace. Instead, he begs for the return of his previous ideals.

My heart's beloved, my desired one, come, oh come! My desired one, come, I am your betrothed, come, come! I wait for you, my desired one, come, come; I am your betrothed!

Where, where, where have you gone, golden days, golden days of my youth?

Tchaikovsky’s young poet has developed his sense of self through and with the Romantics. Unlike Tatiana, who reaches a point of self-awareness about the influence of sentimental literature—her own romantic “mediation”—during the Letter Scene,

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40 Senancour, Obermann, 108.
Lensky’s “creative” singing does not lead him to beyond his present situation. As he acknowledges that his desire will go unmet, Tchaikovsky’s Lensky clearly explains why he is open to death. Like Tatiana, Lensky is tricked by the distance between his own expectations, learned from literature and music, and the social reality of adult life. He chooses not to go on.

**Eugene: Limited in Music and in Life**

In Act III, Tchaikovsky takes the characters to St. Petersburg, where Eugene finally confronts intense emotions like those experienced by Tatiana and Lensky years before. Returning to Russia from a lengthy stay in other parts of Europe, Eugene shows up at a ball at the home of Prince Gremin, Eugene’s childhood friend. The older Prince explains that he has married the young Tatiana, and he sings an aria about his love and her perfection. Reflecting on the meeting, Eugene decides that he has fallen in love with her.

Like Tatiana, Tchaikovsky’s Eugene declares his love with a romance-like melody, breaking from the syllabic, repetitive motives which characterized his role in the first two acts. Certainly, his limited range comes across as boring compared to the long, lyric arch phrases and romance-linked “sixthiness” that Lensky and Tatiana pour forth. Indeed, Eugene’s melodic material for most of the opera reflects Tchaikovsky’s characterization of him as proper, distant, chic.

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42 Opera directors in the twentieth century have played with this notion. In Boris Pokrovsky’s 1944 staging for the Bolshoi Theater, Lensky drops his pistol during the duel and approaches Eugene with outstretched arms. In Dmitri Tcherniakov’s revisionist production at the same theater from 2006, Lensky forces a shotgun into Eugene’s hands. His death is the accident of a misfire. These productions will be presented in full in Chapters 5 and 6.
Example 4.10: Onegin’s limited range and relatively short phrases in his aria rejecting Tatiana’s affection, Act I, No. 12.

As he realizes that he now “loves” Tatiana, Eugene’s melody expands significantly beyond his established musical character. In fact, he “re-uses” music wholesale—melody, accompaniment, and text—that Tatiana had sung years before during her sleepless night.
Example 4.11: Eugene “borrows” Tatiana’s music from Section 1 of the Letter Scene

Tchaikovsky goes further in entangling the two characters. The section of the Letter Scene that Eugene “borrows” is in fact the first section, “Let me Perish!” (Puskai
Tatiana aborted that first draft, its symmetrical phrases too dull, its tempo too rushed. Wiley writes of Eugene’s imitation that “the immediate effect is to show the unity of feeling between the characters, but here too there is an ironic twist: that Onegin, more jaded than ever, should still be so far behind Tatiana in reaching the point where her feelings were when she wrote her letter years before.” For Eugene, this romance represents the entirety of his affection. He sings of love for only sixteen measures before he rushes off to find Tatiana. He does not try to develop beyond this first “draft.” Like his emotions, Eugene’s words and music remain formulaic. Although Tchaikovsky’s Eugene has expanded his range by Act III, he never reaches even the beginning of the adolescent Tatiana’s creative development or maturity.

**Tchaikovsky’s Female Ideal**

By Chapter 8 of Pushkin’s *Onegin*, Tatiana has married a respectable “fat general”; her husband does not receive further description or contribute to the narrative, except as an accessory to Tatiana’s character. In Act III of Tchaikovsky’s *Onegin*, the composer reimagines this character as the dignified Prince Gremin, an older aristocrat who dotes on his young wife and introduces her to the highest social circles. Still,

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43 Indeed, the text for “Let me perish” is not part of Tatiana’s Letter written by Pushkin. Because so many audience members of the time knew Pushkin’s text, they would have been more sensitive to the difference between the inserted romance by Tchaikovsky and Shilovsky and Pushkin’s original letter.
44 This “borrowing” of material from Tatiana’s Letter Scene is also present in Pushkin’s novel when Eugene writes Tatiana a love letter reminiscent of her own declaration in Chapter 8.
although Tchaikovsky’s Gremin speaks and sings, his role in the narrative remains limited to his relationship with Tatiana.

Scholars and audience members generally perceive Tchaikovsky’s fleshed-out Gremin as a new and important character in the musical adaptation. Kadja Grönke, for example, argues that Gremin’s aria confers his respectability onto Tatiana through the academic quality of the da capo form. In contrast to the accompanied recitative and arioso solos that characterize most of Onegin, the step-wise, arched melodies of Gremin’s perfect periods lend his music an almost “official” quality. Combined with this elegance, the stunning ending on a low G-flat almost always elicits applause.

Example 4.12: Gremin’s step-wise arched phrases depict his propriety and high social standing as he sings about Tatiana

![Example 4.12](image)

The text of Gremin’s aria is limited to praise of Tatiana. Indeed, Tchaikovsky’s listeners never receive any more information about Gremin’s character than Pushkin’s narrator offers. His musical role, embodied as he is on stage, functions like the omniscient narrator’s strophes in Chapter 8. Gremin tells the audience of Tatiana’s

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marriage, her newfound ease in high society, and her beautifully moral person. He paints his wife as an ideal woman.

Where scarce an honest man is found who will keep his word or show compassion, Tatiana shines like a star in the darkness of the night, And appears to me always Like a radiant angel, Like a shining angel of light.  

Среди досадной пустоты Расчетов, дум и разговоров, Она блистаёт, как звезда Во мраке ночи, в небе чистом И мнеявляется всегда В сияньем ангела, в сиянье ангела лучистом.

Gremin’s aria is the musical embodiment of dignity and propriety, and he transfers that balanced finesse to Tatiana. Through Gremin’s words and music, the audience understands that Tatiana, the provincial wallflower, has a new role as the belle of the ball among St. Petersburg’s crème. Within the construction of Tchaikovsky’s narrative, however, Gremin’s character remains undeveloped. His aria, therefore, belongs more to the adult Tatiana than to the character who initially sings it.

When Tatiana employs Gremin’s melody to rebuke Eugene, therefore, Tchaikovsky strengthens the image of Tatiana as the moral ideal. Gremin’s balanced periods and stepwise motion certainly contrast with the melodic material previously associated with Tatiana—her “sixthy” leitmotive and lyrical melodies saturated with sixths. Before Eugene enters the room in the seventh tableau, the heroine contemplates Eugene’s return to her life by singing her leitmotive to the words: “Oh I feel like a girl

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47 My translation.
again.” Yet, when he appears, Tatiana uses the melody from Gremin’s paean (albeit with a lowered third scale degree) to begin her famous monologue: she has become the angel her husband described. The musical contrast between these melodies reinforces Tatiana’s metamorphoses from a dreamy adolescent into a mature woman in control of her words and her actions by the end of the opera.

As we saw in Chapter 3, Pushkin’s critics and readers of the 1870s considered Tatiana’s rebuke speech the key moment in the novel. Realist critics Vissarion Belinsky, Dmitri Pisarev, and even the novelist Dostoevsky centered their interpretations of Pushkin’s Onegin on Tatiana’s refusal of Eugene. Furthermore, theater directors in the nineteenth century highlighted exactly this moment in Onegin in their “scenes from” approaches—the opportunity to “rebuke” Eugene became a common and desirable role for Russian actresses. Therefore, when Tatiana sings this monologue with the melody from Gremin’s aria, its “academic” elegance becomes a powerful part of her voice. (See Example 4.13: Tatiana sings Gremin’s aria.)

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48 “Как будто снова девчкой я стала.” My translation.
Grönke asserts that the recycling of Gremin’s aria reveals the Prince’s role in Tatiana’s transformation. She characterizes the adult Tatiana as “an internally sovereign, stable woman, who, as a matter of course, puts duty over desire,” and Gremin’s melody as “armor” used to defend Tatiana from Eugene’s emotional assault. Yet Tchaikovsky’s Tatiana becomes emotionally upset by Eugene’s advances, and his proposal to elope. Indeed, Tatiana and Eugene’s passionate duet during the finale reveals Tatiana’s continuing feelings for Eugene. Therefore, her embodiment of the moral ideal is manifest not in Gremin’s words about her, but in her ability to make the virtuous choice, even as she suffers. In Tchaikovsky’s second version of the finale, at least, Tatiana’s emotionality emphasizes her ultimate moral strength.

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Tchaikovsky’s Major Mistake

By the 1870s, Russian readers acknowledged the final confrontation between Tatiana and Eugene as the moral center of the novel. Pushkin’s narrator describes their final meeting as a strange encounter. After spending the winter shut inside his library, Eugene appears in Tatiana’s mysteriously empty rooms at the exact moment when she is crying over his love letter. Pushkin’s Tatiana rebukes him for noticing her too late, delivering a fully-formed speech. She does not waver—she does not pause to think. While the heroine allows that she still loves him, she declares that she will remain true to her husband. Pushkin’s Tatiana vanishes from the room. Eugene remains speechless during the whole encounter, even when he hears the footsteps of the general approaching. The scene leaves many questions unresolved. Why did Eugene happen upon Tatiana at exactly that moment? What does she really think about Eugene’s motivations? And why, ultimately, does she stay with her husband? The choices Tchaikovsky made in adapting Chapter 8 into Act III (tableaux 6 and 7) became the largest point of contention for early critics of the opera.

The first version (1878-79) presents a significant alteration of Tatiana’s level of agency, and thus, her ability to make a moral decision. As Tatiana repeats her refusal to elope, she finds herself in Eugene’s arms. The stage directions read: “Onegin tries to draw Tatyanova to him; highly overwrought, she struggles to free herself from his embrace but her strength fails her.”51 Even as she demands that Onegin leave her, he holds her in his arms. Gremin enters the scene and sees Tatiana in Eugene’s arms. As the stage

51 Tchaikovsky, Onegin Libretto, trans. Lloyd-Jones, 92.
directions describe it, “Tatyana, having seen him [Gremin], lets out a cry, and falls into his embrace unconscious. The prince makes an authoritative gesture for him to leave.” Tchaikovsky’s first version of the final scene strips Tatiana of her ability to demonstrate her moral strength by refusing Onegin on her own. The Tatiana of the first version of the final scene is a woman who is weakened by her emotions, and who concedes her agency to both Eugene and Gremin.

Tchaikovsky received a good deal of negative feedback about his adaptation of Tatiana’s character as she was imagined by audience of the 1870s. In one vivid description, Tchaikovsky’s friend and supporter German Larosh’ reprimanded the composer for the final scene in his review of the student premiere. Larosh’ wrote that Tchaikovsky has introduced a fundamental alteration to Pushkin in the last scene of his opera; he has made Tatiana show a weakness in her meeting with Onegin for which we would look in vain in the original poem. Unshakeable in the strict fulfillment of her duty but tormented deep down by a gnawing passion, Tatiana in the last chapter of Pushkin’s Onegin is a truly tragic figure whose noble purity does not deprive her of a touching element of tenderness. Perhaps the composer thought that the latter element would be stronger if he lowered Tatiana a little from the pedestal on which we are used to seeing her and made her practically disprove her famous line “I am pledged to another and will be true to him forever” by five minutes of kisses and embraces. Maybe this radical change brings greater operatic effectiveness; but Tatiana’s character as created by the poet and reverently preserved by the composer throughout the opera until this scene is destroyed and replaced by another one.

Indeed, Tchaikovsky himself agonized over the best way to dramatize the last scene long before the premiere. Even when he had already completed the autograph score, the

52 Tchaikovsky, Eugene Onegin Libretto, trans. Lloyd-Jones, 93.
composer wrote to his colleague Konstantin K. Albrecht on February 15, 1878 that he was unsure of the ending:

Ask Samarin [the stage director for the premiere] to read through the libretto carefully. Now, when the score is already prepared, I can not change anything in the essential course of action, but I am earnestly asking kind Ivan Vasil’evich [Samarin] to correct everything in the stage directions which seems to him stupid, inappropriate, awkward, etc. … I ask him also to pay particular attention to the last line. I was required due to musical and theatrical demands to dramatize powerfully the scene of Tatiana’s explanation with Onegin. At the end I have it that Tatyana’s husband appears and orders Onegin with a gesture to withdraw. It was necessary to me at this point that Onegin say something, and I put into his mouth the following line, “O Death! O Death! I go to seek thee out!” It seems to me that this is all stupid, that he must say something else, and what I can not conceive.54

Tchaikovsky’s letter shows that the composer was uncomfortable with the ending he prepared, and he was willing to change the final phrase and the stage directions. Despite the composer’s misgivings, Tchaikovsky’s first version was used by students at the Moscow Conservatory for the 1879 premiere.

By the professional premiere at the Bolshoi Theater in 1881, however, Tchaikovsky had “corrected” his mistake. In the second version, Tatiana struggles to resist Onegin and even embraces him, but instead of succumbing to his entreaties, she walks out of the room. Gremin never appears. Eugene’s last words—“Disgrace! Anguish! O my pitiable fate!”—are about misery, rather than suicide.55 To a Western audience member, these changes may seem minor. Yet Tchaikovsky’s “correction” of his first version allows Tatiana to be active creator of her own fate. Just as Tchaikovsky creates a dynamic form out of Tatiana’s letter, the composer transforms Tatiana’s strange

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55 “Позор! Тоска! О, жалький жребый мой!” My literal translation.
monologue into a dramatic confrontation, a dialogue between the married Princess and her “insidious tempter.” Tatiana engages Eugene in her rebuke. They argue. Tchaikovsky’s Eugene repeatedly interrupts her refusal-monologue with verbal passages from his own love letter, as if trying to prove to her that he has real feelings for her. Instead of listening in silence, Eugene presses Tatiana to elope with him, singing “You are mine!”

Unlike Pushkin’s self-controlled heroine, Tchaikovsky’s Tatiana can still be deeply affected by Eugene. The stage directions in the second version read: “Tatyana, overwhelmed by her confession, sinks on Onegin’s breast. He takes her in his arms, but she, recovering her senses, frees herself from his embrace.”

Eugene begins to overcome Tatiana’s stoicism. Nikolai Zekulin notes, Tatiana here addresses him informally as “Eugene” for the first time in the opera. She soon switches to the informal pronoun, calling him “thou” (ty) and her final words “Farewell forever!” (Proshchai na vek!) reflect the informal pronoun as well.

Despite Eugene’s protests, Tatiana walks out of the room and out of his life forever. Eugene sings the last words—“Disgrace! Anguish! O my pitiable fate!”—to an empty stage.

The rejection of Tchaikovsky’s first ending by audience members and critics underlines how central Tatiana’s moral decision to stay with her husband had become for the audience members of the late 1870s. Tchaikovsky’s Tatiana of the second version maintains her moral strength even as she demonstrates her capacity for emotion,

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56 Tchaikovsky, Onegin Libretto, trans. Lloyd-Jones, 91.
Tchaikovsky’s expansion of Eugene and Tatiana’s final meeting from a stern lecture to a passionate confrontation also expanded Tatiana Larina’s iconic characteristics. The operatic heroine is at once vulnerable and strong, human and ideal. Unlike Pushkin who hides his Muse behind the narrator’s veil, Tchaikovsky illustrates how a dreamy country girl grew into an exceptional heroine through avid reading and singing, creative experimentation, and by taking responsibility for her own fate. This ending is the version that has remained in the repertoire ever since.

**Tatiana as a Model for Creative Expression**

Tatiana, who expressed herself through writing, has become a model for the transformation of the self through creative expression. *Onegin* thematically explores the effect of music and literature on the individual person, and the need to read, listen, and write in order to be a moral person. Tchaikovsky’s *Onegin* foregrounds the difficulty of confronting the “real world” of adult sociality after a childhood of reading and romances—Tatiana and Lensky are initially misguided by romantic expectations. Yet the composer’s focus on Tatiana’s moral and creative development demonstrates that the language built in childhood becomes a tool for negotiating the emotional intensity of love and life. Though Olga’s assimilation of the moral lessons of light-hearted folk songs allows avoid her to enter the adult social sphere without a major struggle, she still suffers when Lensky mistakes her flirtation for betrayal—she suffers for a lack of substance. Having been bored with folk-songs, romances, and books all his life, Eugene lacks grounding in any form of expressive culture. Underprepared to deal with adult feelings,
the title character rushes through his love letter. Eugene never truly understands his rejection by an empowered adult heroine.

Tchaikovsky’s *Onegin* embodies and prefigures with the larger themes of this dissertation—the agency of the reader and audience member in the art, and the influence of artistic expression on the creation of social and moral identity. Tchaikovsky’s difficulties with his first ending demonstrate how potent Tatiana Larina had become as an icon of morality by the end of the 1870s. His “corrected” version of 1881, however, allowed audiences to align the operatic characters with the “Onegin, Tatiana and Lensky figures of Russian culture,”58 to borrow Nikolai Zekulin’s words. But Tchaikovsky also added the quality of emotional vulnerability to Tatiana’s image, emphasizing the close connection between agency, morality, and creative expression throughout his opera. Ultimately, Tchaikovsky’s Tatiana fused with Pushkin’s heroine in the Russian imagination. By the end of the nineteenth century, Tatiana Larina became a model for an exploration of the self through creative expression that would influence multiple generations of Russians, even the writers of twenty-first century spectator reviews.

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Chapter 5: The “Classic” Onegins of Konstantin Stanislavsky and Boris Pokrovsky

In 2006, when Dmitri Tcherniakov radically re-envisioned the Bolshoi Theater’s production of Eugene Onegin, Russian opera fans and critics compared his work to “traditional” productions. Moscow’s Bolshoi Theater and the Stanislavsky-Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theaters had run largely the same productions for the duration of the Soviet period. Already a world-renowned theater pioneer, Konstantin Stanislavsky introduced his chamber setting of Onegin in 1922. It was adapted for the main stage at the Stanislavsky Musical Theater in 1926, where it ran until 2006. Boris Pokrovsky presented his version of Onegin in 1944 on the main stage of the Bolshoi Theater, and produced it many times a year until Tcherniakov’s 2006 premiere. Indeed, Tcherniakov’s new production seemed particularly powerful because generations of opera audiences knew the “traditional” productions so well, and considered them to be true to Tchaikovsky’s “original” vision.

Yet video footage and autobiographical notes reveal that both Stanislavsky and Pokrovsky consciously incorporated their own directorial concepts into the staging. By highlighting Stanislavsky’s and Pokrovsky’s contributions to the scenography—the total visual component of opera—I show how Soviet theater directors infused their productions of Onegin with concepts that reflect the moral considerations and needs of the early Soviet period. In this chapter, I illustrate the how their directorial choices both
reflected and shaped the moral values of Soviet citizens. Building on Tchaikovsky’s score, both Stanislavsky and Pokrovsky emphasized Tatiana as the true hero of the Soviet *Onegin*, foregrounding her simple sincere heart, her Russianness, and her integrity.

**Opera Scenography as Adaptation**

What we now call “director’s theater” in opera (Rus. *Rezhissërskii teatr*, Ger. *Regietheater*) emerged from a trend in drama that foregrounded the director’s new interpretation of a canonic work through major alterations of the scenography. Since the early twentieth century, theater directors and designers increasingly approached the visual element of theater as an expressive agent, rather than merely a backdrop for verbal text. The scenographic turn in theater direction originated in the integrative approach to opera developed by Richard Wagner, known as *Gesamtkunstwerk*; indeed, the pioneers of scenography often adopted the language and aesthetic principles of other forms of art in forming a conception of their own. As Joslin McKinney and Philip Butterworth note, scenography’s pioneers such as Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig asserted that the design in a theatrical play has as much influence on the overall performance as the playwright’s words.¹

McKinney and Butterworth define scenography as a theatrical design: “the manipulation and orchestration of the performance environment […] through architectonic structures [the set], light, projected images, sound, costume, performance

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objects, or props.”

The director’s work of casting, blocking, coaching diction, and creating a through-line consciously interacts with the visual contributions of the scenographer. Often, the two creative roles are both fulfilled by the director. This scenographic approach is often scornfully referred to as “director’s theater,” but it has become a standard and expected element of contemporary theater, especially in Europe.

In effect, the concept of scenography is also an argument for an integrative definition of theater in which all the visual elements on the stage affect the meaning of the play or opera as a performance. As the theater designer Pamela Howard puts it, “the scenographer visually liberates the text and the story behind it, by creating a world in which the eyes see but the ears do not hear. That is, they create an active but silent world in which the acting, singing, and movement come to be.”

Regietheater’s emphasis on the role of the director has come to the foreground of opera in the last thirty years. The “Regietheater” approach, so called since Patrice Chéreau first applied it to the Ring Cycle in 1970s Germany, involves a deliberate alteration of the manipulated scenography in order to fundamentally reinterpret themes, characters, and meanings embedded in classic opera. By the first decade of the twenty-first century, Regietheater productions appear in most Western opera houses. Some spectators look forward to appraising the director’s scenographic conception, one of the most exciting elements of the performance. For these audience members, the director’s dialogue with the canonic staging and with the composer’s words is another fascinating mode of experiencing opera. Others bemoan the distraction of the new scenography or the hubris of a director who dared to revise the

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operas of the great composers. As analyses of Stanislavsky’s and Pokrovsky’s productions of *Eugene Onegin* demonstrate, opera directors in Russia infused the composer’s score with their own ideas. Their work reveals that even the “traditional” productions of *Onegin* reflect the values of the director, and that even in the early twentieth century, directors conceived of their work as a flexible dialogue with the composer’s score and with their culture.

**Stanislavsky’s Studio Production of *Onegin* (1922)**

Indeed, Konstantin Stanislavsky’s productions at the Moscow Art Theater (MXAT) at the turn of the twentieth century helped to begin this trend. Stanislavsky’s productions focused on naturalism in an attempt to create an illusion of reality. The theater pioneer often lowered the social class of Chekhov’s provincial gentry, and his actors wore the same style of clothing as did MXAT audiences. Stanislavsky inserted long pauses between the spoken lines to allow the audience to take in the everyday sonic environment such as the sound of crickets or rain. Stanislavsky often placed large furniture center stage, including tables on which Chekhov’s characters would eat, in order to prevent the actors from declaiming their lines from downstage center as had been common in nineteenth-century theater. His set designs forced actors to declaim their lines from the periphery. He filled the space with non-speaking roles (such as servants) and embraced mundane rather than melodramatic gestures. (His actors would use a real-life gesture such as eating or picking up an object up from the floor to “undercut” the

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seriousness of their words.) Under Stanislavsky’s direction, the Moscow Art Theater (MXAT) performed the first productions of Chekhov’s *The Seagull* (1896), *The Three Sisters* (1901), *Uncle Vanya* (1902) and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904). These productions established theatrical conventions for representing late nineteenth-century life in Russia, often emphasizing the tragic in Chekhov’s tragi-comedies.

After the Russian Revolution in 1918, Stanislavsky established a training program for the young singers of the Bolshoi Theater. From 1918 to 1922, Stanislavsky lived and worked in the studio workshop located in a grand old house on Leont’evsky Alley. The Opera Studio included small rehearsal rooms, the director’s office, and an intimate theater built inside the home’s refashioned ballroom. As K. N. Antarova and Iu. S. Kalashnikov note, the theater director worked to teach young opera singers his method for acting naturally, following his famous method.5 Bella Martin describes how his system required actors to prepare the parts so well that they can “experience the part” on stage, connecting the actor’s personal memories of emotion with the emotions they portrayed.6 In the Opera Studio project, Stanislavsky hoped to transfer his method to opera, creating a new generation of “singing actors” (and thus, making their performances slightly more accessible to working-class audiences who did not grow up attending opera).7 Stanislavsky had taken up the idea first developed at the Moscow Private Opera of Sergei Mamontov in the 1880s. Mamontov endeavored to synthesize the

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6 For further reading, see Bella Martin, *Konstantin Stanislavsky* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 39-82.

musical and theatrical in opera. Stanislavsky’s opera studio became a training ground, a
“school of meaningful song.”

In May of 1922, Stanislavsky staged a small-scale “chamber performance” of
_Eugene Onegin_ with his young trainees. The small venue brought the audience physically
close to the singers. It could hold a maximum of eighty-five audience members, and the
stage would not be large enough for a dancing chorus. During the famous polonaise of
the sixth tableau, the opera chorus promenaded up the aisles of the hall because they did
not fit on the stage. Indeed, some of the audience members felt as if “they were also
guests at the Larins’.” The restricted stage perfectly suited Stanislavsky’s directorial
ambition to infuse opera with “the spirit of chamber-ness, poetry, humaneness and chaste
simplicity.”

Stanislavsky’s directorial goals also aligned well with the Bolshevik
government’s interest in theatrical realism, as well as its need to address the problem of
representing classical opera’s aristocrats. Under Stanislavsky’s direction, the Larin
family—minor gentry—became (relatively) “simple people.” The premiere removed
almost all the elegant trappings of big opera productions—elaborate costumes, props, and
sets—focusing the audience’s attention on character acting. Four Roman columns
dominated the stage, functioning as the backdrop for each scene. They became the façade
of the Larin home, the background for Tatiana’s bedroom, a portico in the garden scene,

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8 Liubov’ Nikolaevna Barinova, “Rabota K.S. Stanislavskogo nad Operoi _Evgenii Onegin_: Opernaia
Studiia Bol’shogo Teatra. 1922 god” [K. S. Stanislavky's work on the Opera _Eugene Onegin_. Bolshoi
Theater Opera Studio, 1922], KFN Dissertation (Moscow: Institut Iskusstvoznaniia, 1996), 9.
9 Barinova, _Opernaia Studiia_, 13.
10 Barinova, _Opernaia Studiia_, 12.
and columns in Gremin’s St. Petersburg ballroom. The almost barren stage projected outwards from the proscenium toward the audience. The small space held few props, including a bed for the Letter Scene and a white bench for the garden scenes of the first and third tableaux. The stark simplicity of the set and the intimacy of the venue allowed the audience to perceive much smaller gestures and facial expressions than would be possible on the enormous opera stages of Moscow.

Lubov’ Barinova describes how the acting coach I. Samarin strove to elicit “natural and thoughtful behavior, the coordination of gesture and song, correct expression of feeling, sincerity, and immediacy.” For example, one of the most significant directorial revisions to the opera was Stanislavsky’s decision to have Tatiana perform her entire Letter Scene sitting in bed. Instead of rushing around her bedroom in ecstasy, Tatiana remains in place for the duration of the twelve-minute scene. As P. Rumiantsev, a vocalist who studied at Stanislavsky’s studio, describes, “the actress doesn’t turn and breathe to the music, but rather the music follows her feelings and actions.” At the very last moment of the final arioso, Tatiana rises to her knees. According to Barinova, Tatiana’s restrained movement allowed the audience to focus on her “interior thought rather than her exterior performance.” Samarin and Stanislavsky’s minimal acting reinforced the intimacy created by the venue.

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12 Stanislavsky’s columns remained a prominent feature of most Onegin stagings, including the 1944 Bolshoi production and others throughout the world.
13 Barinova, Operaia Studii, 13.
15 Barinova, Operaia Studii, 15.
In coaching sessions, Stanislavsky highlighted the characters’ youth. As Barinova notes, Stanislavsky attempted to emphasize the personalities of the principal characters by opposing the male and female pairs on stage. Whereas Tatiana is presented as somber, Olga is represented as a “half-childish coquette,” a young woman who is not truly committed to her fiancée. Stanislavsky emphasized Lensky’s naiveté, depicting his “youthful jealousy” at the name-day party and “youthful sincerity” during the duel scene. Stanislavsky’s director’s notes highlight the moral opposition between Tatiana and Eugene’s characters when the hero rejects Tatiana’s proposal in the third tableau. Yet, by the sixth tableau in St. Petersburg, Eugene is a changed man. According to Barinova, Stanislavsky’s Eugene is “eaten up by the bitter memory of guilt for Lensky’s death,” and he demonstrates his remorse through gestures. Clearly, the theater director consciously emphasized his own interpretation of Onegin’s moral conflicts as he guided the singers to act more naturally.

Stanislavsky’s chamber staging reveals a growing interest in “chaste simplicity” and “sincerity,” virtues that would become the primary personal moralities during the early Soviet period. These words appear frequently in the stage directions, the director’s notes, and in memoirs prepared by Barinova and Rumiantsev. When Stanislavsky’s production moved to the full-size stage in 1926, it became the most important production in the Stanislavsky-Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theater repertoire. The four columns became the theater’s emblem. Stanislavsky’s Onegin was replaced by an “updated” version by Aleksandr Titel’ in 2007.

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16 Barinova, Opernaia Studii, 7.
17 Barinova, Opernaia Studii, 18-19.
Beauty and Authenticity in Pokrovsky’s Wartime Production

The Bolshoi Theater’s production of *Eugene Onegin* produced in 1944 became the best-known opera of the Soviet period, performed on the most important stage of the Soviet sphere. The Bolshoi Theater premiered *Eugene Onegin* in 1944 during the Second World War, as the Red Army chased Axis armies out of Russia and through Eastern Europe. Indeed, many soldiers attended Pokrovsky’s *Onegin* at the Bolshoi before they left for the Eastern front from Moscow. This production addresses the needs of a wartime populace who wanted a way to escape the grim reality of daily life.\(^{18}\) The director, Boris Pokrovsky, developed Stanislavsky’s emphasis on chastity, simplicity, and sincerity on much larger scale than Stanislavsky’s intimate production. In his production of *Eugene Onegin*, the director tried to represent an ideal setting apart from politics and war, a place where the “intonation” of feeling and “pure beauty” takes precedence.\(^{19}\) Seemingly in direct opposition to Stanislavsky’s focus on naturalism, Pokrovsky asserts, “reality in opera, and in art in general, is not possible. Theater is made of higher feelings.”\(^{20}\) These values form the humanist side of socialist realism.

As demonstrated in the Bolshoi Theater’s revival of the 1944 production, performed under Pokrovsky’s direction in 2000, although the director’s stated approach

\(^{18}\) The 1944 production is credited to Boris Pokrovsky for directing, Aleksandr Melik-Pashaev for conducting, Piotr Williams for scenography, and Vladimir Varkovitsky for choreography. The reconstruction was directed by Mark Ermler under the direction of Boris Pokrovsky.


was specifically anti-realist, specific narrative traits of socialist realism are perceptible throughout the production.\textsuperscript{21} For example, the director highlighted Madame Larina’s closeness to her serfs even though in both Pushkin’s novel and Tchaikovsky’s opera, the Larin family is represented as the lower gentry. The opera director presents a large estate with serfs; an elegant manor house is decorated with neoclassical columns and a French garden. In the first scene, however, Madame Larina knits beside the Nanny as she boils jam in the elegantly designed courtyard. Tatiana and her sister are dressed in pastel blue and pink dresses, and Tatiana’s long brown braid markedly contrasts with Olga’s blonde curls. Tatiana’s braids align her with the traditional peasant hairstyles of the young female serfs. Furthermore, her braid emphasizes the contrast between the deep and dreamy heroine and her cute but superficial sister who wears a more fashionable hairstyle. Although the young daughters of the estate frolic in pastel gowns, Nanny and Madame Larina wear brown sarafans and beige bonnets. In their drab appearance and homely activities, the aristocratic owner (\textit{barina}) of the estate can barely be differentiated from the Nanny, her servant and companion.

In the next scene, an enormous group of peasant-serfs lays a giant sheaf of wheat at Madame Larina’s feet—the symbolic harvest. The virtues of the Russian \textit{narod} are highlighted in the representation of the Larins’ serfs. Peasant dancers perform a circle dance (\textit{khorovod}) and the owners, servants and serfs of the Larin estate chat in a large group. Madame Larina and the Nanny merge with the group as they treat the agricultural workers to some wine. Pokrovsky’s \textit{barina} is a good-hearted old lady; she just happens to

\textsuperscript{21} Piotr Tchaikovsky, \textit{Eugene Onegin}, 1944 Production Revival, directed by Boris Pokrovsky and Mark Ermler (2000, Ratingen, Germany: TDK Mediactive, 2005), DVD.
own the estate, but she lives and works alongside the others. The presentation of Madame Larina as close to the peasants reinterprets Pushkin’s description of the barina’s transition from a debutante to a homely country wife, pushing her much further down the social hierarchy. Pokrovsky’s choice highlights the “simplicity” of the Larin family and provides Tatiana with an appropriate class background for an archetypal socialist realist heroine.

The representation of the Russian landscape’s natural beauty further emphasizes Pokrovsky’s concept of unadulterated beauty, but also subtly reinforces the early Soviet preoccupation with the relationship between a people (narod) and the physical aspects of the land. More importantly, he emphasized the beauty of Russia’s natural environment, creating enormous and detailed illusions of trees against a deep blue sky. In Tableau 5, a snow-covered lake fills the Bolshoi’s enormous stage. Each of the seven tableaux has a unique, breathtaking set design. Pushkin’s descriptive passages detail the “lyric” beauty of Russian forests and magical frosty mornings. In Pokrovsky’s staging, the beauty of Russian landscapes becomes a major component of the story, supporting a nationalist appreciation for the land itself.

Pokrovsky selected costumes and sets relatively authentic to the 1820s, but his chosen color scheme also portrays a metaphorical opposition between the warmth of country life and the cold, harshness of St. Petersburg’s aristocracy, emphasizing the contrast already present in Tchaikovsky’s opera. As Richard Taruskin describes it, Tchaikovsky deliberately contrasts the topical associations of the “waltz” danced at the Larin party in the country, and the polonaise danced by the aristocratic guests at the
Gremins’ St. Petersburg ball. Pokrovsky further emphasized the sharp contrast between the affective warmth of the Larins’ home and the cold formality of the Gremins’ ballroom with color and gesture. Tatiana’s name-day party takes place in a two-story wood-paneled home full of children and girls in colorful dresses. The Larins even welcome the foolish Monsieur Triquet, a red-haired bumbler in striped pants.

In the St. Petersburg ball, however, monochromatic white columns and white dresses dominate the color palette. Identically costumed guests promenade around the ballroom in stiff courtly dances, and no one speaks to Eugene, now an outsider. Pokrovsky thus highlighted the warmth of the Russian folk (narod) and the harsh cruelty of the “European” capital and its rulers. The Bolshoi’s Soviet production further emphasized a nationalist trope from nineteenth-century Russian literature, allowing its twentieth-century citizens to claim the virtues of the countryside represented by the simple Larin family’s warmth, while reminding them of the necessity of the Revolution to overcome the cruel aristocracy.

Pokrovsky’s fifth tableau depicts the Manichean duality of good and evil, a theme certainly not present in Pushkin or in Tchaikovsky’s adaptation. In the Bolshoi’s production, Lensky and Eugene’s duel takes place during a snowy pre-dawn morning. As Lensky turns towards Eugene to begin the duel, the younger man smiles, gazing towards the sky rather than at his opponent. Pokrovsky’s sweet young man then looks at his arm as if he does not recognize the pistol in his hand or what is happening. Acting as if he wished to halt the duel, Lensky extends his arms toward Eugene and takes a few steps

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towards his opponent with a smile on his face. Yet Pokrovsky’s Eugene shoots point blank at his friend, oddly not looking towards Lensky to aim the pistol. Lensky falls and dies. The victim and villain are quite clear in this presentation of the duel. Eugene’s guilt over his friend’s death is not mediated by any questions about the idiocy of dueling practices or of Lensky’s naïve and wrong-headed challenge. As in socialist realist stories, it is clear which character is completely good and which is completely evil.

Even as Pokrovsky asserted that his production of Eugene Onegin illustrated pure beauty, his directorial choices reveal the omnipresent politics of socialist realism in the 1930s and 1940s. On the opera stage, Tatiana develops along the trajectory of a socialist realist heroine, as discussed in Chapter 3. Her braided hair, homely childhood, and her warmly peasant-like mother provide her with the appropriate class beginnings. As a sincere and serious young woman, her internal strength allows her to declare her love to Eugene with honesty. Although she suffers, she also recognizes Eugene’s shallowness. The title character’s duel with the innocent Lensky only reinforces Tatiana’s understanding of Eugene’s limitations. In the final scene, Tatiana acknowledges her own desire for love. In Pokrovsky’s interpretation, however, Tatiana’s knowledge of Eugene’s superficiality and her own personal integrity provide her with the strength to reject the mirage of love and remain true to her own life choices.

Created by Pokrovsky in 1944, the Bolshoi Theater’s Onegin played continuously with only minor revisions to the costumes in 1967 and 1994. Pokrovsky’s production has been performed at the Bolshoi, broadcast on Soviet television and even cinematized in
1958 by Roman Tikhomirov. Thus, Pokrovsky’s socialist realist interpretation of Tchaikovsky’s realist adaptation became the canonic representation of *Eugene Onegin* until Perestroika.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, the same political and social forces fostering revision in politics, education, and the economy impacted the staging of the opera *Eugene Onegin*. For Galina Vishnevskaya, the consummate Soviet diva, the Tatiana Larina of Pokrovsky’s production represented the ideal Russian woman. The Soviet-era soprano based her international opera career on her performances of *Onegin*. She first learned the role of Tatiana at the Bolshoi Theater under the direction of Boris Pokrovsky in 1952. Her autobiography, *Galina: A Russian Story*, published in 1984, reveals Vishnevskaya’s complete assimilation of Tatiana’s virtues into her moral identity.

Tatiana! In my childhood she had captivated me. To me, she embodied everything that was most beautiful and valuable in Russian women: a deeply passionate nature, tenderness, boldness, and a willingness to sacrifice herself…. For Russian women there is a special sweetness in the willingness to sacrifice oneself. It is as strong in them as love. The soprano attributes these virtues to Tatiana Larina and all Russian women, and demonstrates them through her own narrative. Vishnevskaya portrays herself as a passionate, bold diva, who falls in love with her cellist (Mstislav Rostropovich) in four days. Her courage allows her to shelter Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. She later sacrifices her position at the Bolshoi Theater and emigrates in order to save her husband from artistic

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despair. According to her own account, Vishnevskaya possesses a similar capacity for passion, tenderness, bold courage, and sacrifice as her moral ideal, Tatiana Larina.

By 2000, almost all major Moscow drama and opera theaters included productions of *Onegin* in their repertoire. The opera theaters performed Tchaikovsky’s opera with moderate transformations of the scenography, whereas directors of dramatic theaters created radical adaptations, mixing operatic excerpts with recitations of poetry, critical commentary, and period costumes. In 2002, looking back on his now “traditional” interpretation from 1944, Pokrovsky asserts that the strong moral values of the past, lost with the disintegration of society after the collapse of state socialism, can at least be experienced during a performance of *Onegin*. He says: “In this performance [Tchaikovsky’s Eugene Onegin], any person will feel what we [Russians] have already lost: honesty, generosity of spirit.”25 Pokrovsky and many Russian operagoers feel that performances of classic opera connect people to a higher moral world, one that is difficult to locate in contemporary Russia.

**Galina Vishnevskaya Marches Out**

In this context, the Bolshoi Theater commissioned a new production of Tchaikovsky’s *Onegin* from opera director Dmitri Tcherniakov. Already well known for his iconoclastic productions of *A Life for the Tsar* (2004) and *Aida* (2005) for the

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Mariinsky Theater, Tcherniakov’s production of *Onegin* was the first Regietheater staging of a classic opera at the Bolshoi Theater. With the premiere of Tcherniakov’s *Onegin*, director’s theater burst onto the Moscow scene. As I will discuss in Chapter 6, Tcherniakov re-envisions Tatiana as a mentally fragile woman, Lensky as an idiot, and his death in the duel as a gun accident. The ensuing scandal elicited a major debate between those audience members who engaged with Tcherniakov’s ideas, and those who rejected his interpretation.

Galina Vishnevskaya inspired and led this debate. At the premiere on September 1, 2006, the diva angrily marched out of the theater after the duel scene. A few days later, Vishnevskaya called Tcherniakov’s production the “desecration of a national shrine” in an open letter to the Bolshoi Theater director, Aleksandr Iksanov. Vishnevskaya described her feeling of alienation from the current direction of the Bolshoi, and she refused to come to the eightieth birthday celebration hosted for her by the Bolshoi Theater. The soprano’s response to the staging demonstrates how deeply *Onegin* had become integrated into her identity. Her letter invoked the emotionality of Tatiana’s Letter and the despair of Lensky’s “suicide aria”:

> I attended the premiere of “Eugene Onegin” at the Bolshoi Theater, and I was overcome with despair at what happened on the stage. For two days I couldn’t sleep, and I’ve written a letter to the director. About how I refuse to celebrate my jubilee in the theater. It turns out that life is lived in vain… if the Bolshoi Theater puts out such… When I heard, “Kuda, Kuda, Vy Udalis’” I simply began to sob from humiliation.…

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27 Ibid.
Subtly equating Lensky’s past with the golden days of Soviet art, Vishnevskaya’s public letter drew Russian identity, the Soviet past, and the future of Russian art into her negative reaction to Tcherniakov’s production. Vishnevskaya scorned the production as a transgression against the moral order of nation and state. The power of her voice to stir debate was largely due to her respected place in the pantheon of Great Russian artists, and because she is so closely related with Tatiana.²⁸

Vishnevskaya’s shock might also stem from a cognitive disconnect between the virtuous (socialist realist) Tatiana she identified with and performed, and the image that she witnessed in Tcherniakov’s production. Her letter exemplifies the powerful sense of alienation that can result when the artistic embodiment of morality is threatened. Tcherniakov’s twenty-first-century adaptation of Eugene Onegin destabilized the soprano’s moral center, and it also stimulated a plethora of artistic, critical, and online responses as other audience members voiced their pleasure or outrage. Vishnevskaya’s negative reaction exponentially increased the attention paid to the new production. At the turn of the century, Russian opera fans widely admired Vishnevskaya for her virtuosity and respected her for her association with the political dissident, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. As the most famous performer of the role of Tatiana, Vishnevskaya’s reaction to Tcherniakov’s new staging carried power and weight. Her decision to leave the performance at intermission and to write an open letter denouncing the production made Tcherniakov’s Onegin the scandal of 2006.

The history of Stanislavsky’s and Pokrovsky’s *Onegin* productions reveals that directors consciously formed the productions that are now considered traditional with their own visions: they reinterpreted the meaning of Tchaikovsky’s opera for their audiences through scenography. Stanislavsky’s and Pokrovsky’s opera productions, therefore, can be considered adaptations. The directors created a commentary, a dialogue between the adaptor-director and Tchaikovsky’s score.

Whereas Tcherniakov’s production emphasized the director’s voice in a conscious dialogue with the traditional productions and Tchaikovsky’s score, Stanislavsky’s and Pokrovsky’s emphasized a connection with Pushkin’s original. Both directors shaped the discourse surrounding their work, focusing on the moral frameworks of simplicity and authenticity. Stanislavsky’s representation of Tatiana as a simple girl with clear emotions fulfilled the demands of socialist realism, reshaping Soviet audiences’ understanding of Tatiana’s character. Pokrovsky’s wartime production presented a socialist realist heroine of strong moral integrity to audiences who needed to see a strength and goodness amid the horror of war. Stanislavsky and Pokrovsky thus added their voices to the conversation, participating in the tradition of negotiating social, moral, and national identities in Russia through *Onegin* interpretations, as Tcherniakov would do in 2006.

These productions were performed for so long that the next two generations of Russian operagoers forgot that these productions were once also new. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, Stanislavsky’s and Pokrovsky’s productions took on meaning as a beautiful vestige of the Soviet past. Both the Bolshoi Theater and the Stanislavsky Musical Theater deliberately left that past behind when they replaced the Soviet
productions in 2006 and 2007, respectively. Moscow’s major theaters commissioned contemporary Onegins for the new century.
Chapter 6: Confronting the Soviet Past in Responses to Tcherniakov’s *Onegin*

Dmitri Feliksovich Tcherniakov is the most famous practitioner of “director’s theater” (Regietheater) in Russia. Over the last ten years, he has become one of the most internationally prominent directors of opera. Tcherniakov is known for radically reconceiving the scenography of major Russian operas, such as *A Life for the Tsar* (Mariinsky Theater, 2004), *Eugene Onegin* (Bolshoi Theater, 2006), *Ruslan and Liudmila* (Bolshoi Theater, 2011), and *Prince Igor* (Metropolitan Opera, 2013). His Regietheater operas comment upon the meanings associated with the traditional production. Often, they also refer to the Soviet past through sets and costumes, and thus, extend the dialogue about Russian culture to their contemporary audience. Tcherniakov’s productions foster a dialogue between the director, the audience, and Russian culture, especially when the director “moves” the setting of a classic opera to a relatively contemporary time and place.

As I will demonstrate in this chapter, many audience members perceived Tcherniakov’s reconceived *Onegin* as deprecating Russian culture as a whole. In reviews written by professionals and by ordinary audience members, individual people explain and demonstrate how Tcherniakov’s *Onegin* disrupted the complex network of meaning associated with the classic. As these individuals describe and evaluate the production,
they explore and rework their own moral, social, and national identities. As each individual attempts to define the good and the beautiful, and they also reconceive themselves as Russians today.

**Dmitri Tcherniakov: Opera Iconoclast**

Many of Tcherniakov’s opera productions reflect the post-Soviet need to examine Russia’s recent history, and he frequently sets his operas in a vaguely Soviet past. Trained in opera directing during the late Soviet period at the Russian Academy of Theater Arts (GITIS), Tcherniakov’s career unfolded after the collapse of the USSR. The director rose to national prominence in the early 2000s, when he produced radically politicized productions of *A Life for the Tsar* (2004) and *Aida* (2005) at the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg. When the Bolshoi commissioned the young director to create a new production of *Eugene Onegin* for the 2006 season, the Moscow opera scene lit up in anticipation of a scandalous premiere.

While the Regietheater approach to opera directing is relatively new in Russia, opera directors have been reconceiving canonic operas in the West since the 1970s. Joslin McKinney and Peter Butterworth describe the “director’s theater” approach:

new productions of classic and revived texts often begin with the expectation that scenography need not reflect wishes of playwrights, and
that it is by means of scenography, in particular, that new insights may be
brought to bear on old texts.¹

In restagings of classic opera, the sonic elements of the classic (words and music) are
maintained, while the visual elements (set, costumes, blocking, acting) enact the vision of
the director and scenographer.² Directors rarely alter the music as defined by pitches,
orchestration, and sung words in the score, but the original or traditional stage directions
printed in the original score and libretto are frequently discarded. When derisively
applied, the term “director's theater” emphasizes the usurpation of authority from the
playwright by the director.

Since the 1990s, new productions of classic operas have become omnipresent in
major opera houses. Indeed, radical new productions outnumber newly composed operas
by far. In the 2000s, Tcherniakov brought Regietheater to Russia at Moscow’s Bolshoi
Theater, the “symbol of Russia.” In Eugene Onegin, Tcherniakov acts as both the director
and the scenographer of the opera, flanked by the respected costume designer Maria
Danilova and lighting designer Gleb Filshtinsky. Indeed, all three contribute to the
scenography and appear in the program notes; yet, only the director Tcherniakov is

² In an unusual decision, Tcherniakov does alter one verbal phrase in the libretto, while keeping the
musical phrase intact. During the fifth tableau’s duel scene, the character Zaretsky should sing
“Come together!” (Skhodites?) which commands the duellists, Eugene and Lensky, to turn, walk
towards each other and shoot. Since Tcherniakov cancels the traditional duel and re-blocks the scene
as wresting over a loaded shotgun, the formal instructions of the gentlemen’s duel would not make
sense. Instead, Tcherniakov replaces “Come together!” with the command, “Enter!” (Vkhodite!), which
commands the chorus to enter the room and become spectators to the “fight” and to Lensky’s death.
Many critics and audience members responded to the change to the libretto, commenting not only on
its significance to the altered storyline, but on the ethics of altering even one word of the original
libretto.
typically held responsible for the scandalous aspects of the production. In the critics’
eyes, the others are considered artisans rather than authors and only the director is
responsible for the success or failure of the performance.

Two months before the premiere on September 1, 2006, commentators at
Forumklassika.ru began trading rumors about the new production. Galina Vishnevskaya's
dramatic outrage, voiced in her open letter, further stoked the fire, creating a “scandal.”
Tcherniakov’s *Eugene Onegin* became the most talked-about performance of the 2006-
2007 season in Moscow. The design team won three “Golden Mask” awards from the
annual theater competition in 2008 —the Russian equivalent of the Tony’s—for best
directing (Tcherniakov), lighting design (Filshtinsky), and costume design (Danilova).³
Since 2006, the Bolshoi has performed Tcherniakov’s *Eugene Onegin* several times each
year, as well as taking it on tour to Paris, Milan, Madrid, Tel Aviv, and London. Ten
years later, the opera remains in the Bolshoi’s active repertoire, performed by the
company several times each season. In early 2014 the new general director, Vladimir
Urin, attempted to retire Tcherniakov’s *Eugene Onegin*, but patrons protested his choice
online, arguing for the continuation of Tcherniakov’s *Eugene Onegin*.⁴

Since the scandal, Regietheater productions have become much more common in
Moscow and St. Petersburg. Plenty of operagoers oppose Tcherniakov’s *Onegin* as a
violation of something pure and true. For example, after attending Tcherniakov’s *Onegin*,
the blogger Driada-84 “had nothing good to say—I hated it terribly—and that’s still an

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⁴ Daria Kurdiukova. “V Kulture: Evgenii Onegin ne pokiniet v Bol’shoi Teatr, a Zhelesnyi Feliks ne
16/8_culture.html.
She longed for the scenic grandeur of the “classical” version at the Bolshoi. In my 2013 interviews, I learned that some audience members who dislike director’s theater have learned to check the theater website and ascertain whether the opera production will be traditional or “post-modern” before they buy a ticket. Others clearly appreciate the potential of Regietheater. For example, the blogger Aleksandr (alexat) attributes a “heroic” power to Onegin. Tcherniakov’s production, he writes, “is always sneaking up on you, even when you’ve already been surprised.” For Aleksandr, the production’s greatest contribution is its destabilizing agency: Tcherniakov’s Onegin makes the audience “empathize, sympathize, and in the end, just think.” Similarly, the commenter Vasia praises the director for “giving a different accent and forcing the viewer to look at the opera from a different angle.” Commenter Irina Eduardovna praises Tcherniakov’s compelling adaptation. She writes that “the modern production may disturb or delight, or worry to tears, but there’s no person it won’t touch.”

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describe is *expression*, characterized by Maurice Merleau-Ponty as an individual’s traumatic process of engaging with the world and creating meaning.

**Beauty or Oppression in the “Everyday” Russian Past**

Tcherniakov set *Onegin*’s Larin estate scenes in a “vaguely Soviet past,” marked by the late nineteenth-century architecture of a rural dacha, the Empire-style furniture of the 1930s, and costumes ranging from the 1920s to the 1940s. Moreover, the director clearly designed the scene to resemble the first productions of Anton Chekhov’s major plays by the Moscow Art Theater (MXAT), the same productions described in Chapter 5. Chekhov’s major plays feature large ensemble casts, and his psychologically flawed characters fall apart emotionally as they perform unglamorous activities in the Russian countryside. In fact, many professional critics noted the Chekhovian resonances of Tcherniakov’s *Onegin*, calling his opera production a “chamber drama,” a “psychological drama,” a “social drama,” and a “reading of Tchaikovsky through Chekhov.”

Tcherniakov thus links his *Onegin* to some of Chekhov’s major themes, including the oppressive quality of daily life and the little tragedies that occur in ordinary circumstances. His intertextual reference prompted a dialogue among audience members and critics about the quality of Russian life and how the past should be represented on stage.

Much of the discussion of Tcherniakov’s *Onegin* revolved around the Russian concept of *byt* which Vasily Papernyi translates as “everyday existence,” “everyday routine,” or “stagnation.” The concept can connote life as ordinary, but also carries the sense that daily life is limiting or suffocating. For example, the blogger Paslen describes the quality of *byt* in Tcherniakov’s *Onegin* as a “tragic Russian neurasthenia [depression], heavy, and hung-over.” For this blogger, the Chekhov-Stanislavsky legacy is tangibly connected to the depressingly routine existence of provincial Russia.

At the start of the opera, the curtain opens directly onto a dinner party scene hosted by Madame Larina. An enormous wooden table supplies food for the guests (the chorus members) who remain, eating and drinking, throughout the opera, alluding to the MXAT Chekhov productions. In Chekhov’s own words: “People eat, just eat, and at the same time their happiness is being decided or their lives ruined.” The critic Dmitri Morozov immediately connects Tcherniakov’s Chekhovian setting with tragedy. He notes

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that the presence of the large table in combination with the funereal sounds of the opening phrases of Tchaikovsky’s “Introduction” make the first tableau seem like a wake. According to the critic Marina Zaionts, even before the singing begins, the Chekhovian mood of despair is palpable. She characterizes the opening scene as “noisy, heavily populated table where everyone becomes louder than the others, and from time to time they cry out and nothing, in essence, is heard.” Zaionts characterizes the mood at the table as one of stagnation and frustration. The critic Iulia Bederova goes further, noting: “the guests’ faces are flushed with salad and vodka or with natural hopeless suffering.” Tcherniakov’s allusion to the negative aspects of byt is so strong that even the salad and vodka consumed during parties and celebrations in Russia become associated with despair.

**How to Accurately Represent the Past**

Tcherniakov’s sepia-colored set resembles an old photograph that documents the past but does not make it look beautiful. According to critic Iulia Bederova, the color

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16 Bederova, review of Eugene Onegin. “населенной пошловатыми обыденными людьми с их раскрасневшимися от салата и водки рожами или натуральным безысходным страданием.”

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palette creates a time period and conveyed an affect of oppression associated with the early Stalinist period. Warm lighting, neutral-colored costumes, and beige wallpaper helped to create this ambiance. She writes that the set is “unified not by reality, but by coloring.”\(^{17}\) The set, “deep, dark, and heavily yellowed with a brown tint on the walls, recalling Stalin’s *Book of Healthy and Delicious Food,*” lent a sense of “false welfare, both beautiful and oppressive.”\(^{18}\) For Bederova, Tcherniakov’s setting of a Soviet past draws out her feelings about the hypocrisy of the Stalin period and its artificial presentation of healthiness.

Indeed, many spectators felt betrayed by what they considered the portrayal of an ugly, heavy Russian past. Often, they voiced their indignation in calls for period authenticity, equating period accuracy with beauty and goodness. For example, the commenter Liubov’ fumed that Tcherniakov dressed “Lensky in a simple rumpled suit of our (!) time.”\(^{19}\) Lensky’s unattractive garb shaped Liubov’s affective response to his character: “Wretched Lensky elicited squeamish pity rather than compassion….” By the end of Liubov’’s comment, the lack of period authenticity had became the focus point for her revulsion towards the negative Soviet *byt* presented on stage. “Upon leaving, I would

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18 Bederova, review of *Eugene Onegin.* “Густой, темный, тяжелый желтый с коричневым отливом цвет стен, который лично мне запомнился еще по картинкам в сталинской «Книге о вкусной и здоровой пище» и до сих пор вызывает ассоциации с густопсовой фальшей благополучия, кажется одновременно красивым и давящим.”

have liked to have shot the director and his ilk. What kind of society did he portray? Pushkin’s? Even a goat knows that answer is no. NEP [1920s] society? Rublev’s [Medieval] time? What did he mean by it, and where did he see such filth?” Liubov’s rejection of Tcherniakov’s setting is a demand for a past she can be proud of.

Similarly, the lack of period accuracy at the Bolshoi indexed the pitiful decay of post-Soviet life. In the forum commentator Tatiana’s opinion, period productions must be historically accurate in order to educate Russia’s future adults about their history. She writes, “it’s most pitiful for our kids. They don’t really show them the olden days on television, and they wouldn’t watch anyway. So they [Russian youth] are going to think that they went around in sports coats with shotguns in Pushkin’s time. There is so much I want to write, but I don’t have the words.” Tatiana is as frustrated with Russia’s contemporary youth who “wouldn’t watch anyway” as she is with Tcherniakov’s artistic concept.

The blogger Jaseneva focuses on the lack of expected manners and behavior, censuring Tcherniakov’s “vulgar” directorial choices and the cast’s “unrealistic” gestures. She accuses Madame Larina and her aristocratic guests of “getting drunk, slapping each other and behaving like cooks’ children,” as if the Russian nobility never

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drank too much. She was similarly infuriated that Zaretsky slept with his boots on the sofa, and that Tatiana and walks on the table “with her shoes on.” When Tcherniakov violates Jaseneva’s idea of the manners of aristocrats, it breaks her suspension of disbelief.

In summary, Jaseneva states: “I should say that I’m closer to the past, and so I will go to it [seek it out] again in Onegin.” Liubov’, Tatiana, and Jaseneva conceive of the past as a more beautiful reality, where aristocrats, at least, behaved well. All three oppose the ugly, poorly behaved present to the well behaved, moral past and more beautiful past. For these bloggers, Tcherniakov’s presentation of an ugly past threatens their cultural memory. Spectator reviews allows them room to hope for a better future.

**Sonic Interruptions and the “Opera Itself”**

In the opening scene of Tcherniakov’s Onegin, before the first notes of the orchestra sound, the chorus sits around an enormous oval dining table, eating cake and clinking spoons against their tea glasses. Periodically shifting in their chairs, the chorus members giggle and pretend to chat at an afternoon party at the Larin’s house. Madame Larina appears to have had a bit too much vodka and her big contralto’s laughter resounds across the set. She scolds Tatiana and primps inappropriately in front of her guests. Later during the dancing, the relatively large woman falls to the floor with a

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22 Jaseneva, review of Eugene Onegin, “что такая вот Ларина способна влепить пощечину испортившему Татьяни дён Ленскому, но они же все ж такие дворяне, а не кухаркины дети, а опера, даже мелодраматичная, все ж таки не мыльная опера, где все орут, жестикулируют, лупят друг друга по лицу.”

23 Driada, “По столу можно ходить в обуви, как это делает Татьяна в сцене написания письма.”

24 Jaseneva, “Надо ли говорить, что мне ближе последние и что снова захотелось к ним на «Онегина»?.."
thump. Indeed, throughout Tchaikovsky’s Introduction and First Tableau, sounds made by the acting bodies of the singers cut through the scored music, creating a strange fusion between “real-life” noises, operatic voices, and an orchestra hidden from sight.

Not surprisingly, Tcherniakov’s insertion of laughter and other noises into the opera bothered many spectators and critics. The numerous ways in which individual spectators chastise the director, however, reveal great variation in what individual audience members consider the central component of opera. Their voices illustrate the complex network of perceptions of what musicologists sometimes call “the music itself.”

For instance, the commenter Elena fumed at the director for “destroying the first act with unauthorized shuffle and laughter… It's a shame that this ‘newness’ appears in the world, and disfigures the nature of opera.” According to Elena, Tcherniakov did not have the “authority” to add his new ideas to Tchaikovsky’s music. The critic Aleksandr Matusovich likewise bemoaned the lack of respect for the master composer. Yet, Matusovich paradoxically endows the characters on stage with an awareness of their own operatic soundtrack. He calls them “a pack of smug, snickering slackers who are constantly drunk, who beat the dishes and laugh loudly with no respect for the music of

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Tchaikovsky." For Matusevich, the canonic supremacy of Tchaikovsky’s score demands respect even from the characters within the unfolding drama.

Some bloggers privilege the technical performance of the vocal lines over the opera as drama. For example, the blogger Dmitri (kpucstofer) complained that the vocal projection was dampened by the blocking of the chorus and because soloists performed many of the arias far upstage behind the giant table. He laments, “one could only hear [the singers] from the first row.” For Dmitri (kpucstofer), the essence of the opera lies in the sound of the voices resonating throughout the hall, rather than the director’s dramaturgical concept. Echoing Dmitri (kpucstofer), the blogger Chandra suggests that the music should be the only focus of opera. “I want to absorb the flow of the music and the voices pouring off the stage without the conditions of the setup and minimalism of the set restricting my eyes.” Boris Lifanovsky, a cellist with the Bolshoi Orchestra and freelance music critic, complains: “the stage action mutes the music constantly. […] just as the chandelier blocks some of the action on stage […] the constant hubbub on stage

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too often distracts from the important things in the music.” Like Dmitri (kpustofer), for Lifanovsky the most important aspects of Tcherniakov’s *Onegin* are located in the clarity of the projected sound, and the director’s interruptions of clarity diminish his perception of Tcherniakov’s professionalism. For Dmitri, Chandra, and Boris Lifanovsky, opera is an event of musical sound, not story. Their comments come remarkably close to articulating some musicologists’ preference for notes in the score—the music itself.

Yet the notion of musical meaning separated from the stage becomes confused when bloggers describe Olga and her relationship to Lensky and Tatiana. According to the blogger Valery, Tcherniakov is a “young director without the ability to listen, without hearing, taste, or tact” who cannot “hear the music.” In their eyes, Olga becomes a “mean girl.” She reprimands Tatiana through facial gestures and body language as she sings the arioso “Ah Tanya, Tanya” during the first tableau. When Lensky sings “I love you, Olga,” Tcherniakov’s Olga grabs the love poem Lensky wrote her and shows it to the other guests, mocking his sweet idiocy even as he sings. In Valery’s view, Olga’s gestures contradict the “unique impulse of passion, which carries you like a powerful wave.” By accusing Olga of insincerity, Tcherniakov drains Lensky’s melody of its inherent meaning. Valery fully understands Tcherniakov’s psychological project, but feels that the gestural trajectory contradicts and invalidates the music. For Valery, the

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31 Valery, spectator review of *Eugene Onegin*. “человек берется за режиссуру музыкального спектакля, музыку не только не любя, но даже не умея ее слушать, а главное - слышать.”
center of Onegin is in the affective content of the melody and harmony, which can be altered by the acting. But Tcherniakov goes too far. “It is clear that the action develops separately from the music itself, as if from a radio that one forgot to turn off.”

Similarly, the blogger Lensla felt that Tcherniakov “lost track of the musical component.”

In another example, the blogger Gaidamak writes that the “strangest of the director’s vocal ideas was the accompaniment of practically ceaseless idiotic laughter in the first two acts, emitted in turn by Madame Larina, Olga who laughed straight through her duet with Lensky and at other moments by chorus members of both sexes who mercilessly drowned out the soloists.” Lensky’s loving aria must be accompanied by an equally loving recipient for its musical message to be conveyed. Actually, Lensky’s “I love you, Olga” is a solo usually sung towards Olga, not a duet. Even as Gaidamak criticizes the singers for drowning out the music itself, his mistake reveals that actions of the characters on stage also contribute to the total meaning of the number. For Gaidamak, Valery, and Lifanovsky, the music itself as composed by Tchaikovsky connotes sincere love, and no part of opera can be separated from those meanings.

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32 Valery, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “Понятно, что музыка существует здесь сама по себе, а действие развивается от нее отдельно – как если бы она звучала по радио, которое забыли выключить.”


For the blogger Marys12, essence of “the music” must match her Byronic reading of Pushkin’s novel. According to Marys12, Tcherniakov ignores Pushkin:

[Tchaikovsky’s] “music is infused with the spirit of the novel, above all a romantic figure who distances himself from the demands and traditions of society.”35 Marys12 conflates her reading of Pushkin’s clear allusions to Lord Byron’s Childe Harold throughout the novel with the operatic version of Eugene. For Marys12, Tchaikovsky’s adaptation carries the same Byronic resonances. Tcherniakov’s Eugene, however, is pathetically ordinary rather than a Byronic hero, and therefore, the whole essence of Eugene Onegin is lost. According to Marys12, Tcherniakov’s staging “horribly coincides with the music.” When Marys12 complains about the “stylistic mismatch between the music and the scenographic action,” she reveals how the whole complex of Eugene Onegin as novel, opera, and cultural icon shapes her idea of “the music.”36

Echoing Marys12’s logic, two participants in the Theatr.ru forum also rejected Tcherniakov’s psychological portraits as un-Pushkinian and therefore invalid for Tchaikovsky’s Onegin. Elena writes that the production was “banal, mediocre in the worst of Hollywood traditions […] The director] didn’t leave Pushkin’s soul nor his spirit alone. […] to see it at the Bolshoi is not only strange—but more like shameful in front of those who know and love Pushkin.”37 Another commenter, Natal’ia, even suggests that Tcherniakov’s staging creates a “mockery of Pushkin, Tchaikovsky, and all the

35 Marys12, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “Черняков игнорирует Пушкина, а ведь музыка слита с духом его романа, и прежде всего с романтической личностью, которая дистанцируется от запросов и традиций общества, стараясь реализоваться в других сферах.”
36 Ibid., “я ощутила стилистическое несовпадение музыки и сценического действия.”
This attitude towards the masters even seemed to threaten some audience members. Marys12, Elena, and Natal’ia attribute such power and agency to Tcherniakov’s scenography because any production of Onegin indexes the cultural memory of Pushkin, Russian creative potential, and morality in general. Although Natal’ia angrily suggests that it would be better to “close the curtains [in front of the stage] and only listening to the music,” these associated meanings are always present.39

Indeed, the blogger GAZEQ articulates the primacy of the literal meaning of the text and stage directions, by listing discrepancies between Tcherniakov’s blocking and scenography and the verbal libretto, often comparing those to Pushkin’s words. For instance, in the sixth tableau Eugene asks Gremin “who is there in the raspberry beret?” (kto tam v malonivom berete?). Taken from Pushkin’s novel, the phrase “who is there in the raspberry beret?” has become a cultural sign, the moment where Eugene finally recognizes Tatiana’s value. According to GAZEQ, the opera becomes alienated from its cultural power because Tcherniakov’s Tatiana does not wear the requisite headpiece.40 (Apparently, she did wear a raspberry-colored clip in her hair, but it was too small to be visible to most of the audience members.) Although GAZEQ argues that the essence of Tchaikovsky’s opera lies in the words of the libretto, he is most upset by Tcherniakov’s dismissal of important symbols like the raspberry beret.

Contradicting this line of censure, however, a handful of bloggers applauded Tcherniakov’s sonic interruptions as a powerful dramatic device. For example, the

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39 Natal’ia, comment at Teatr.ru.
40 GAZEQ. Citation information obscured because the blog post was later removed.
blogger Picareta approved of the clinking of tableware during the opening scene as the sonic meme of the society that does not understand the quiet Tatiana. “Although it disturbs Tchaikovsky’s music, the interruptions enable the audience member to better comprehend Tatiana’s family situation before she writes her letter to Eugene.” By engaging with the opera as drama, Picareta constructed her own new interpretation of Tcherniakov’s sonic interruptions. Another blogger, Paslen, pointed to a moment in the Letter Scene when Tcherniakov’s sonic interruptions underscore the climactic moment in Tatiana’s character development. According to Paslen, “with a monstrous screeching noise … Tatiana shifts the huge round table from its usual place—she was able to escape the suffocating everydayness [byt] for a time.” Because Paslen and Picareta approached the opera as an unfolding story, they interpreted Tcherniakov’s added sounds as a useful dramatic device rather than a disruption.

These contradictory reviews reveal the multiplicity of the ways that audience members engage with just one production. Some listeners do privilege the musical sounds over the drama, but more often than not, what they call the “music itself” is actually a complex network of meanings. As audience members defend the “pure” meanings of the music, they carry the whole history of Eugene Onegin, standard interpretations of the opera, and even its source text further into the melee.

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42 Paslen, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “Именно поэтому в порыве Татьяна, только что закончившая писать письмо Евгению, с чудовищным скрежетом и шумом сдвигает огромный круглый стол с его обычного места - ей удалось на какое-то время вырваться из удушающей бытовухи.”
A Mentally Fragile Icon

During the opening scene of Tcherniakov’s *Onegin*, Madame Larina and Olga socialize with their guests, but Tatiana stares out the window. She even flees the room, and she must be coaxed and scolded in order to sing her duet with Olga. Tcherniakov portrays the passionate, bold, and self-sacrificing Tatiana Vishnevskaya loved as a fragile person. While it is difficult to pinpoint her mental or behavioral disorder, the character is far from the peaceful, bookish country girl of Pokrovsky’s staging. Tcherniakov highlights Tatiana’s otherness by opposing her dress to Olga’s. Tatiana’s blonde hair is worn loose whereas Olga is well coiffed. Tatiana’s shabby dress hides her figure, while Olga’s enhances her feminine waistline.

By the time she reaches the Letter Scene, Tcherniakov’s Tatiana is almost wild. At the first phrases of her twelve-minute aria, she shows physiological signs of mental distress. According to the critic Zaionts, Tatiana “writes the letter in a growing state of hysteria.”[^43] During the final arioso, Tatiana shoves the giant table into the corner, knocks down some chairs, and stands atop the table, proclaiming her fate to the world. The critic Dmitri Morozov suggests that she is “on the verge of a nervous breakdown.”[^44] By the sixth tableau in St. Petersburg, however, Tatiana has calmed down and learned to control her behavior in public. Even as Tatiana sings her agitation about Eugene’s return to her life, Gremin cares for Tatiana as if she were very delicate. He tenderly fetches her a cup of water, and then quietly leaves the room just as Eugene enters. In Tcherniakov’s

[^43]: Zaionts, review of Eugene Onegin. “Знаменитое письмо пишет в состоянии нарастающей истерии.”
[^44]: Morozov, review of Eugene Onegin. “На грани (а иногда и за гранью) нервного срыва.”
production, Tatiana’s primary characteristic is not integrity or moral strength, but vulnerability.

In general, newspaper critics have seemed to relish illustrating Tatiana’s unorthodox appearance and diagnosing her illness for their readers. Marina Babalova describes Tcherniakov’s Tatiana as “unwashed, unkempt, a somnambulist reeling from corner to corner.” To Bederova, she is “crazy like the heroine Tatiana Drubich from the film Moskva.” Gubaidulina notes that she is “shy even of her closest relatives.” Leila Guzmachova calls her an “almost neurotic savage.” Sergei Biriukov notes her “neurotic grimace,” and Marina Zaiontz, her “weird, closed-off, stubborn nature.” Khodnev suggests that Tatiana is a “weird, slightly autistic, and deeply feeling girl, who by the final scene turns into a splendid arrogant lady.”

Only a few of the professional critics, however, extrapolated any thematic significance from Tcherniakov’s portrayal of Tatiana. The critic Sergei Biriukov names Tcherniakov’s goal as showing that in high society, a person with “strong, sincere

46 Bederova, review of Eugene Onegin. “она - сумасшедшая. Как героиня Татьяны Друбич в фильме «Москва».”
47 Gubaidulina, review of Eugene Onegin. “Татьяна (Екатерина Щербаченко) дичится даже собственных родственников.”
48 Guzmachova, review of Eugene Onegin. “почти невротической дикарки.”
emotions is thought to be ill.” Sadykh-Zade notices that Tatiana is the only one who can properly empathize with Lensky. “She is the only one who notices that there is something wrong with him.” In Sadykh-Zade’s eyes, Tatiana’s vulnerability renders her compassionate. The critic Zimianina points out that “the most important characteristic of the heroine is a vulnerability which women can not voice.” The critic interprets Tcherniakov’s message as a feminist one. Women are expected to behave like Olga, confident in their appearance and identity, and never reveal Tatiana’s brand of weakness. These three critics, however, are the only reviewers among a large group to suggest that Tcherniakov’s mentally fragile Tatiana was not a complete loser.

By contrast, ordinary audience members called attention to the significance of Tatiana’s behavior in almost every review. Their comments diverge into two streams: some responders emphasize her illness in order to show what is not acceptable in normal life, while a second group defends Tatiana’s abnormality as the mark of a deep individual. Those who react negatively cast Tcherniakov’s Tatiana as an attack on the true original, a beautiful shy girl. Marys12 contrasts her Marian image of Tatiana with Tcherniakov’s subhuman mongrel. She writes: “Pushkin’s Tatiana is a ‘sweet idea,’ a guiding star for a person who is ‘rudderless and without sails,’ moving into the unknown.

51 Biriukov, review of Eugene Onegin. “в светском обществе, больном пошлостью, человек, чьи чувства сильны и искренни, сам кажется больным.”
53 Zimianina, review of Eugene Onegin. “до самого конца спектакля выдерживая главную черту своей героини – беззащитность, которую женщины чем только не прикрывают!”
In Tcherniakov’s, she is like a mutt chasing after the best bite” to eat.\textsuperscript{54} Another commenter, Maria, even interprets her perception of illness on the stage as belonging to the actual performers rather than a directorial choice within the context of the drama. “I was ashamed to tears to see such a disgrace…. I got the impression that the performers were from some theater club in a provincial town and had big mental problems….\textsuperscript{55} For these audience members, Tatiana’s mental vulnerability violates her core identity. As an icon of moral strength, Tatiana cannot be an icon of mental weakness.

The blogger GAZEQ saves special invective for the Larina women, whom he perceives to be psychologically unbalanced, almost dangerous. According to GAZEQ, Madam Larina “sits in a chair and then suddenly begins to sharply burst into tears, [but] in a second, when the choir pays attention to her, she excitedly laughs, expressly excitedly—it’s an unnatural change between crying and laughing… such people with psychological defects… schizophrenia and this isn’t my personal opinion, psychologists and psychiatrists talk about this!!!\textsuperscript{56} The blogger reinforces his diagnosis with specialists

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\textsuperscript{56}GAZEQ, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “Ларина в первой картине с нисчего начинает рыдать, причём рыдать в захлеб. Просто сидит за столом, а потом начинает вдруг, резко заливаться слезами, через секунду, когда хор обращается к ней, она взахлеб смеётся, именно взахлеб - это неестественный переход между плачем и смехом. Такое можно встретить в жизни и я это встречал, но такие люди с психическим отклонением. Если у человека резкая смена в эмоциях, именно РЕЗКАЯ, это говорит о расположенности к шизофрении и это не мои личные заверения, об этом говорят психологи и психиатры!!! Значит, получается Ларина "шизофреник" в той или иной степени тяжести.”
and exclamation points. According to GAZEQ, Olga sings her aria “as if she hated her own relatives, she yells at Mama and Tatiana.”

Tcherniakov’s concept reminded him of “Chekhov’s Ward no. 6 with Tatiana as the patient.” The blogger doesn’t hesitate to diagnose all three Larina women, but surprisingly, GAZEQ reads Onegin and Lensky as rather normal fellows. “Onegin,” he writes, “is a simple average guy,” while “Lensky is also a simple character who loves a girl named Olga – writing her love poems and praising her in them.” GAZEQ’s reading of Tcherniakov’s characters seems to reflect a discomfort with women in general and their relationship to men.

Like GAZEQ, the blogger Veronika216 also diagnosed Tatiana’s behavior as a clinical disorder. She writes: “My companion and I graduated from medical school, so we tried to count the number of psychological illnesses that Tatiana demonstrated. After the show, we agreed on three.” In parts of her post, Veronika216 sympathizes with Tatiana as a vulnerable person who had just been subjected to a situation too difficult for her, surrounded by loud people and new people. For someone like Tatiana, “it would be such

57 GAZEQ, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “поёт свою арию так, как будто она ненавидит своих родных, маму и Татьяну, она им кричит, махает руками о чём то доказывая, но в тексте арии ничего такого нету, на что можно было "наложить" жесты и поведение, которые исполняет пивица.”

58 GAZEQ, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. "Когда занавес открылся и начался спектакль у меня прошла аналогия с первых минут от увидинного: "ПАЛАТА №6". И Татьяна пациент этой палаты.”

59 GAZEQ, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “Что касается Онегина, то он простой обыватель, не такой как принято грант, Ленский же тоже простой персонаж, который любит девушку по имени Ольга - пишет ей любовные стихи и превозносит её в них.”

a burden—a big loud society, new people… but she sang AMAZINGLY. “Here again the blogger conflates the production with the performers. The blogger also suggests that the characters had to overcome the scenographer’s obstacles in order to present the act. Furthermore, for Veronika216, mental illness is a real issue, but also an ugly one. The blogger writes, “If I were her mother, I would not let my daughter go out like that. It gives the neighbors material for gossip, and it scares away Olga’s suitors.” In a single blog entry, Veronika216 shifts between compassion and the enforcement of social codes, just as she shifts between putting herself in the place of Tatiana’s mother and interpreting the scene as a spectator. Tcherniakov’s fragile Tatiana inspired Veronika216 to be doctor, mother, and audience member at the same time.

Suffering as a Virtue

A second group of reviewers shift into an emotional or psychological interpretation, and they place Tatiana and Lensky’s emotional pain into the context of their own lives. By defending Tcherniakov’s representation of vulnerability, they validate their own experiences of suffering, sometimes achieving a catharsis. For example, Tamara justifies Tcherniakov’s passionate representation of Tatiana with Freud’s pleasure principle, which argues that sexual pleasure is always mixed and perhaps heightened by the presence of pain. Tamara writes,

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61 Veronika216, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “больная психика барышни дает предсказуемую реакцию – еще бы, такая нагрузка – большое шумное общество, новые люди... Но пела ИЗУМИТЕЛЬНО!!!!”

62 Veronika216, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “Лично я бы на месте мамаши не выпускала бы такую доченьку в свет – она не только даст повод для сплетен, но и отпугнет всех женихов от Ольги.”
Tatiana, worn out by the desire to love, writes a candidly passionate letter – this scene in the opera is very good! Finally, the singer knows what she is singing about. It’s known and understood. And if someone dares to say to me that love is sexless, I will now, mildly speaking, not believe it. In the show, Tatiana does not ‘write’ a letter, she screams, moans, cries out, faints, ‘squeals’ as in Blok – ‘screams the dawn of love’ – and only then when Nanny arrives, does she quickly-quickly write out her letter. It’s very important that the singer doesn’t just sing about feeling, but also suffers through it in the scene.63

For Tamara, Tcherniakov’s representation of Tatiana as metaphysically suffering in her sexual awakening, accurately portrays the psychological suffering associated with passion. Tamara implicitly argues that Tatiana’s abnormal behavior should be fully supported because it marks a life lived fully.

The blogger Liudmila Guseva emphasizes love in a society where there is no place for it, connecting Tatiana, Lensky, and Onegin to her own experience of love. She writes, “During the letter scene, [I felt] strong empathy, all the stronger because you know what is going to happen. […] The transformation of the inhibited introvert who kept all inside into the energetically-charged extrovert rushing around the stage is

63 Tamara, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. "Итак, Татьяна, истомлённая желанием любить, пишет откровенно страстное письмо – эта сцена в опере очень хороша! Наконец-то певица знает, о чём она поёт. Это знают и слушатели. И если мне станут говорить, что любовь беспола, я ему теперь, мягко говоря, не поверю. Татьяна в спектакле не «пишет» письмо, Она кричит, стонет, зовёт, изнемогает «визжит» - как там у Блока: «визжала заре о любви» - и только потом, когда уже приходит няня, она быстро-быстро строчит своё письмо. И очень важно, что певица не только поёт о чувстве, но также и переживает его в действии. Здесь очень помогают мизансцены, которые мастерски выстроил Черняков."
striking.” According to Guseva, “Love, at least at its most passionate peak, certainly looks like weirdness. The person doesn’t control their feelings, their feelings control them.” Although she does not narrate her own story, Guseva’s sympathy seems to stem from a real-life connection.

For instance, the blogger describes Tcherniakov’s table as a “symbol of public body,” a place of judgment for the protagonists, for the expression of Tatiana’s (literally) higher feelings, and for Lensky’s death. “Society is focused on the everyday, the simple and routine, […] and the inner person is not important […] just the ritual.” Guseva admits that Tatiana, Lensky, and Eugene look “weird” but then argues that their abnormality is desirable since it manifests the higher feelings of deep human love. It is understood that Guseva aligns herself with the abnormal, because abnormality marks both higher feelings and non-participation in the corrupt group mentality.

The blogger Heyka similarly connects with the human element—the “emotional and psychological subtext”—in Tcherniakov’s production. Heyka reads Lensky’s appropriation of Triquet’s couplets and his clown act as a real-life attempt to hide his

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65 Guseva, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “Любовь, по крайней мере, на своем страстном пике – выглядит совершенной ненормальностью. Человек собой не владеет. Им владеют чувства.”

66 Guseva, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. "Стол – главный символический атрибут спектакля, он не только физический центр всего действия, но и символ общественной корпорации, он же - место суда над главными героями, он же - место высшего проявления чувств Татьяны, он же место - смерти Ленского, смерти на миру.”

67 Guseva, “Общество сосредоточено на житейском, простом, рутинном, на соблюдение норм и приличий, что у человека внутри – его не волнует, главное - ритуал, всё как у всех.”

pain. She writes, “How often does it occur that we are deliberately cheerful and sociable so as not to feel pain?” Her praise for Tcherniakov also follows these lines. “The director is a living man of his time, and he showed how close Eugene Onegin is to us, that it is universal for humanity in general.”

Heyka opens and closes with criticism of the conservative reaction to Tcherniakov’s staging. Although she praises conservative fans for being “culturally-minded, well-read, smart, intelligent, patrons of opera, drama, and classical music,” she criticizes their inability to view literature and art as living. “Do these people think that literary and opera heroes belong only to books and opera, and they can forget that these are human images, and that they can be placed on some table and forgotten?” For Heyka, the rejection of Tcherniakov’s innovation for the sake of canonicity denies art its connection to human experience.

Like Heyka, the blogger Filologinoff emphasizes human passion and pain. “Love hurt Tatiana.” He then demonstrates his own capacity for emotion by describing his sense of catharsis. “During the last scene, in which two loving people compel themselves and each other to suffer, it is so persuasive that… tears swell your throat…. When you

69 Heyka, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “Как часто мы сами бываем нарочито веселы и общительны, чтоб не чувствовать боли.”
70 Heyka, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “Режиссер - он живой человек своего времени, и он показал то, чем близок "Евгений Онегин" нам, тем он универсален для человечества вообще [–]”
71 Heyka, spectator review of Eugene Onegin.
72 Heyka, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “Или эти люди думают, что литературные и оперные герои принадлежат лишь территории книги или оперы, а то, что это человеческие образы и поместить их можно куда угодно и за какой хочешь стол, - забывают?”
73 Filologinoff, Evgenii Onegin, November 25, 2006 (4:00 p.m.), http://filologinoff.livejournal.com/74601.html. “Любовь мучает Татьяну, и этот накал прекрасно передаёт внезапно разгорающаяся всё ярче и столь же внезапно гаснувшая от перенапряжения люстра.”
see his [Tcherniakov’s] *Onegin* and you recognize yourself in the hysterical Lensky, the catharsis advances no less than in the well-known Pushkin novel.”⁷⁴ In his review, Filologinoff defends Tcherniakov’s representation of emotion as well as the blogger’s own emotionality.

Similarly, the blogger Nobrow emphasizes his personal identification with Tcherniakov’s Lensky. Describing a strange old lady on the stage who listens to Lensky’s pre-duel aria, he writes:

My God, that’s exactly it! It’s how often happened to me – you wait for compliments (for example after a show…) and the only one to cuddle up to you is some kind of half-drunk Madame who pushes towards you and speaks gibberish. And Olga, who does not notice Lensky, at that moment, is busy looking for her earring. Oh, this is high tragedy!⁷⁵

For Nobrow and Filologinoff, Tcherniakov’s *Onegin* is a successful and meaningful drama—“sensitive, bitter-sweet, and madly pulling into itself”—because it allows audience members to connect the emotional suffering on stage with that in their own lives.⁷⁶

The apogee of this type of spectator review blog comes from Manu_f’s exploration of love, passionate suffering, and human existence. Countering critics of Tatiana’s “hysterical” behavior, Manu_f justifies her heroine’s behavior with her own.

⁷⁴ Heyka, spectator review of *Eugene Onegin*.
⁷⁵ Nobrow, spectator review of *Eugene Onegin*. "когда ленский поет "куда, куда вы удалились" и его слышат лишь кривляющаяся-молодящаяся старуха - боже мой, как это точно! как часто и со мной такое бывало - ждешь комплиментов (например, после спектакля в летчике), а тебя только прижимает какая-то полупьяная мадам и начинает нести какую-то белИберду. И не замечающая ленского ольга, в этот момент деловито ищущая сережку, - в этом максимум трагизма!"
Strange reaction, hysterical? Yes. So what? Haven’t you ever spent hours waiting by the telephone, breaking into hysterics at the attempts of your relatives to get you to drink some tea, ever sobbed into your pillow at night, not hurled furniture at the feeling of complete hopelessness?  

Manu_f again draws on personal experience when talking about Tatiana’s behavior during her name-day party. “She doesn’t know how or for what reason to live. In my opinion, everyone is familiar with this feeling. Some can fight with this and keep face in public, while in reality, they want to die, and some can’t. They quietly die [inside] in a corner.”  

Manu_f explains most of Tatiana’s intimate feelings as an experience of suffering shared by all, rather than as an abnormality.

Manu_f’s intensely personal description advocates for the validity of the individual and personal experience of suffering. She interprets Tcherniakov’s Onegin as “about man and society. How society degrades a person with normal feelings, a place isn’t [set] for them, and their choices are few—death, loneliness, or an attempt to imitate” the rules. Her lengthy blog post reveals an engagement with Onegin on multiple levels. As Manu_f perceived an echo of her own emotions on stage, she retells her own narrative, placing herself in the position of Tatiana. Manu_f’s spectator review

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77 Manu_f, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “Реакция странная, истеричная? Да. И что? А вы никогда не просиживали часами у телефона, срывались на истерику при попытке родных напоить вас чаем, не рыдали ночами в подушку, не швырялись мебелью от ощущения полной безнадеги? Татьяна разговаривает с Онегиным, пока придумывает письмо - она смотрит на тот стул, где он сидел и мечется вокруг него. Потому и двигает стол в отчаянном порыве - этот социум, его правила, запрещает ей вести себя так, как она себя ведет.”

78 Manu_f, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “Она в принципе не понимает, как и для чего жить дальше.” “По-моему, ощущение, знакомое всем. Кто-то умеет с этим бороться и играет на публику, когда на самом-то деле хочет умереть, а кто-то нет - и тихо умирает себе в уголке.”

79 Manu_f, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “Впрочем, этот спектакль не про любовь вовсе, а про человека и общества. Про то, что когда общество деградирует, человеку с нормальными чувствами места в нем нет, и выбор у него очень не велик - смерть, одиночество или попытка мимикрировать.”
demonstrates the active construction of the self through blog writing, as Miller and Shepard describe it in Chapter 2. Yet the blogger’s defense of Tcherniakov’s heroine is also part of the moral project of the Russian intelligentsia. Through their interpretations of Onegin, Manu_f, Nobrow, Filologinoff, Heyka, and Guseva call for a more compassionate society, they attempt to make their world a better place.

**Nationalist Discourse in Reviews**

Many reviewers worried about the national implications of Tcherniakov’s productions, including a few that specifically address historic and contemporary points of contention. Since the reforms of Peter the Great in the early seventeenth century, Russian intellectual discourse has often focused on Russia’s image in the eyes of Europe. The opposing intellectual camps of the Westernizers and Slavophiles in the nineteenth century contested Russia’s identity mainly in terms of its relationship to Europe. The Westernizers sought to develop Russia’s social and ideological connection to Western Europe, whereas the Slavophiles emphasized the inherent difference between Russia and the West in terms of history, culture, and Russia’s spiritual mission as the leader of Eastern Orthodox Church. These lines of inquiry into Russian national identity and the rhetoric developed around the opposing arguments appear in many spectator reviews.

At the Teatr.ru forum, the commenter Irina worried that Tcherniakov’s negative presentation of Russian life would further damage Russia’s image outside of the country. Irina asserts, “Such a representation of the Russian nobility only assures foreigners that
Russians are evil.”" Her criticism demonstrates a concern with the country’s self-presentation that began in the early nineteenth century. Responding to Irina’s post, another commenter, Anna_Geo, defends foreign audiences as being able to separate Russian art from international politics. She writes: “Foreigners aren’t fools. They judge us [Russians] by our actions, not by Tcherniakov’s productions.” Anna_Geo is probably correct, but she fails to acknowledge that Irina’s concern stems from a three-hundred-year history of defining the national self in relationship to Western Europe.

Other comments engage with the concept of the mysterious Russian soul. The catchphrase originates in the idea that Russia as a nation cannot be understood rationally, but can only be felt through spiritual belief. This Slavophile concept divides the rational West from the spiritual East; its adherents insist that Russian culture does not lag behind the West, but offers an alternative to Western modes of life. Because *Eugene Onegin* is so closely tied to Russian national identity, the discourse of Russian spiritual difference comes through clearly. For example, one commenter Nadejda criticizes British audience members who “haven’t seen better. And what they have seen they do not understand.” According to Nadejda, the British viewers cannot understand the problems with Tcherniakov’s production because the do not understand the traditional production, a

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proxy for the mysterious Russian soul. The blogger Valery articulates this construction directly: “The success of such a performance in Paris is clear: with the restless mysterious Russian soul stripped of its trappings, it becomes understandable and simple, like the cube room with a chandelier and a long red dining table.”

Valery scorns what he perceives as a simplification of Russian spirituality, as well as Western operagoers’ acceptance of it. According to Nadejda and Valery, *Eugene Onegin*, like the mysterious Russian soul must be protected from those who would misrepresent it.

Some reviewers drew on more contemporary constructions of Russian difference and spiritual superiority. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Western political leaders celebrated the victory of democracy and capitalism over state socialism; meanwhile, Russian daily life was turned upside down, forcing people to radically adjust their lives, ideological frameworks, and hopes for the future. Poor-quality commercial products flooded the Russian market, while high-quality products were only available to the “New Russians,” select party insiders who had managed to profit from the collapse. Deregulation meant that pornography was widely available on the streets. Hollywood “B” movies and soap operas offered ordinary Russians a glimpse of sleek homes and fashions without the underpinning of a quality narrative.

Some Russians continue to associate cheapness and trashiness with Western cultural imports and ideologies. For example, Marys12 likens Tcherniakov’s production to the cheapness and banality she associates with Italian-style opera:

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83 Valery, “Успех такого спектакля в Париже понятен: с загадочно мятущейся русской душой содрали мишурку, она стала понятной и простой, как этот кубический зал с люстрой и длинным канцелярско-обеденным столом.”
Pushkin’s novel was read [by Tcherniakov] as a sharp and contemporary farce. High society became a gangster party with the manners of the nouveaux riches, more like the “New Russians” of the ‘90s. The plot revealed the foundations of a cheap novel. In the forced singing and in the music was so much expression of Italian opera, revealing the obvious banality of this story.\footnote{Marys12, “Evgenii Onegin Postanovka Tcherniakova,” July 18, 2013(12:47 a.m.), http://marys12.livejournal.com/25582.html. “Роман Пушкина был прочитан, как фарс, очень остро и современно. Верхи общества превратились в бандитскую тусовку с манерами современных нуворишей, скорее даже «новых русских» закваски 90-ых. Сюжет обнажил основу бульварного романа. [...]В форсированном пении и в музыке было столько экспрессии итальянской оперы, что обнаружилась очевидная пошлость этой истории.”}

Marys12 conflates her response to the representations of the New Russians in Tcherniakov’s St. Petersburg scenes with her dislike of the “Italian” vocal style and subject matter. The repetition of the words “cheap” and “banal” subtly call up the widespread view that Western cultural imports lack depth and substance.

In a more explicit statement, a commenter who calls himself Chelovek employs the imagery of Christianity to denounce Tcherniakov’s staging. He even paraphrases Jesus’s last words on the cross: “Forgive this pervert, Piotr Iliich and Aleksandr Sergeevich, for he knows not what he does,” equating Tchaikovsky and Pushkin to God the Father, and Onegin to Christ crucified by Tcherniakov’s scenography.\footnote{Chelovek, comment on “Evgenii Onegin: Bol’shoi Teatr: Zritel’kie Otyzy,” Teatral’naia Afisha (discussion forum), December 19, 2011, http://www.teatr.ru/th/perfcomm-view.asp?perf=960&rep=0. “Простите этого извращенца, Петр Ильич и Александр Сергеевич, ибо не ведает, что творит.”} Furthermore, Chelovek accuses Tcherniakov of perversion, homosexuality, and corruption of Russia’s national spirituality.

In contemporary Russia, especially in the last five years, the public recognition of homosexuality has become a sometimes violent proxy for national identity politics. The
conservative movement in Russia, strongly supported by Putin’s government, has represented the gay rights movement as a Western attempt to undermine Russia’s spirituality and sense of moral purpose. Chelovek rhetorically addresses Tcherniakov:

Why do you not like people? Why do you feed them this ****? (author’s asterisks) … I understand that there is a global tendency—freedom to perverts, sexual minorities, but I had hoped that the Bolshoi Theater had kept its spirituality. It’s very painful, but I was mistaken. Ballet at the Bolshoi is still alive, but opera is dead, and instead of it, they shoved some diabolical creation down our throats. Don’t worry; there is the Judgment Day.  

Chelovek personifies the Bolshoi Theater as a human body, which can keep its spirituality or be similarly perverted. When Chelovek accuses Tcherniakov (and the theater administration) of perversion, therefore, he is not only denouncing the director as a purveyor of sexual immorality, but also accusing him of assisting the Western-led destruction of Russia’s artistic beauty and spiritual mission.

In my opinion, the most sophisticated reading of Tcherniakov’s Onegin came from a young woman named Tamara, who wrote her spectator review as an email to her mentor, Alla Gozun. Her mentor then posted Tamara’s review-email to the self-publishing website Proza.ru, an open-access site for poets, amateur and upcoming novelists, and songwriters. Tamara’s analysis of Onegin focuses on the scene at

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87 Chelovek, comment on teatr.ru. “За что же Вы так не любите людей? За что кормите этим г...? Мы не извращенцы, мы люди. Опомнитесь. После этого спектакля нет оправдания руководству Большого, раз разрешили так опуститься и разрушить все принципы. Я понимаю, что общемировая тенденция—свобода извращенцам, сексуальным меньшинствам, но я надеялась, что Большой сохранит свою духовность. Очень больно, но я ошиблась. Балет в Большом еще жив, а опера умерла, и вместо нее нам подсовывают какие-то дьявольские творения. Не бойтесь, есть Высший суд.”

Tatiana’s name-day party in the fourth tableau, and explores how Tcherniakov’s revision threatens to upend the Pushkin myth. She illustrates how, for her, the struggle for the gun between Tcherniakov’s Lensky and Eugene challenges the Pushkin myth.

In the Bolshoi’s new production, Tamara writes, Lensky comes at Eugene with the shotgun and the whole of Russian history gasps. In Tcherniakov’s staging, the poet Lensky becomes the aggressor, challenging Eugene to a duel and then pushing a loaded shotgun into his hands inside the Larins’ dining room. For Tamara, Tcherniakov’s revision of Onegin’s duel scene reveals the ugliness and cruelty of Pushkin’s own unnecessary, deadly duel. She ruminates on how Russians would be affected if Pushkin had killed D’Anthès in the duel instead of the other way around. She writes:

Pushkin’s death shook Russia and to this day it is still shaking. But imagine that it all “could be otherwise, and fated completely different” …

That Pushkin wasn’t killed in the duel, but that he killed D’Anthès. Could that have happened? It could. And then what would that mean for Russia? Our greatest poet—a murderer?

And our critics would have to look for other justifications, evidence of this outcome. […]
PUSHKIN could behave like Lensky, and he did just that.
[Pushkin’s actions were] Funny, ridiculous, ugly, irresponsible.

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89 Tamara, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. Here Tamara paraphrases Tatiana’s letter.
90 Tamara, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “Гибель Пушкина потрясла Россию и до сих пор потрясает.
Но представьте, что всё «быть могло иначе, и суждено совсем иное»…
Что не Пушкин был убит на дуэли, а это он убил Дантеса.
Могло быть такое? - Могло.
И тогда что имела бы Россия? Величайшего своего поэта – убийцу? И нашим критикам пришлось бы искать другие, оправдательные, свидетельства этого исхода. […]
Pушкин мог поступить так, как Ленский, и он так и поступил.
Смешно, нелепо, безобразно, безответственно.”
As I presented in Chapter 3, Aleksandr Pushkin is frequently invoked as a symbol of Russia’s creative potential and its morality. Part of this symbolism relates to Pushkin’s untimely death in a duel: although the poet was the challenger, his foreign opponent killed him. The death of Pushkin’s character Lensky has strongly shaped the cultural memory of Pushkin’s death: the popular perception of the poet Lensky as an innocent has, by analogy, diminished the impression that Pushkin was to blame for his own death. When Tcherniakov’s staging requires the operatic Lensky to act aggressively and purposefully, the moral center of the Pushkin myth is threatened. Still, Tcherniakov does not change history: he has Onegin grab the gun, which accidentally goes off. As Tamara puts it, “the ridiculousness and horror of the occurrence returns” to Onegin and to Russia with the whole audience as witness.91

Tamara’s particular gift is her ability to articulate how relatively minor directorial decisions resonate with the social, moral, and national constructions of the Russian audience. Russians, she argues, should be more aware of their own beliefs, and they should be able to recognize the difference between history and the cultural construction of morality. Her reading of the duel scene testifies to the role of Tchaikovsky’s Onegin in sustaining the Pushkin myth. But it also demonstrates how adaptations, including Tcherniakov’s production, continue to influence the conversation about the arts and life by challenging audience members’ narratives about individual and national guilt.

91 Tamara, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. "Острота и ужас содеянного вернулись из жизни - из романа и оперы- к зрителю."
Onegin Reviews as Expression

The many reviews written by professional critics and ordinary audience members reveal how important Onegin remains in the construction of Russian national identity. Yet the depth of many “amateur” analyses reveals that individual people engage with the opera in multiple ways. Online diatribes against Tcherniakov and his reconception of Onegin reveal much more than the preference of conservative operagoers for traditional stagings. Instead, each review illustrates the process of one individual struggling to reconcile the new production within his or her own complex understanding of life.

When examined as a process, rather than as categorical products, each review can be regarded as a transcript of one individual’s expression. Tcherniakov’s radical reconception of the cornerstone of Russian literary and music culture led many people to reexamine Onegin, Tatiana, and the Pushkin myth as a network of meanings. For many audience members, the director’s iconoclasm threw them into the turbulent and vulnerable state of expression. During this process, the search for stable meanings drove these individuals to reflect on Onegin and Russian life. As individual audience members described the production and their emotional reaction to the character, or as they named it brilliant or heretical, each person documented their search for a sense of stability (Fundierung).

As Russian operagoers described the opera, they also addressed their own identity as Russian citizens, as members of the intelligentsia, and as lovers of musical beauty. Furthermore, the public posting of reviews allows audience members to feel that they have the ability to participate in shaping their own culture, even as individuals without
the authoritative platforms of cultural critics or famous artists. As such, scholars can read these reviews not only as “rants” that “vent” excess emotion, but the documentation of individual’s search for meaning in art and in life. Many of these audience members chose to post their thoughts online, but we can assume that far more people engaged with Tcherniakov’s *Onegin* in face-to-face conversations or in personal reflection. Those who posted their spectator reviews online, however, have demonstrated how important *Onegin* and art remain for members of the Russian intelligentsia.
In 2009, three years after the premiere of Tcherniakov’s iconoclastic production of Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin*, the choreographer Boris Eifman created a full-length ballet *Onegin* for his own company. Unlike Tcherniakov’s setting in the “vaguely Soviet past,” Eifman’s *Onegin* moved the chronotope closer to the present day, to post-Soviet Moscow. Television footage projected on a screen showed the riot around the Russian White House in 1991 and scenes from Tchaikovsky’s ballet *Swan Lake*. Eifman’s equally heterogeneous musical score alternated between Tchaikovsky’s orchestral works and progressive rock pieces. The choreography encompassed ballet as well as a pastiche of “modern” dance styles, including mid-twentieth-century partner dances and a balletricialized version of hip-hop.

Writing from his position as artistic director of the Eifman Ballet, the choreographer placed a statement in the program that spelled out his intentions for *Onegin*:

*What is the Russian soul today? Has it retained its uniqueness, its mystery, and its appeal? How would the heroes of the novel play out their fate? In the “encyclopedia of Russian life,” what would the features of that time become today, and have they become a sign of the fate of the many generations of my fellow countrymen? The art of choreography is not ready to answer questions of social existence in real terms. But by taking part in creative work...*
through its comprehension, analyses, and individual
evaluation, we take part in the process of its improvement.¹

The choreographer draws on Dostoevsky’s association of *Eugene Onegin* with the
“mysterious Russian soul” and projects his own intent to locate the current state of that
soul. He alludes to the tradition of examining Russian social life through critical
interpretations of *Eugene Onegin* begun by Vissarion Belinsky in his 1844 article,
discussed in Chapter 3.² While acknowledging that choreography is not as specific as
literature, Eifman frames his project as an attempt to participate in the amelioration of
Russian social life.

Judging by the reception of Eifman’s *Onegin*, this artistic statement was also
understood as a prompt. When professional critics and ordinary audience members wrote
their own reviews, they too grappled with the idea of a Russian soul transformed by post-
Soviet circumstances. Eifman’s contemporary *Onegin* became the starting point for much
of the discussion, which duly expanded toward broader evaluations of what contemporary
life holds for Russians. These responses appeared online from December 2009 until July
2014, when I stopped collecting them. The corpus—fourteen blogs, eighteen reviews, and
two academic papers—addresses salient themes of sexuality, emotion, and virtue.

душа сегодня? Сохранила ли она свою самобытность, свою тайну, свою притягательность. Как
распорядились бы сегодня своей судьбой герои романа? Что в «энциклопедии русской жизни»
было печатью времени, а что стало знаком судьбы многих поколений моих сограждан.
Искусство хореографии не готово ответить на актуальные вопросы жизнеустройства
общества. Но, участвуя в творчестве их осмыслении, анализе и индивидуальной оценке, мы
тем самым участвуем в процессе его совершенствования.”
² Vissarion Belinsky, “*Eugene Onegin: An Encyclopedia of Russian Life,*” in *Russian Views of Pushkin’s
Although Eifman’s production did not cause as much collective distress as Tcherniakov’s opera staging three years earlier, this Onegin did inspire a related and fascinating conversation about the possibilities and challenges of life in the contemporary world.

**Boris Eifman and His Choreographic Adaptations**

Boris Eifman (b. 1946) is one of the most active choreographers in Russia today, and his company also tours annually in Europe and the United States. After graduating from the Vaganova Academy of Russian Ballet, one of the most prestigious and academically rigorous training centers in the world, Eifman founded his own troupe in 1977. Although this path from dancer to choreographer is fairly common in the Western world, Soviet Russia had very few independent ballet companies that could employ choreographers. Alternately titled the “Leningrad New Ballet,” the “Lenkontsert Contemporary Ballet Theater,” and the “Leningrad Ballet Ensemble,” Eifman’s semi-underground troupe provided an experimental alternative to the academic state ballet at the Mariinsky and Bolshoi theaters. Although Soviet authorities never prohibited

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3 Knowledge about Eifman’s biography has been sculpted by Eifman and his press team, who have made information available about his development as a choreographer, but withheld information about him as a performer. The biographical information presented above is taken from the most thorough extant sources, including Tatiana A. Boborykina’s articles and prefaces to books, Ol’ga Smetanina’s dissertation about his early works, and a long interview with the journalist, Elena Livsi. Smetanina, “Scenic Interpretations of Literary Works in the Œuvre of Boris Eifman: The Last Third of the Twentieth Century to the Beginning of the Twenty-First,” (KFN Dissertation, Sankt-Peterburgskii Gumanitarnyi Universitet Profsoiuzov, 2008); Boborykina, “Introduction,” in *The Art of Boris Eifman*, Souheil Michael Khoury, ed. (Lebanon: Dergam, 2013); Livsi, “Boris Eifman: Ya Dalek ot Shou-Biznesa i Glamura,” [Boris Eifman: I’m Distanced from Show Business and Glamour], *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* (June 20, 2011). http://www.kp.ru/daily/25723.4/2714624/.
Eifman’s ballet performances, his company remained precariously unfunded until 1989.\(^4\)

Most of Eifman’s literary ballets are set to classic orchestral works, often related to the topic of the ballet by a shared time period. His movement style emphasizes emotional suffering through outstretched arms, writhing torsos, soloists lying prostrate on the ground, and melodramatic facial expressions that are uncommon in contemporary ballet. Now officially titled “St. Petersburg State Academic Ballet Theater under the Direction of Boris Eifman,” the shorter “Eifman Ballet of St. Petersburg,” or simply the “Eifman Ballet,” the company has become a fully recognized state theater troupe and one of the important dance ensembles in St. Petersburg.\(^5\)

During the post-Soviet period, the Eifman Ballet became as renowned an institution as the Mariinsky. The Russian Federation heaped awards on Eifman’s work in the 1990s, as if making up for the years when he operated without funding. Eifman became a “People’s Artist of Russia” in 1995, and was granted the “‘Triumph’ Award for Outstanding Contribution to National Culture” in 1996, the “Order of Peace and Reconciliation” in 1998, a Laureate of the State Prize of Russia in 1999, and the Order of Services to the Fatherland, Degree IV, in 2003. Post-Soviet theater festivals likewise honored him with their annual awards (the equivalent of New York’s Tony Awards). He won St. Petersburg’s Golden “Sofit” Prize in 1995, 1996, 1997, 2001, 2005, and

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Moscow’s Golden Mask in 1996 and 1999. In the 2000s, Eifman and his ballets fell out of favor with theater festivals and St. Petersburg and Moscow critics, but the company’s dancers win these awards each year and the Russian government continues to provide over half of the company’s budget. Although Eifman’s current work is considered old news among St. Petersburg dance critics, his company performs for large communities of Russian émigrés in cities around the world and in the Russian cultural capitals.

**Literary Ballets**

Over the years, Eifman has created over forty full-length ballets, many of which are narrative or “story” ballets based on literary sources. Since the early 1980s, Eifman has engaged well-known classics of Russian and world literature. Examples include ballets drawn from Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* (1984), Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot* (1994) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1995/2013), as well as biographies of Tchaikovsky (1993), Catherine the Great (*Russian Hamlet*, 1999), and George Balanchine (*Musagète*, 2004). His works participate in a tradition of contemporary ballet that combines the two-act format with a flexible approach to traditional ballet vocabulary and well-known narratives. Since the 1980s, the choreographer has premiered a new narrative ballet about once each year. Many Russian and American critics dislike his interest in storytelling:

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7 German Gureev, (Deputy Director of touring and external affairs, Eifman Ballet), in discussion with the author, August 5, 2013.
8 The literary ballet is not exclusively a Russian genre: other choreographers of literary ballets include Frederick Ashton, John Cranko, and John Neumeier.
narrative ballet runs contrary to the dominant trend in modern dance that prizes “pure” movement. For example, the Russian critic Maia Khichin argues that Eifman neglects “movement for the sake of the beauty of the movement itself,” and she observes that “freedom of the body takes a back seat to the original storyline and illustration of the relationship of the choreographer to the great literary work.” Still, Eifman’s interest in adapting literature and the lives of well-known artists into ballets can be considered his lifelong artistic project, and one that belongs to the larger post-Soviet turn toward reconsidering classic literature.

The choreographer’s major project for the last twenty years has emphasized the “psycho-emotional” interior life of his ballet heroes. In his trio of great Russian classics—Anna Karenina (2005), Chekhov’s The Seagull (2007), and Pushkin’s Onegin (2009)—Eifman presents klassika as an attempt to reveal its relevance in modern life.

The choreographer describes his project of adapting from literary sources:

If I need a literary base, it means that I am looking for an opportunity to plunge into some sort of realm, one that is familiar to me and to my audience; and, in the familiar, I try to discover and reveal the unexplored…. 

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10 For a history of the turn toward pure movement in ballet, see the section on George Balanchine and the New York City Ballet in Jennifer Homans, Apollo’s Angels: A History of Ballet (New York: Random House, 2010), 526-539.
Though Eifman himself is interested in the psychological underpinnings of classic literature, his modernizations of Russian classic literature simultaneously promote a discussion about post-Soviet social, moral, and national identities.

Establishing a Post-Soviet Chronotope

To explore “the Russian soul today” through choreography, Eifman updates the setting of his *Onegin* to the last decade of the twentieth century. When this work was first performed in December 2008, a little over a year after the Tcherniakov-Bolshoi scandal, its title, *Onegin.Online*, emphasized its “updated” scenario. In the months after the premiere, however, the choreographer reworked his ballet. He cut some of the screen projections and rearranged the numbers, framing most of the narrative in retrospect like a cinematic flashback. He also removed the playfully provocative “online” element from the title. The company’s official website does not acknowledge an earlier version: it states that the world premiere of *Onegin* took place on March 3, 2009. *Onegin* broaches major issues of identity in the twenty-first century, but despite the original title, it does not address computer technology at all. Instead, Eifman’s work considers what new possibilities and circumstances would influence the moral choices of Tatiana and Eugene if they lived in contemporary Russia.

Mikhail Bakhtin’s discussion of the concept of *chronotope* can help us explore the results of *Onegin*’s “updated” setting. *Chronotope* comes from the old Greek word for “time-space.” In “Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel,” Bakhtin describes how the expectations for what is realistic in a story are created by and bound to its literary
genre. He writes, “Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history.”13 For instance, in an ancient adventure tale, the story might move from one dangerous adventure to another at an unrealistic pace. The hero and heroine never age, nor do they consummate their marriage until the end. The adventure-time *chronotope* defines how the story will move forward, what kind of events will take place, and the possible actions of the heroes and villains. It also guides what kinds of perceptions, emotional reactions, and thoughts may occur within the story. Following Bakhtin, Caryl Emerson defines chronotope as the “conviction that the very structure of narrative carries within itself laws of causality and plausibility.”14 In Emerson’s exploration of *Boris Godunov*, she shows how opera’s chronotope governs the way that the action moves between recitative-time and aria-time, between dialogue that advances the plot and sung outpourings of emotion that pause it.

As Bakhtin describes it, the hero of the nineteenth-century realist novel moves through time and space as an individual. The novel follows closely his thoughts, movements, and travels. All of these influence the development of his person and therefore the narrative trajectory of the novel. As discussed in Chapter 3, Pushkin’s novel follows Eugene’s development in a manner appropriate to the genre, but it also offers extensive digressions in which the narrator looks away from Eugene to illustrate life in different social environments. *Eugene Onegin’s* chronotope mixes the expectations and

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limits of the novel and long form poetry. Chronotope does not necessarily equate to the “time period” of the story. For instance, merely changing the costumes for Verdi’s *Rigoletto* or Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* to the clothing of the 1960s would not necessarily alter the expectations for time and action inherent in each genre. In most adaptations, though, the chronotope often changes with the medium and the genre.

In Eifman’s adaptation of *Onegin*, the shift in chronotope between Pushkin’s novel-in-verse and Eifman’s narrative ballet is enhanced by the audience’s perception of expectations and limits within the post-Soviet setting. The chronotope of Eifman’s *Onegin*, therefore, is created not only by the shifting between “dream time” and “action time” of Eifman’s narrative, but also by the audience’s perceptions about their own lives. By specifically affixing the chronotope of *Onegin* to the post-Soviet period, Eifman does not merely select a particular time and place for the setting of his ballet; he also endows each of his characters with the image of a “contemporary” Russian person. Thus, the chronotope establishes what conflicts Tatiana, Eugene, and Lensky may face, and what kinds of solutions they may pursue.

In the printed libretto, Eifman denoted a specific location and time period for each scene, marking the time period “1990s” or “present.” During the first scene, for example, the choreographer projected footage of the 1991 coup at the Russian White House alongside a recording of the ballet *Swan Lake* on a scrim-backdrop. This choice was not merely an invocation of *klassika*. During the period of instability in 1991, the television channels suspended broadcasting and instead showed *Swan Lake* continuously for about three days. Many critics recalled that exact moment of uncertainty in their reviews. For
instance, the critic Irina Gubskaia notes at the beginning of her reviews that Eifman sent “the audience members with Onegin and Co. back to the time of the August coup.”\textsuperscript{15} The rest of the ballet moves between a “contemporary present” and flashbacks to August 1991. In an attempt to clarify the confusing narrative, the choreographer also quotes verses from Pushkin’s novel that matched the action, informing the audience exactly which moment from the novel is being performed.

Even though Eifman specifies the past-present binary between the early 1990s and the late 2000s in the printed program, many reviewers formed their own opinions about when the action of different scenes took place. To many professionals and ordinary spectators, all of whom had access to the program booklet (for about five dollars or 150 rubles in 2009), it was clear that Eifman’s Onegin shifts between the Soviet past and the post-Soviet present.\textsuperscript{16} Nonetheless, spectators did not agree about which decades actually constitute the “present” and “past.” Thus, their evaluations of what can happen in “contemporary” Russia reflect a conscious negotiation of their identities as specifically contemporary people.

For many audience members, their understanding of contemporary Russian life informs the chronotope of any story set in the present, from film to ballet or television series. Thus, their perceptions of the characters, actions, and psychological motivations in Eifman’s narrative ballet are strongly influenced by the idea that Eifman’s Onegin is a


contemporary story. Professional critics and ordinary audience members evaluated the relative plausibility of the actions, the setting, and the ultimate fate within the context of a period of life they themselves had experienced, each in different ways.

A “New Russian” in the Country

Eifman transforms the St. Petersburg high society people of Pushkin’s novel into the “New Russians” (basically, the post-Soviet nouveaux riches) of the 1990s, a style of Russian life familiar to every television viewer but experienced by few. The ballet opens with a corps de ballet scene among New Russians, a social (perhaps mafia) circle led by Tatiana and her husband, the blind “General.” Eifman then flashes back to the 1991 coup d’état. Eugene wears all red, Lensky has a guitar strapped to his back, and a General wears military fatigues. They guzzle vodka among a riot of corps dancers. Although crimson suit jackets were popular among chic men in the early 1990s, Eugene’s red jacket and red pants set him apart from the pastels worn by the provincial characters and the black-tie elegance of the city dwellers. At the end of the scene, a bomb explodes and the General staggers across the stage with blood on his face, clasping his eyes. With this scene, Eifman establishes Eugene, Lensky, and the General as new “types” of Russians: people who lived through the coup and subsequent times. Their new roles strongly contrast with Tchaikovsky’s characterization of the three men as handsome aristocrats. Tatiana’s husband becomes a 1990s oligarch (in Russian, mafiozi), Lensky a rock musician in the Russian bard tradition. The seductive Eugene, an alluringly sophisticated Don Juan type, remains a misfit in both the provinces and the city.
Ballet critic Nina Alovert introduces Eifman’s men:

The general (as he is called in the ballet) is an active and energetic freedom-fighter, a little bit rude and pushy; Lensky—a romantic, a bard never parting from his guitar—and Onegin, absolutely indifferent to all the goings-on. He’s a “lost” hero, a man outside society.\(^17\)

While the General and Lensky can be considered high-status figures of the contemporary world, Onegin loses his social status by the end of the Eifman’s ballet. Critic Maia Krylova describes him as “nobody Eugene, an indifferent loser in red pants.”\(^18\) Another critic, Natal’ia Korkonosenko, quickly extends Eugene’s ill-suited behavior and clothing into a metaphor for the times: “Onegin is the embodiment of the superfluous person of Soviet times and the transition period.”\(^19\) Eugene’s costume allows the audience to position him as an outsider. Thus, the critics Alovert, Krylova, and Korkonosenko all join in the Belinskian tradition of interpreting Pushkin’s characters within the critics’ own time.

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“Генерал (как его называют в балете) — активный и энергичный борец за свободу, несколько грубый и напористый; Ленский – романтик, бард, не разлучающийся со своей гитарой, и Онегин, совершенно безразличный ко всему происходящему. Это «потерянный» герой, человек вне общества.”


\(^{19}\) Natal’ia Korkonosenko, “Onegin posle Putcha,” review of Onegin, directed by Boris Eifman, Eifman Ballet, St. Petersburg, Gazeta, Mar 12, 2009, http://www.russianews.ru/newspaper/22102/22165. “Онегин — воплощение «лишнего» человека советских времен и переходного периода...” Here Korkonosenko refers to the concept of a “superfluous” men of nineteenth-century Russian literature. A “superfluous” character type who has wasted their potential, exemplified by Turgenev’s Diary of a Superfluous Man (1850). Eugene Onegin has been referred to as another superfluous type by the social critic Dmitri Pisarev in 1865 article, “Pushkin and Belinsky: Eugene Onegin.”
According to the choreographer’s program notes, Eifman’s third scene is set in the provincial world of Tatiana and Olga, generally perceived by audience members as the late (Soviet) 1980s or early 1990s. Eifman’s *Onegin* largely follows the skeleton of Pushkin’s plot. As in the novel, Eifman’s Tatiana Larina lives in the country with her sister, Olga. When Olga’s fiancé, Lensky, brings his friend Eugene to visit the girls, Tatiana immediately falls in love with him. She confesses her love in a letter written on the floor of the stage, accompanied by a voice-over reading of Pushkin’s verses. Eugene meets Tatiana, dances with her, but then leaves her literally alone on the stage floor. Deeply saddened, Tatiana dreams about consummating her love with Eugene through a symbolic sexual fantasy in which Eugene appears as the master of a group of monsters and enacts a sexual encounter on the stage. (This erotic nightmare is present in Pushkin’s *Onegin*; it was not a part of Tchaikovsky’s adaptation. The Soviet reading of Pushkin’s novel downplayed the dream and blurred the erotic undertones.)

Later, in a provincial nightclub, Eugene and Lensky quarrel over Olga, and Eugene ultimately kills Lensky with a knife. The girls mourn Lensky, but they also return to the provincial club to find their future husbands. The General, now a blind Russian *mafiozi*, pulls Tatiana into a dance. In the next scene, she undergoes a beauty salon make-over. In the final scenes, Tatiana appears as a glamorous and bejeweled “New Russian,” pleased with her place as queen of her oligarch’s circle. When Eugene re-enters her life and belatedly falls in love with the society lady Tatiana, she kisses him and then pushes him away.
Yet instead of ending the story there, as Pushkin and Tchaikovsky did, Eifman finishes his ballet with an operatic end. The General challenges Eugene. Though blind, he manages to stab Eugene with a knife. Eugene dies in his study among loose leaves of an unfinished manuscript scattered on the floor, perhaps representing his own story. Despite Eifman’s complicated combination of flashbacks and dreams, the basic trajectory of Pushkin’s tale remains intact. Furthermore, most if not all of Eifman’s Russian audiences are so familiar with Pushkin’s story that the broken narrative did not draw major complaints in professional or spectator reviews.

In fact, many professional critics responded positively to Eifman’s contemporary chronotope, calling it an accurate representation of modern life. Critics typically do not offer detailed connections between the ballet and their personal lives as the authors of spectator reviews do; nonetheless, their “objective” descriptions of Eifman’s project reveal resonances (or lack thereof) with their own opinions of contemporary life. For instance, the critic Elena Dobriakova finds the “anxiety of modern society” in Eifman’s Onegin. Sharapova fully supports Eifman’s project. She writes that “his Perestroika-period environment of the Eifman ballet—it’s nothing more than an attempt at a contemporary understanding of Pushkin’s times.” In Olga Sharapova’s reading, Eifman’s idea of reconsidering the “encyclopedia of Russian life” is both possible and

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admirable. The critic Irina Gubskaia concurs, noting that the atmosphere of Eifman’s *Onegin* remains “extremely close to the emotional tension of the novel.” None of these critics offers personal information, but their comments reveal how even “objective” critics connected with Eifman’s project of considering *Onegin* in post-Soviet Russia.

**Scholars Respond to Post-Soviet Life**

Russian scholars analyzing the literary components of Eifman’s adaptation also reflect upon and sometimes voice their anger at post-Soviet society. For example, literary scholar Jenni Katysheva censures Tcherniakov’s *Onegin* as a “deformation of the classics,” yet she praises Eifman’s adaptation of *Onegin* as a reading of Pushkin “in a contemporary way, without destroying its meaning and spiritual qualities.” Katysheva’s interpretation of Eifman’s transposed setting reveals her relationship with the collapse of the Soviet Union. She associates Eugene’s personal tragedy with the tragedy of the Russian people, a “healthy nation which is allowed a taste of freedom” and decides to destroy its old system. In Katysheva’s view, “to its shame” Russia’s rash decision has eroded its own conscience and spiritual values, resulting in disillusionment.

Katysheva further argues that Eifman intended to show how the “Russian soul” deteriorated after the collapse of state socialism. Like Russia, Eifman’s Tatiana becomes disillusioned, pursues money over love, and ends up spiritually broken, at the mercy of a *mafiozi*. Eugene, however, ultimately “returns to genuine spirituality” and even

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22 Gubskaia, review of *Onegin*. “Крайне близкими эмоциональному напряжению романа.”
challenges the world of power and money through his altercation with Tatiana’s husband. Katysheva’s reading of Eifman’s ballet is scholarly—she draws on Bakhtin’s theory of genres to defend the legitimacy his adaptation—but it also reveals her own experience of the collapse of the USSR as a tragedy. Writing out her interpretation of Eifman’s *Onegin* allows her a forum for negotiating the trauma of political turbulence.

Likewise, the blogger Verona_Sunrise praised Eifman’s choice of material, task, and approach as innately Russian. The blogger writes:

> the homegrown choreographer, whose consciousness, like that of any student from Soviet schools, is burdened with the memory of the encyclopedia of Russian life and the Russian soul,... took it upon himself with the help of Pushkin to solve the critical issues of reality in the fatherland.

Verona_Sunrise observes that because Eifman’s Russianness had been instilled in him by birth, education, and spirituality, his moral imperative to “solve the critical issues” of his country inspired his *Onegin*. Eifman’s adaptation is worthwhile, she argues, because the story’s connection to the Russian soul enables a good and necessary reworking of the current state of Russian life. By contrast, the blogger Margarita Rebetskaia accuses Eifman of unintentionally creating kitsch because he accurately reflects the zeitgeist of the 1990s. She writes, “The only justification here is that ‘kitsch’ was part of the atmosphere of the ‘90s, which is well known to all Russian citizens of the twenty-first

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"Отечественный хореограф, чье сознание, как у каждого бывшего советского школьника, отягощено памятью об энциклопедии русской жизни и русской душе, сразу же отказался от иллюстративности, сгубившей англичанина, и взялся с помощью Пушкина решать важнейшие вопросы отечественной реальности."

27 Verona_Sunrise, review of Onegin."решать важнейшие вопросы отечественной реальности."
Although Dobriakova, Katysheva, Verona_Sunrise, and others find Eifman’s post-Soviet chronotope moving, Rebetskaia believes that it ultimately made his Onegin a “superficial and empty” work.29

Other critics were angered by Eifman’s representation of the present. Their comments demonstrate that they understand their present-day world quite differently than Eifman does. For instance, the critic Nina Alovert fumes at “such a terrible picture of contemporary Russian society.”30 Her colleague, Irina Gubskaia, points out that Eifman sets “a ballet about lawlessness in a city which is trying to forget about its reputation as a crime-ridden city.”31 As citizens of twenty-first-century Russia, they already feel distanced from the “wild ‘90s” and bristle at Eifman’s representation of a decadent, lawless present. Another critic, Natal’ia Korkonosenko, doubts that the core of Pushkin’s novel remains in Eifman’s work: “What does all this have to do with Pushkin and his ‘encyclopedia of Russian life,’ the audience member asks himself.”32 Korkonosenko thus implies that the choreographer was unsuccessful both as an adapter and in his promotion of social questions. These comments demonstrate a strong demand that an Onegin ballet truthfully represent society. Because individuals understand and relate to Russian society

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"Единственное оправдание - это то, что «китч» - отчасти атмосфера 90-х, знакомая россиянам XXI века."

29 Rebetskaia, review of Onegin. "Все самое поверхностное и пустое."

30 Alovert, review of Eugene Onegin. "Такую страшную картину современного российского общества"

31 Gubskaia, review of Eugene Onegin. "В городе, который всеми силами пытается забыть о своем титуле криминальной столицы, ставить балет о беспределе."

32 Korkonosenko, review of Eugene Onegin. "Какое отношение имеет все это к Пушкину и его «энциклопедии русской жизни», задается вопросом зрителя."
of the present day differently, their own conception of contemporary life guides the variety of reactions to Eifman’s *Onegin*.

Theater critic (and blogger) Boris Tarasov concurs, pointing out that Eifman is “much too late.” In Tarasov’s view, *Onegin’s* “fraternization of communists, liberals, and democrats as embodied by the General, Eugene and Lensky for a bottle of vodka in ‘the kitchen’, the party at the Larins’ is turned into a ballet at a provincial discothèque, the ‘Mafioso’ Gremin – these metaphors are irrevocably outdated.” Although 1991 marked the beginning of the post-Soviet period, Alovert, Gubskaia, and Tarasov have begun intellectually and emotionally to periodize the 1990s as separate from the present. By denying that the political environment of the coup and the period of lawlessness that ensued are part of the present day, these critics take part in the process of re-writing living history. They are defining what life is like now in distinction to what life was like in the past.

The Eifman Ballet performed a set of previews of the work in November 2008 under the title *Onegin.Online*. Although Eifman dropped the “Online” portion of the title for the next set of performances in March 2009, one critic who attended these previews drew the word *online* into their reviews. For instance, the blogger and critic Boris Tarasov punned on the lingo of the Internet, joking that while Eifman hoped to show that


34 Tarasov, review of *Eugene Onegin*. “Только сильно опоздал. Перенос пушкинской истории во времена путча 1991 года выглядит не только надуманным, но и анахроничным. Братание коммунистов, либералов и демократов в лице Генерала, Онегина и Ленского за бутылкой водки «на кухне», вечеринка у Лариних, обернувшаяся в балете деревенской дискотекой, «мафозии» Гремин – все метафоры безвозвратно устарели.”
he “had his finger on the pulse of contemporary life,” he utterly failed. In a second review, Tarasov notes that Eifman’s directorial choices showed that he was more ‘offline’ than ‘online.’ Tarasov criticizes Eifman’s idea of contemporary Russia in 2009 and his choreographic approach to representing it, both style and content are out of date. For example, the choreographer defined the present as beginning in 1991, but Tarasov and others feel that by 2009, they have moved beyond the culture of the wild ‘90s. Eifman’s intended to hold a mirror up to contemporary society, but he chose an outdated image.

The blogger T_Platonova similarly accused Eifman of creating a meaningless version of the present, a “notorious and rather false ‘contemporaneity’” that distracted from the scenes of pure dance. Other bloggers responded positively to issues of relevance and the power of Eifman’s “contemporary” Onegin. For instance, Svetlana Trinity writes that the addition of the word “online” in the original title cues the audience to look for the “unknown in the known,” suggesting further that “the expression ‘online’ is an allusion to the universality of Pushkin’s work.” For Trinity, Eifman’s original title

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36 Tarasov, spectator review of Onegin. “Из «online» «Онегин» переместился в «offline», что, впрочем, неудивительно — постановщик балета и сам уже давно и хронически «не в сети».”


and his adaptation drew Pushkin’s work into the present, helping Russians venture into the “unknown.”

Musical Markers of Passing Time

In addition to the chronotope established through costumes and projected images, Eifman also employs the musical score to create a sense of shifting between the past and present. The choreographer mixes recordings of Tchaikovsky’s best-known works, including the first Piano Concerto, the Seasons, his string quartets, and instrumental performances of the opera Eugene Onegin, with progressive rock songs by guitarist Aleksandr Vital’evich Sitkovetsky. Switching among such disparate musical styles reminds the audience of the past-present theme with every scene change. For the most part, however, the critical reviews and spectator responses accepted this medley as an accessible part of Eifman’s treatment of Onegin.

The choreographer borrows songs from Sitkovetsky’s solo albums from the 1990s, Zello and Empty Arena. The musician is more famous for his work as the lead guitarist and songwriter of the progressive rock group Avtograf.39 Led by Sitkovetsky from 1979 to 1990, Avtograf was among the best-known Soviet rock bands, and one of the few state-supported ones. Like most art rock groups, Avtograf emphasized virtuosic instrumental technique (its members had studied at the prestigious Tchaikovsky Conservatory of Music and Gnesin Academy in Moscow) and their musical compositions featured a variety of complex textures and forms. Perhaps because Avtograf emphasized

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musicianship rather than rebellion, the band was allowed to release recordings in the USSR, have their music played on the radio, perform in Western countries, and collaborate with Western music groups. The group dissolved along with the Soviet Union in 1990, but Avtograf’s music remained in the national soundscape for a while afterwards.

Sitkovetsky’s music for Eifman’s *Onegin*, however, was composed after the guitarist emigrated to the United States in the 1990s. Sitkovetsky’s albums, *Zello* (1991) and *Empty Arena* (1999), were complex and clever compositions for rock ensemble, orchestral instruments, and studio effects, without vocals or lyrics. Eifman’s particular choice of Sitkovetsky’s solo albums—rather than other Soviet rock groups more closely associated with political dissidence such as Akvarium, DDT, or Kino—allowed him to present a distinctive stylistic contrast to Tchaikovsky’s classical music without necessarily invoking a parallel discourse about dissidence in the 1980s. Instead, the progressive rock sound predominantly summons a nostalgia for the last Soviet decade.

Although Avtograf broke up before the 1991 coup, the contrast of any rock music with Tchaikovsky’s orchestral works activates a past/present pairing for most audience members. Still, Eifman does not lock the stylistic contrast between Sitkovetsky’s rock and Tchaikovsky’s classical music into a fixed binary opposition of past/present, city/country, or classical/rock. For example, the city club scenes supposedly take place in the present (late 2000s), but the dancers perform a stylized tango to Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto No. 1. In the provincial club scene, set in the relative “past” (circa 1991), Tatiana and the General meet each other to the progressive rock of Sitkovetsky, which
was composed in the mid-1990s. Eifman does not oppose the warm country to the elegant but cold musical associations of the city in the partner dances, as Tchaikovsky did in his *Onegin*. Instead, the patchwork placement of the borrowed musical excerpts adds a further layer of shifting between opposites. These shifts never quite align with the frequent crosscutting between past and present, country and city, dreams and real life.

Newspaper critics wrote mixed reviews of Eifman’s borrowing of such disparate musical styles. Some reacted negatively to the use of rock—critic Lidia Nochneva called Sitkovetsky’s music “a little bit of ‘um-tsa-tsa’ of the cheapest quality.”40 On the other hand, critic Nina Alovert praised the disparate selections as “connected quite meaningfully.”41 (She does not say how.) Unlike most critics, Nina Roms connects the patchwork mixture she finds in Eifman’s scores to the sonic ecology of contemporary life. She writes, “At first glance, the connection of classical music and rock may seem strange, but we really find such things in today’s world at every step […] in the end, that’s really our life, which seems to consist of multi-colored patches.”42 For Roms, Eifman’s use of rock music signifies the contemporary chronotope, but also emphasizes a post-modern sense of the artistic and historical past that remains a meaningful part of the present.

41 Alovert, review of *Eugene Onegin.* “соединенных весьма осмысленно.”
Negotiating Homosexuality in Contemporary Life

In his contemporary *Onegin*, Eifman uses pairs of dancers to address themes of sexuality and the sexual experience of love in the modern world. In Soviet readings of Pushkin’s and Tchaikovsky’s *Eugene Onegin*, the discussion of the affection between romantic pairs Olga-Lensky and Tatiana-Eugene remained markedly platonic. Instead of addressing the sexual allusions in Tatiana’s dream in Chapter 5, Soviet educators approached it as an example of old folk practices and nature imagery. Indeed, in the canonic opera productions as well as the opera-on-film, the couples barely hold hands. Eifman’s couples, however, explore their romance through physical contact, as would be expected in a work for dancers.

The choreographer thematically explores ideas of sexuality through Tatiana’s and Eugene’s dream sequences. In many of bloggers’ responses to the performance, Eifman’s representations of sexuality and sexual experiences come to the foreground. Indeed, many of the bloggers mention the possibility of some kind of sexual relationship between Eifman’s Eugene and Lensky. Other bloggers, however, focus more on the highly sexualized relationship between Tatiana and her two male partners, Eugene and the General. Yet these comments also link the conversation to a consideration of sexual practice and experiences in contemporary Russia. A third line of thought branches off from these conversations about sex: the contested place of emotion, especially the concept of pure love, in the post-Soviet world.
Within the history of *Onegin* interpretations and adaptations, Eifman’s focus on Lensky and Eugene’s relationship is fairly unusual. Eifman’s choreography for Eugene and his best friend Lensky calls up a topical subject in post-Soviet Russian discourse—homosexuality. The close friendship between Lensky and Eugene in Pushkin’s novel deserves some attention from literary critics, but a Eugene-Lensky romance has not played a large part in the Pushkin myth or in realist interpretations of *Onegin*. Tchaikovsky’s two male heroes rarely interact on stage. Eifman’s Lensky and Eugene, however, dance together often, including in two dream sequences where the deceased Lensky visits Eugene, a manifestation of the latter’s troubled conscience. In a *pas-de-deux* between two male dancers, Lensky and Eugene lift each other’s bodies, wind their limbs around each other, mirror each other’s movement, and roll over each other on the floor. The level of engagement is not atypical choreography for modern dance, and it does not necessarily carry sexual content.

Although Eifman does not raise the issue of homosexuality in his notes in the printed program, many critics interpreted the male duets as homoerotic. For dance critic Nikita Eliseev, Lensky and Onegin “explicitly and in so many words, clearly and earnestly, heavily and roughly dance passion, love.” Eliseev asserts that homosexuality is “explicitly” present in the duet, but he cannot bring himself to write the word *homosexual*. The critic’s avoidance of the word homosexuality is typical in Russia. It reveals both the desire to address the issue of “non-traditional relationships” (as

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“Онегин (Олег Габышев) и Ленский (Дмитрий Фишер) совершенно недвусмысленно, ярко и убедительно, весомо, губо танцуют страсть, любовь.”
homosexuality is often described in official parlance) and a hesitation to use the deliberately direct discourse common in the West.

Unlike Eliseev, who interprets the relationship between the male leads as homosexual, the critic Boris Tarasov reads Eugene as sexually confused. “Onegin is confused in his own sexual orientation, and therefore is unconvincing in both the gay and the hetero-duets.”44 Tarasov reads the male-male duets as revealing sexual confusion as experienced by a gay person who has not yet understood his own sexuality. This sexual confusion is a stage of the process of “coming out” as currently understood in Western Europe and the United States. Tarasov writes, “The only original approach of the director and scenarist is the explanation for Onegin’s behavior as his love for Lensky and Lensky’s refusal of it—withers and dies unsubstantiated, and is then devalued by the sudden transformation of Onegin into a heterosexual.”45

Similarly, Tarasov criticizes Oleg Gabyshev, who dances the part of Eugene and is one of the best male soloists in Russia. Tarasov censures Gabyshev’s dance-acting by equating the core of his performance with a clear knowledge of the character Eugene’s sexuality. “Oleg Gabyshev’s quite colorless Onegin traditionally rushes around aimlessly,


45 Tarasov, spectator review of Onegin. “Когда-то бойкая режиссерская мысль Эйфмана климактерически буксует в «Онегине». Единственный оригинальный ход режиссера и сценариста — объяснение поведения Онегина его любовью к Ленскому и отказом Ленского — чахнет и погибает ничем не подкрепленный, а затем и девальвируется внезапным превращением Онегина в гетеросексуала.”
and this time—in search of his own sexual orientation." According to Tarasov’s interpretation, the role of Eugene cannot be “convincing” until Gabyshev the dancer has chosen an unambiguous gay or straight identity for his character. Tarasov’s call for clarity pursues a clear sexual orientation, and the need for one’s outward behavior to reflect one’s inner self.

Whatever Eifman’s intention for Lensky and Eugene’s relationship, the critics’ response demonstrates that the subject of homosexual relationships looms large in the minds of audience members. The discussion continues in the spectator reviews. The blogger Slava Arlekin alludes to homosexuality: “the exact character of the relationship between Onegin and Lensky, and moreover, that for the given question, I cannot give an objective answer. But to be specific, they are very–very close and have known each other for a very–very long time.” Arlekin’s delicate wording both demonstrates the blogger’s discomfort with the subject and reveals his need to grapple with it.

On the other hand, the blogger Sandy_z finds Eugene and Lensky’s homosexuality possible, probable, and interesting. She writes, “I must say that several times their duets conveyed a bisexual tension, but once the action moved to our time, why should they not be so? This only added spice to the story.” Sandy_z appears to

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46 Tarasov, spectator review of Onegin. “Довольно бесцветный Онегин Олега Габышева традиционно и бесцельно мечется, на сей раз — в поисках собственной сексуальной ориентации.”


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welcome the representation of homosexuality on the stage, yet her comments also reflect a protection of the classic story, and thus an idealized past. Although it is possible for a contemporary Eugene and Lensky to have such feelings, in her view such relationships would not have been possible in the era of Pushkin.

Other audience members tried to avoid a homosexual reading. For instance, the blogger Keppro ignores her own negative reaction to a possible allusion to homosexuality, and instead focuses on the choreographic possibilities of a duet between two male dancers. She finds the “acrobatic holds and close contact” between Onegin and Lensky to “open new horizons in choreography,” and remarks that “same-sex duets do not make me cringe.” 49 Keppro diverts attention away from a possible homosexual reading through an intellectualization of her own response, and perhaps a Western or progressive posturing. Similarly, the critic Tatiana Kuznetsova presents Eifman’s male-male choreography as one of variety: “Onegin’s relationship with Lensky is much more diverse and productive than with Tatiana.” 50 Indeed, Eifman is well known for his spectacular choreography for male dancers. Kuznetsova’s focus on the aesthetic elements of the Eugene-Lensky duets allows her to simply avoid the issue.

Although the critic Sharapova readily acknowledges the sex act in Tatiana’s dream, she doesn’t see any homosexuality in the male duets; instead, she attributes their

physical contact to the “trace of [Eugene’s] never-healing guilt and inescapable loss.”\textsuperscript{51} She views the dream sequences as illustrating Eugene’s spiritual entanglement with the friend he killed, foregrounding themes of spirituality or morality over questions of sexuality.

When critics and audience members chose to find homosexuality in Eifman’s (perhaps purposefully) unclear duets, they reveal their own need to deal with the subject and its relevance to contemporary identity, even if they hesitate in their writing. Indeed, since the 2009 premiere of Eifman’s \textit{Onegin}, the place of homosexuality in Russia life has become one of the major sites of conflict between “Eastern” and “Western” identities. As critics and audience members awkwardly interpret the relationship between Eugene and Lensky, they reveal their own negotiation of the place of alternative sexuality in their world. Thus, Eifman’s male-male duets act as a catalyst for a conversation about homosexuality in contemporary Russian life.

\textbf{Losing Tatiana}

In a similar discussion of sexuality in the contemporary world, many bloggers responded to the sexualization of Tatiana; some invoke the concept of the “fallen woman,” while others accept her sexuality as appropriate to a contemporary young woman. In Pushkin’s novel, the heroine dreams that she has been chased into a forest hut and is surrounded by wild animals ready to devour her. Then Eugene appears as the master of the wild animals. He leads her to a bench in the corner of the hut, “lays her on a

\textsuperscript{51}Sharapova, review of \textit{Eugene Onegin}. “след незаживающего чувства вины и неизбыточной потери.”
makeshift bed, and on her shoulder rests his head.” Eifman translates this scene directly from the novel, surrounding his Tatiana with the *corps de ballet* in animal masks. They lift her high on a plank. When Eugene rescues her, he places Tatiana on her back, and they engage in an explicitly sexual *pas-des-deux*. The two dancers move from the gestural imitation of the sex act into a highly expressive set of lifts and leaps, as Tatiana consummates in her dreams the love she is denied in real life.

Critics reacted both positively and negatively to the implications of Eifman’s sexual choreography for his heroine. Eliseev calls Tatiana’s dream an “erotic nightmare.” Sharapova interprets the scene as a legitimately “powerful picture of an erotic fantasy of a maturing girl.” To Nina Alovert, the dream sequence depicts Tatiana as a “fully contemporary girl, who doesn’t hide her spiritual, nor later her sexual, impressions.” For Alovert, dreaming of sexual fulfillment is part of being a complete woman.

Others welcome the sexualized duets as aesthetically appealing. The blogger U_jazzi, appreciates the sexual scenes, assessing Tatiana’s nightmare as “cooler than any erotica.” In his blog, Boris Tarasov grumbles about the overtly sexual positioning of limbs, and the omnipresence of sexualized females in Eifman’s choreography. “As usual

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54 Sharapova, review of *Eugene Onegin*. “в мощную картину эротических фантазий взрослеющей девушки.”
55 Alovert, review of *Eugene Onegin*. “Это вполне современная девочка, которая не скрывает ни душевного, ни, позднее, сексуального влечения.”

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Anastasia Sitnikova’s Tatiana and Natal’ia Pоворозниу’s Ol’ga voluptuously spread their legs on a bench while waiting for their cavaliers.” Though Tarasov reluctantly concedes that the representation of female sexuality is a part of modern dance, his comments reveal a discontent with this kind of explicit choreography.

Other bloggers chafed at the onstage representation of a sexual Tatiana. Arlekin interprets Tatiana and Eugene’s meeting as a moment of sexual awakening for Tatiana. Her provincial world, Arlekin argues, has prevented her from developing her sexuality, and Onegin’s seductive touches lead her to break the rules of her own social order. Arlekin writes, “Morals and matters reign harshly there.” Then he criticizes Eugene’s actions in corrupting the sexually innocent heroine. “On the first date he gets up Tatiana’s skirt, and receiving the letter, instead of offering her a confession, and not in the spirit of ‘I love you with a brother’s love,’ and something more like ‘You, Slut, disgust me.’” In Arlekin’s view, Eifman has substituted sexual connection for love. Eugene’s arrival awakens Tatiana sexually rather than romantically. Yet, in Eugene’s reproach, she suffers the repercussions of a girl who has broken her own moral code.

Similarly, Margarita Rebetskaia defines Tatiana’s love as a seduction. Eugene’s “sexual looseness” and “fashionable haircut” draw out the innocent heroine’s desire.

57 Tarasov, spectator review of Onegin. “Татьяна Анастасии Ситниковой и Ольга Наталии Поворозниу как обычно сладострастно раздвигают ноги на завалинке в ожидании кавалеров.”
58 Arlekin, spectator review of Onegin. “Нравы там царят жестокие, гопота выступает клином и никому не дает проходу. Но и Онегин не прост - на первом же свидании лезет Татьяне под юбку, а получив письмо, взамен предлагает ей не исповедь, но отповедь, и не в духе ‘я вас люблю любовью брата’, а что-то больше похожее на ‘ты, Зин, на грубость нарываисси..’”
According to Rebetskaia, Tatiana and Olga become “corrupted.” Rebetskaia likens Tatiana to Julia Roberts’s prostitute in *Pretty Woman*; she receives a makeover and the trappings of high society, and welcomes her role as the sexual companion of a powerful man. Unlike the cheerful ending of *Pretty Woman*, however, Tatiana’s transition into sexual glamour girl is a descent into moral depravity.

St. Petersburg-based literature scholar Tatiana Boborykina offers an explanation of Eifman’s Tatiana. A respected scholar in her own right, Boborykina maintains a unique relationship with Boris Eifman. As Eifman’s former spouse, Boborykina remains in the choreographer’s small inner circle as a trusted critic and a connection to the St. Petersburg academic world. Her writing on his work emerges as a blend of Eifman’s choreographic ideas, those of a scholarly critic, and those of a member of Eifman’s press team. Boborykina has authored numerous articles about Eifman and his ballets; much of this material has been published under the auspices of the Eifman Company. For example, Boborykina wrote the preface for the most recent coffee table book of Eifman’s ballets (*Khoury, The Art of Boris Eifman*). Her forthcoming book about the choreographer will have a chapter on *Onegin* and it will include a series of photographs edited by the choreographer.

As Boborykina confided to me, Eifman reviews many of her essays about his ballets and gives her feedback. Because of this relationship, it is difficult to know where Eifman’s ideas end and Boborykina’s begin. Her published criticism of his work presents

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60 Rebetskaia, spectator review of *Onegin*. “растление Татьяны и Ольги Лариных.”
61 Rebetskaia, spectator review of *Onegin*. “история Татьяны из фильма «Красотка» со смешными находками из области «снимите это немедленно».”
Boborykina’s interpretations of Eifman’s ideas, but the content has been influenced by conversations with the choreographer and probably filtered for concepts that did not appeal to him. Despite the uncertainty about the source of each idea, Boborykina’s relationship to Eifman still offers a unique opportunity for insight into the choreographer’s philosophy as well as his conceptual goals for *Onegin*.

In his printed statement in the ballet’s libretto, for example, Eifman sets out to understand “what is the Russian soul today?” Boborykina answers Eifman’s question in her unpublished manuscript.

Tatiana of the past is no more. It is in her that Eifman embodies the tragic passing of time as well as history, and its power over the human soul. The contemporary Tatiana has her own motives for scorn ing Eugene.  

Boborykina suggests that the moral strength motivating Pushkin’s Tatiana to ultimately reject Eugene, the decision that earned so much praise in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is not a factor in the rejection of Eugene by Eifman’s Tatiana. Instead, she rejects Eugene for less lofty reasons. These include an attachment to her luxurious lifestyle as the wife of an oligarch and fear that she and her lover might incur the violent wrath of the General.

In Act II, Eifman’s Tatiana goes to the beauty parlor and is wheeled around the stage in a rolling bathtub, accompanied by all the accouterments of modern-day hair salons. According to Boborykina, Eifman portrays Tatiana’s metamorphoses as “a familiar and ironic process: Tatiana goes through all the stages of conversion along the

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way to the contemporary notion of the ‘glamor girl.’”\textsuperscript{64}

The choreographer demolishes the moral ideal championed by late nineteenth-century readers, depriving her of her dignity and her ability to demonstrate virtue. Yet, in so doing, Eifman’s Tatiana maintains her role in the Pushkin myth. Tatiana Larina remains an image, a body onto which an author and a society project an image of themselves. Eifman and Boborykina see in this Tatiana the image of an amoral contemporary Russia, corrupted by modern commercial values and disillusioned with the future. Even as she turns into a wealthy socialite, Tatiana remains a potent image of morality (or lack thereof) for Russians.

**Love and Art in the Contemporary World**

Another group of bloggers examines the theme of emotion, complementing their evaluation of sexuality in the contemporary world, including a characterization of love as difficult in contemporary life. For instance, the blogger Julia Prefezid writes “Is love and loyalty really not possible in our times? It’s possible. But it has seriously changed.”\textsuperscript{65}

Prefezid compares the motivations of Pushkin’s Tatiana with Eifman’s, ultimately finding that the contemporary heroine lacks the circumstances for true love and true drama. In Prefezid’s reading, “Pushkin’s Tatiana was married because it was necessary. All women were married.”\textsuperscript{66} But Eifman’s Tatiana was not compelled into marriage by

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{64} Tatiana A. Boborykina, “The Ethereal Body of the Flesh” (unpublished manuscript, May, 2013), Microsoft Word file, 8.
  \item \textsuperscript{65} Julia Prefezid, “Balet Eifmana & Quot; Evgenii Onegin&Quot” Dnevnik Julia_Prefizid, January 19, 2011 (12:27 a.m.), http://www.liveinternet.ru/users/julia_prefizid/post148025496/.” Неужели в наше время не возможны любовь, верность? Возможны. Но все так изменилось. Попробую разобраться.”
  \item \textsuperscript{66} Prefezid, spectator review of *Onegin*. “Пушкинскую Татьяну выдали замуж, потому что надо было. Все выходят замуж.”
\end{itemize}
society; instead, she chose her fate. Moreover, because divorce is common and acceptable in modern life, today Eifman’s Tatiana would not need to sacrifice her own happiness and stay in her marriage in order to protect her husband. Thus, the self-sacrifice of Pushkin’s version is made incomprehensible; according to Prefezid, the character’s actions make no sense within the modern chronotope. Despite her relatively liberated modern state, Eifman’s Tatiana is afraid of potential retribution for leaving her mafiozi husband. After her final pas-de-deux and kiss with Eugene, the General appears with his arm outstretched on the stage. Tatiana is pulled towards him like a magnet. The general immediately pulls his wife towards him with one arm, kissing her, while with the other he extends a knife towards Eugene. Thus, Tatiana makes no great sacrifice for her husband, but simply chooses the easier road. Prefezid writes, “In our times—to stay with a person you don’t love so as not to cause them pain—it's the height of idiocy.” For this blogger, Tatiana’s pure sacrifice, like pure love, makes no sense in the contemporary world.

The blogger, T_Platonova agrees with Prefezid’s analysis, arguing that Tatiana’s moral sacrifice has no place in contemporary life. In T_Platonova’s interpretation of Eifman’s Onegin, the main character Eugene is a novelist who has imagined the whole story. “Pushkin, Tchaikovsky and genuine feelings—it's all a dream. And it proffers the doleful conclusion about the impossibility of genuine feelings, of the impossibility of the

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67 Prefezid, spectator review of Onegin. “В наше время – жить с нелюбимым человеком из-за того, чтобы не причинить ему боль – верх идиотизма...”
existence of such heroes of our times.”

In T_Platonova’s lament, she reveals her nostalgia for the classic moral ideals of the past. The blogger desires and idealizes deep romantic love, but claims that such love is impossible in the modern world, existing only in fantasy.

Other bloggers, however, deal with emotion not as a virtue, but as an experience. For instance, although Keppro accuses Eifman’s adaptation of creating a “stampede on the holiest of holies,” the blogger argues that Eifman’s directorial heresies foster an intellectual rather than emotional response: “this is food for thought, it doesn’t touch the emotions.”

Similarly, she evaluates the score that combined Avtograph’s progressive rock with Tchaikovsky’s klassika as “totally interesting, very tasteful, absolutely professional work – but without that spark.”

For Keppro, the experience of emotion is the glue between the object perceived and the audience member, and this experience is obscured by Eifman’s “professionalism.” By rendering Eugene’s and Tatiana’s story in such a foreign setting, Eifman has dissolved the emotional content of the original. Even though Keppro finds the choreographer’s Onegin interesting and well crafted, since it does not offer her an emotional connection, she does not feel inspired to grapple with its major issues.

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68 T_Platonova, spectator review of Onegin. “а что касается Пушкина, Чайковского и подлинных чувств – это все сон. И напрашивается печальный вывод о невозможности подлинных чувств, о невозможности существования таких героев в наше время,”


70 Keppro, spectator review of Onegin "безумно интересно, очень со вкусом, работа абсолютного профессионала - и без искры."
The bloggers Sandy_Z and Verona_Sunrise described a completely opposite experience, one full of emotional rather than intellectual work. Sandy_Z writes, “In general, the ballet is dusky, anxious, so biting that it doesn’t relax my soul, rather it makes it work.” Sandy_Z, spectator review of Onegin. “В целом, балет сумрачный, тревожный, колючий такой, на нем не получится отдохнуть душой, скорей, ей придется поработать.” Sandy_Z, “Пушкин здесь был лишним.”

Verona_Sunrise goes further, arguing that ballet is only emotion. Verona_Sunrise, spectator review of Onegin. “В этом буйстве пляса не предусмотрено подтекстов - только задекларированные и переведенные на язык телесных узлов истины. Но, может, именно так однозначно и выглядит сегодня таинственная русская душа, если зал устраивает овацию увиденному мутанту?” Eifman can be excused for a bad libretto—“Pushkin here was superfluous”—because the emotive power of ballet is created by the expression of the dancers’ bodies.

Verona_Sunrise approves of Eifman’s Onegin because it connects to the Russian audience members on an emotional rather than intellectual level. She writes, “In this riot of dancing, subtexts are not expected—only what is translated and declared in the language of bodily truth. But, maybe, perhaps today’s mysterious Russian soul is just that simple, since the visual hybrid receives a standing ovation.” For Verona_Sunrise, Eifman’s visual-bodily representation of the Russian soul is enough to affect the audience on a spiritual level. In her opinion, contemporary Russia values emotion over intellect, itself an extension of the nineteenth-century idea that Russia itself is beyond rational comprehension.

Onegin Reviews and the Conservative Turn

Although Eifman intended to explain his choreographic ideas with program statement, his words prompted audience members and critics to consider “What is the...”
Russian soul today?” Most reviews reflected an impression of lost ideals; this sense of loss is expressed most acutely in the agreement that a moral Tatiana could not exist today. The reviewers’ collective acknowledgement that Russia has been turned upside down, however, also reveals an opposite tendency—a belief that Russian society can and should be made better by a return to past values.

Taken from professional reviews, blogs, and scholarly articles, each interpretation cited in this chapter represents individual people’s engagement with the world around them. The focal point of each review is Eifman’s adaptation, including his choreography, narrative design, and selection of music. Yet, as audience members describe and evaluate the choreographer’s choices, they incorporate their own understanding of the most pressing questions about Russian life. As discussed in Chapter 2, the act of writing a spectator review takes the writer into a turbulent state of expression. The individual tries to make sense out of a part of life—in this case, Eifman’s Onegin—and in the process, he or she articulates what is most important. As Rebecca Blood describes, writing a blog strengthens confidence in one’s own opinions and lends a sense that one’s own voice matters. By complaining about contemporary life, each person simultaneously calls for a more moral world—one that prizes love over sexuality, emotion over intellect, and simplicity over crass commercialism.

Although both writers and readers perceive this list of values as belonging to the past, by concentrating discourse on their lack, audience members thrust these ideas into discourse and practice of morality. This is especially true when an author’s words are posted publicly, in newspapers, blogs, or scholarly journals. This particular set of
reviews, written by professional critics, scholars, and bloggers, do not contain literal ripostes. Instead, each individual reviewer joins a larger conversation that blurs literature, the arts, and life. Just as many generations of social critics infused their reading of Pushkin’s *Onegin* with social ideas and agendas, writers infused their own ideas into their reviews.

Written from 2009 to 2014, these reviews reveal the dual prevalence of nostalgia and anxiety, sentiments that have supported the growth of Russian social conservatism in the current decade. By writing professional or spectator reviews, therefore, each audience member is participating in the Russian moral project, a conversation that blurs literature, the arts, and life. Even when lamenting the loss of the past, writers of spectator reviews lend their own voices to the reshaping of Russia. When reviewers such as Verona_Sunrise praise Eifman’s ability to “make their souls work,” therefore, they reveal an understated strain of optimism among contemporary Russians.74

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74 Verona_Sunrise, spectator review of *Onegin*. 

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Chapter 8: Icons of Experience in Rimas Tuminas’s *Eugene Onegin* (2013)

In a Russian Orthodox Church, visual, sonic, and olfactory stimulation overwhelm the senses. Icons decorated with gold leaf cover every inch of the tall walls, narrow windows diminish the light, and incense permeates the air. On Sundays, the sound of choral singing welcomes the congregants into a sacred space. During the three-hour Sunday liturgy, believers kiss the corners of icons and stand before the images, praying to Christ, to the Mother of God, or to one of the many saints for help. In the Orthodox tradition, icons are considered windows into heaven, portals through which believers can communicate with the divine.

Rimas Tuminas’s theatrical dramatization of *Eugene Onegin* flooded the stage of the Vakhtangov Theater with secular icons. Like Orthodox churches, Tuminas’s *Onegin* includes icons in every moment of the play. But his are icons of Russian *klassika*, history, and culture. In addition to recitation of the *Onegin* strophes, Tuminas’s play involves ballet and folk dance, arrangements of Tchaikovsky’s and Shostakovich’s music, folk songs and city romances, and even a landscape painting by Isaac Levitan. Music resounds through the theater almost constantly during the four-hour performance. Felt *valenki* boots go flying through the air, a snowstorm whirls, and Tatiana dances with a giant stuffed bear.
Audience members and critics of Tuminas’s Onegin interact with these secular Russian icons as they describe them in critical and spectator reviews. The responses to them open a new window into the moral identity of contemporary Russians, and in a way, into the post-Soviet Russian soul. Audience reception of Tuminas’s Eugene Onegin reveals the deep personal connection that many “educated people” in Russia maintain with the iconography of klassika and folk culture, a relationship epitomized by Onegin.

The Foreign Master of Russian Classics

Rimas Tuminas (b. 1952) is a talented director who often adapts classic literature for his theatrical productions. He currently works as the artistic director of the Vakhtangov State Academic Theater in Moscow, one of the major Moscow drama companies. In the Russian approach to nationality, Tuminas is considered a Lithuanian, even though his mother was an ethnic Russian. Tuminas was born and raised in Soviet Lithuania, a small Baltic state treated as a cultural satellite of Russia. Like most talented artists from Soviet republics or satellite states, Tuminas capped his Lithuanian education with a degree from the prestigious GITIS (the Russian University of Theater Arts) in Moscow. The young director next worked at the state theater in Vilnius, Lithuania. Founding his own company, the Little Theater Vilnius, in 1990, Tuminas then became head of the Vilnius State Academic Theater in 1994, making him in effect the leading figure in Lithuanian theater at age 42.

75 In this chapter, I will mix spectator reviews with quotations from newspaper reviews written by professional theater critics. I gathered thirty-eight blogs from livejournal, thirty-six reviews printed in newspapers (but accessed online), and four discussion forums. These include a forum maintained by the Vakhtangov Theater on their site (sixty-five comments), Vashdosug.ru (three posts), Q&A Center (only one post), and afisha.mail.ru (four posts).
In the 2000s, Tuminas began directing productions as a guest in several Moscow theaters, including an adaptation of Nikolai Gogol’s “Inspector General” (*Revizor*) in 2002. He directed “Woe from Wit” (*Gore ot Uma*) in 2007 at the Vakhtangov Theater. In 2007, the Vakhtangov appointed Tuminas as artistic director. Since then, he has directed and produced about one play each year and his work has been very well received. Three of his recent shows (*Uncle Vanya*—2011, *Stand Up!*—2012, and *Eugene Onegin*—2013) were all nominated for “best production” at the Crystal Turandot Awards. Tuminas’s *Eugene Onegin* premiered in February 2013 to largely positive reviews and quickly became the hit of the theater season. It swept up awards from Moscow juries. These include the “Crystal Turandot” prize and the *Moskovskii Komsomolets* (newspaper) prize for best play in 2012-13, as well as a nomination for the “Pillar of the Season” award in 2014. In addition to winning the “best director” award at the 2014 Golden Mask Awards for *Eugene Onegin*, Tuminas was also nominated for the same prize at the Theater Stars Awards (*Zvezda Teatral’*a). Yet although Tuminas has been highly successful in Moscow, many audience members still view him as a foreigner to Russian arts and culture.

Many spectator reviews framed their interpretation of Tuminas’s *Onegin* in terms of ethnic prejudice and pride. For instance, the blogger Vtli5mir excoriates the “Varangian” Tuminas for imbuing a classic of “great historical significance” with the
current “era of public pessimism, decadence, and moral decay.” Vtli5mir’s slight ethnic slur (Varangians were a medieval tribe from Northeast Europe) compounds his indignation at the director’s “decadent” reading. Another audience member, Realty$$, asserts that Tuminas’s position as a citizen of a smaller and poorer country than Russia has made the director want to spoil Russia’s beauty. Realty$$ reports that Tuminas had become so jealous of Russia’s cultural and financial wealth that he decided to “besmirch the annoying and boring young misses from Pushkin and Turgenev’s literature so as to delete them from history and memory.” This rhetoric resembles the common nationalistic view that cultural imports from the decadent West will spoil Russia, desecrating its cultural wealth and revoking its moral righteousness. Another commenter, Olga Korchazhkina, suggests that as an ethnic Russian she maintains a privileged connection to Pushkin’s work. She ventures, “the director did not manage to understand what Pushkin is for the Russian mind and the Russian ear crept into my mind. Pushkin is really ‘our everything,’ as corny as it sounds, it necessary to understand that and to feel that.” Whereas Korchazhkina does not attack Tuminas as Realty$$ does, like him she claims a connection to Pushkin’s work based on nationality that excludes Tuminas as a foreigner.

79 Olga Korchazhkina, comment on “Evgenii Onegin,” Vakhtangov Theater (discussion forum), September 16, 2014 (9:38 p.m.), http://www.vakhtangov.ru/forum/messages/149. “акралась мысль о том, что режиссёру так и не удалось понять, ЧТО такое Пушкин для русского ума и русского уха. Пушкин – действительно "наше всё", как бы банально это ни звучало, и это нужно понять или почувствовать.”
Other reviewers did not see Tuminas’s non-Russian nationality as a hindrance to a good adaptation of Pushkin, but they still used an ethnicized framework in describing his success. The blogger Lubovkovaleva writes, “It’s interesting to see how this Lithuanian reads such a Russian as Pushkin, how he understood this most Russian of souls….” Lubovkovaleva found Tuminas’s Onegin intellectually appealing, but even she frames her positive opinion of the adaptation as a foreign interpretation of a classic, one owned by and reflecting the identity of ethnic Russians. Nikitin praised Tuminas’s production as “a declaration of love for Russia.” The blogger Nothre voiced his pleasure at how Tuminas loved the Russian classics.

Framing Tuminas as a foreigner is remarkable because his mother was an ethnic Russian, and probably a member of Russia’s educated class. Tuminas was also educated during the Soviet era in schools that would have privileged Russian language and literature. Moreover, he completed his higher education at GITIS, the most prestigious (and most selective) theater school in the Soviet sphere. Although a Lithuanian citizen, Tuminas is an unofficial member of Russia’s educated class of people. As commenters address his interpretation of Pushkin, the attention paid to his nationality reveals the heavy weight that Russians place on ethnic origin, prioritizing it above education or

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residence. The director is clearly a member of the Russian intelligentsia, as defined by its moral project of working for a better nation through literature and the arts. Yet, in the minds of many spectators, Tuminas the director will always remain more foreign to his Russian classics than his audience.

Government officials have expressed approval, however, with Tuminas’s role in the cultural life of the capital. Since becoming the artistic director of the Vakhtangov Theater, Tuminas has won state awards including the “Order of Friendship” in 2010, which thanked him for his contribution to the development of cultural ties with the Russian Federation, and the preservation and promotion of the Russian language and culture abroad. The Vakhtangov troupe occasionally goes on tour, but mostly they perform in Moscow for Russian audiences. Although Tuminas is considered a foreigner, his fluency in the sounds and symbols of the Russian literary and musical traditions of Russia reflect a deep awareness of Russian klassika. The director seems committed to addressing Russian national identity in all of his productions, no less in his dramatization of Pushkin’s novel-in-verse. Tuminas’s *Eugene Onegin* is a multivalent negotiation of Russian secular iconography (*klassika*) for the Moscow theater audiences.

**Dramatized Iconography**

Rimas Tuminas’s theatrical production of *Eugene Onegin* is a multi-medial work. Throughout the four-hour performance, Tuminas connects Pushkin’s dramatized verses to a parade of Russian cultural icons. Actors on stage recite strophes from *Onegin*, accompanied by non-diegetic music borrowed from Tchaikovsky and Shostakovich. The
combination engenders an atmosphere of melancholy, perforated by humorous skits that gently satirize Russian folk culture.

Tuminas constructs his *Eugene Onegin* as a story told by Eugene to a companion after the fact. The middle-aged Eugene (played by Sergei Makovetsky) narrates his tale to a retired hussar (Vladimir Vdovichenkov) from an armchair at downstage left as if by a fireside. Within this retrospective framing device, the Onegin tale progresses chronologically beginning with Eugene’s life in St. Petersburg, his meeting with Tatiana in the countryside, and ending with Tatiana’s ultimate rejection of Eugene. Multiple scenes follow Tatiana’s development, from the introduction of her shy personality and role in the Larin family to the writing of her letter. The second act depicts Tatiana and Olga engaging in folk fortune-telling, Tatiana’s dream, her visit to Eugene’s empty home, and her journey to find a husband in Moscow. The middle-aged Eugene narrates these parts of her life even though he does not take part in them.

Tuminas’s *Eugene Onegin* can be considered a dramatization of the novel because the majority of words spoken during the play are taken directly from Pushkin’s novel-inverse. Often, the whole strophe is recited. Furthermore, as many critics and spectators note, the actors alter the standard intonation and rhythm of the reciting phrases. By accenting certain words through stresses and pauses, the actors force a defamiliarization of the canonic text, a technique that pleased some audience members and enraged others. For example, Grigorii Zaslavskii was pleased by how “those distinct-sounding strophes are extremely free, flying, joking, mischievous, just as a show ‘based on’ Pushkin should
Tuminas’s characters also recite strophes that describe them in third person omniscient. For instance, the actor playing Tatiana’s father recites the Larin family history in third person. With tears welling up in his throat, he narrates Pushkin’s description of his own death. His wife and daughters cry as he finishes the strophe. As if surprised by his early death, the father pauses at the foot of the stage until death (an actress in black) leads him away.

To further complicate Tuminas’s dramatization of the novel-in-verse, the director uses two actors to play the figure of Eugene and two actors to play Lensky. They frequently appear on the stage at the same time. Each pair of actors contains a younger and an older man. Tuminas’s concept creates a mirroring effect, and allows the audience to see the two sides or personalities of Eugene. The older man playing a more mature Lensky perhaps represents the man that Lensky would have become, if not for the fatal duel. The double-character concept works to support the reframing of Eugene Onegin as a retrospective narrative told by an older Eugene to a drinking buddy. Invented by Tuminas, this character is a retired hussar (played by Vladimir Vdovichenkov) who might embody the stylized Pushkin.

Tuminas chose not to stage Pushkin’s elaborate descriptions of the Russian landscape and high society. Instead, these descriptive passages are transposed into gesture, image, and music in added comic scenes sprinkled throughout the play. A group of unmarried girls act as a Greek chorus. They serve as extras, as representatives of St. Grigorii Zaslavskii, “Drugai Muzyka. Evgenii Onegin v Teatre imeni Vakhtangova.” review of Evgenii Onegin, directed by Rimasy Tuminas, Evgenii Vakhiratov Dramatic Theater, Moscow, Novala Gazeta, February 18, 2013, http://www.smotr.ru/2012/2012_vah_onegin.htm#ved. "...внятно звучащего стиха, и чрезвычайно свободный, летящий – как и положено спектаклю «по Пушкину», и шутливый, – ни озорства пушкинского «Онегина..."
Petersburg high society, and as Tatiana and Olga’s girlfriends at the Larin estate. Most of the girls wear identical waistless nightgowns reminiscent of the conical shaped *sarafans* traditionally worn by Russian peasants; for no apparent reason, one girl is dressed in a white ballet tutu like the title character from *Giselle*.

During the name-day party, the girls put on a domestic concert singing twelve songs, city romances, French chansons, folk songs, and opera excerpts as entertainment. This comical concert develops the soundscape of the provincial nobility. After Lensky is killed and Olga married off, the girls’ chorus travels with Tatiana to Moscow: wearing dresses identical to hers, they echo her transformation from village girl to high-society lady. Although the director also employs other extra non-speaking characters, the female chorus is the main addition to the story, providing comic relief, representing different “societies,” and also helping to translate Pushkin’s descriptive passages to a staged narrative.

The dramatized recitation of selected stanzas from Pushkin’s novel is nearly always accompanied by music and dance. Within the context of the plot and recited verse, characters play instruments, sing folk songs and city romances from the late nineteenth century. Dancers move rhythmically around the stage, alluding to Russia’s classical ballet tradition and folk dance. These cultural references occur inside the context of the story, but also alongside it. For example, during Tatiana’s name-day party, a guest presents her with a landscape painting in the “classical” style of Isaac Levitan. These performances and citations offer the audience some lighthearted entertainment, but they also act as symbols, leitmotivs, and transition devices. By sampling so many pre-existing...
icons of Russian folk and high culture, Tuminas expands the scope of his adaptation, and *Onegin* becomes a play about Russianness.

Within Tuminas’s framework, even real-life sounds, from the howl of the winter wind to the rhythmic sound the familiar *Onegin* strophes, become sonic icons of Russia. Similarly, elderly famous actors, including the beloved Soviet-era actress Yulia Borisova, play a few bit parts. Within the play, Borisova’s aging (and still beautiful) body becomes an icon of the Soviet past, further enhancing Tuminas’s reflective glance backward through cultural history. With post-modern fluidity in mixing genres and art forms, Tuminas weaves a myriad of citations of iconic Russian imagery into his own reading of the Onegin tale. The four-hour barrage of sonic, visual, verbal and somatic icons ultimately stimulates audience members to reflect about Russian culture and open a dialogue about the past, present, and future through and with its symbols.

**Musical Layering**

Tuminas and the collaborating music director Faustas Latenas incorporate music throughout *Onegin* in multiple layers. Recorded music streams non-diegetically through the speaker system, and the actors also perform full songs on stage. They accompany themselves on a piano and a traditional Russian domra; Olga plays the accordion. These musical instruments also become important symbols, adding further significance even as they are performed within the context of the narrative. Tuminas and Latenas use recognizably Russian music to accompany Pushkin’s classic; they also draw on classical opera and popular song from France and Italy, creating a multi-layered and highly
inter textual soundtrack. For instance, Tchaikovsky’s “Old French Song” (from his Children’s Album) functions as the primary theme in the original piano setting and as a cheerful arrangement for wind band. Blaring through the speakers to the point of discomfort, this grotesquely loud wind band arrangement appears at the beginning and end of each act. (One spectator Elena Garakh used the Vakhtangov Theater discussion forum to request that the producers “reduce the sound.”84 Anna_Kh stated that the “music was too loud. It was good in its way, but just too loud.”85)

As the secondary theme for the whole production, Latenas uses a much quieter prelude to a string quartet attributed to Dmitri Shostakovich. This soft, moderately slow, and thickly textured string piece appears most prominently in the scenes featuring Tatiana and her sister. Both of these pieces were surely recognizable to many if not most of the audience members. Audience members discussed Latenas’s soundtrack as music from childhood. Tatiana’s child-like sister Olga is particularly musical, although her character’s cheerful voice sounds a little awkward. Throughout the play, Olga walks around with an accordion strapped onto her chest, often playing the late nineteenth century waltz, “In the Moon’s Glow” (V lunnom Siianii). Olga’s song and her accordion function as symbols of youthful joy and sexual potential. She performs her own personal leitmotiv.

84 Elena Garakh, comment on “Evgenii Onegin,” Vakhtangov Theater (discussion forum), April 1, 2013 (7:05 p.m.), http://www.vakhtangov.ru/forum/messages/149. “убавить звук во время спектакля.”
In addition to the two main thematic pieces, Tuminas inserts a concert of songs put on by the girls’ chorus during Tatiana’s name-day party. Performed one by one, these songs include French cabaret *chanson* and Aleksandr Vertinsky romances from the early twentieth century, Russian city romances, and two domestic songs from Tchaikovsky’s opera, *The Queen of Spades*. Most of these songs and melodies are surely recognizable to Russia’s urban intelligentsia, even if they could not identify the titles or sources. Latenas also arranges Jacques Offenbach’s lilting “Barcarolle” from *Tales of Hoffman*. When Eugene kills Lensky during the duel scene, the half-naked poet dies to the pleasant tune of Offenbach’s lyric duet for soprano and alto. By arranging the melody for wind band, an ensemble associated with the happy leisure of a Sunday afternoon in the part, Latenas further heightens the cheerful topic of Offenbach’s “Barcarolle.” There is a bitter irony in the juxtaposition of this lyric piece and the tragic death of the young man.

In Tuminas’s *Eugene Onegin*, music accompanies almost every moment of the play. Even in the few parts of the play when songs are not prominent, Latenas incorporates eerie harmonics played by stringed instruments to accompany the recitation of Pushkin’s strophes or the silent action on stage. In Tuminas’s *Onegin*, the music disappears only during the final scene, when Eugene recites his love letter to Tatiana. The stage becomes strangely quiet as the actor Sergei Makovetsky speaks his lines in his gruff voice. But when Tatiana responds to him, the string harmonics begin again, followed by the wind band blaring Tchaikovsky’s “Old French Song.” The whole performance ends on a loud upbeat tune whose volume dominates the senses. Eugene’s declaration of love thus becomes the climax of the play, highlighted by the unusual absence of an
accompanying soundtrack. Perhaps Tuminas meant to set apart Eugene’s monologue from his retrospective narrative. In any case, Latenas’s multi-faceted musical score offers audience members many opportunities to perceive musical meaning within the context of the play and as sonic icons of Russian klassika.

Most critics and ordinary audience members offer detailed interpretations of Latenas’s score. Some reviewers describe music as a carrier of emotion, of Russian history, of personal memory, or of social class. Others present the music as an object—as scenic backdrops, as effects, or as physical symbols of Russian culture. For instance, the blogger Nikitin connects the wide variety of music used in Tuminas’s Onegin to Belinsky’s interpretation of Eugene Onegin as an “encyclopedia of Russia life” from 1844. He especially names Tatiana’s name-day party an “apotheosis of encyclopedia-ness.”86 For Nikitin, each musical number represents an encyclopedia entry containing information about specific times in Russian history through sound. The critic Maia Kucherskaia likens the songs performed at Tatiana’s name-day party to birthday presents. “At Tatiana’s name-day party, each guest gives her the present of a musical number, some wonderful and others tasteless.”87 Her interpretation highlights her experience of songs as durable material objects. The blogger Ponomarev also highlights the material aspect of Russian music culture, but instead focuses on the (physical) instruments that pepper the stage as part of Russian material culture. The blogger accuses Tuminas of

86 Nikitin, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “И апофеоз «энциклопедичности»”
creating an encyclopedia of annoying Russian stereotypes presented for Western audiences with his use of stereotypical instruments. Similarly, Ponomarev describes the strange non-speaking character who sits at the knees of the middle-aged Eugene and plays a domra. “There is some ‘wanderer with a domra,’ more reminiscent of the Evil One-Eye who relentlessly accompanies Onegin before his travels (why a domra? Because Zhivago’s daughter in the famous film walks around with a balalaika?).”

For Ponomarev, the musical instruments signify a part of Russian folk culture, which appears to him as corny. Like the spectators of Tcherniakov’s Onegin who censure the director for creating a Russian play for Western audiences, Ponomarev accuses Tuminas of including an element of folk culture to satisfy the Western interest in an exotic East. A large number of bloggers and critics lovingly mentioned Latenas’s use of Tchaikovsky’s “Old French Song” in his soundtrack, connecting it to their personal and cultural memories. Their notes reveal how audience members from a specific social group—Russia’s educated intelligentsia—take pride in their childhood musical education. For instance, the blogger Nothre writes that the “Old French Song” is part of the beginning piano repertoire for children from intellectual families. The critic Irina Kaminskaia notes the same: “the sad little motive from the “Old French Song” in P. I. Tchaikovsky’s Children’s Album is a tune which kids from good families have diligently

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89 Nothre, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “Мелодия «Старинной французской песенки», известная каждому, кто в детстве учился играть на пианино [...]."
plunked out for two centuries already.” Both Nothre and Kaminskaia associate the simple piano piece with pleasant experiences of “good” childhoods.

In a rare analysis of the audience members, critic Elena Diiakova explicitly includes her readers and herself in the social group of “educated Russians.” She writes, “Latenas’s ‘primary melody’ comes from “the same old piano exercises which we learned in childhood. And there is a special aura when the whole audience knows the words by heart….” The critic’s words demonstrate pride in her social belonging, and in the accomplishment of classical music education, and in their collective cultural memory.

Tuminas’s Onegin creates an intertextual dialogue between the shared cultural knowledge received in “good childhoods” and art experienced by adults. Diiakova also subtly praises anyone who studied piano and also reads her theater reviews as people from “good families.”

Tchaikovsky’s “Old French Song” is not the only tune from which audience members drew significance. The critic Giorgii Zaslavskii describes how “lovingly the recognizable notes from Tchaikovsky’s opera caress the ear… then suddenly the rumbling of electronic processing interrupts and the familiar tune is hopelessly lost.”

Even though Zaslavskii mistakes Tchaikovsky’s piano piece for the composer’s famous

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opera, his description illuminates the affective experience of nostalgia, cued by familiar music from one’s childhood.

The Sound of a Snowstorm

Tuminas expands this effect to a national scope, by mixing Tchaikovsky’s recognizable melody with sounds typical of the Russian folk environment, at least in the imagination of Moscow’s educated people. The critic Irina Alpatova describes the holistic Russian soundscape. Alpatova depicts a “wrenching musical atmosphere in which an original melody is interwoven with Tchaikovskian motifs, ‘village’ sounds of roosters crowing and horses neighing, and hymns.”92 Further cataloging the sonic landscape, the blogger Nothre notes “a lullaby, the ringing of bells, a bouncing mazurka, and a crazy tragic waltz,” coming from the proscenium above the stage.93 Much of these sounds were broadcast through a P.A. system placed above the stage’s proscenium. The sonic topics of the music and the natural “folk” sounds fuse together to create a sonic affect of nostalgia.

Some critics and bloggers endow Latenas’s score with physical power, focusing especially on the music during the snowstorm in the second act. The critic Nikolai Borzenko notes how the “atmosphere grows restless (the situation is worsened by the

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93 Nothre, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “в колыбельную, то в колокольный звон, то в подпрыгивающую мазурку, то в безумный трагический вальс.”

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Faustas Latenas’s music, the wind and snow and fog blowing over the stage.\textsuperscript{[94]} For Borzenko, Latenas’s score combined with the atmosphere stage effects enhance the palpable disquiet as Tatiana and Eugene’s relationship sours. According to critic Karas’, Latenas’s music is so powerful that it has the force necessary to physically blow snow and fog over the stage:

Never giving one time to recover, Faustas Latenas fills the space with partly-recognizable melancholy music. It grows sensually, blowing snow and fog all over the stage, illuminating the pale moonlight, and combines with the shimmering psychological tremolo of Sergei Makovetsky’s voice to create a potent gestural metaphor.\textsuperscript{[95]}

In her reading, Latenas’s musical score drives the crescendo of nostalgia, as sonic icons, melancholy winter imagery, and even the rough timbre of Makovetsky’s voice overwhelm the audience’s senses.

Endowing Latenas’s score with symbolic rather than sensuous power, the critic Anna Banasiukevich asserts that the score expands the action from a narrative to a metaphor for life. Throughout the play, Latenas’s score moves between the diegetic performance of music in a domestic setting, and the non-diegetic broadcast of similar melodies over the speaker system. For example, Eugene sometimes plays “Old French Song” on the piano in Tchaikovsky’s original arrangement. The “mongrel” character


might outline the melody only on her domra. But in the opening and closing numbers, the melody is arranged for a Soviet-era wind band, and blared over the P.A. at a barely tolerable volume. Banasiukevich attaches significance to Latenas’s shift. She writes:

> growing from a modest, domestic melody, the whirlwind of sounds captures the human figures positioned on a borderless stage among white piles of snow. The sound customizes time, expanding it from the short period of a human life to the infinite universe.⁹⁶

According to Banasiukevich, Latenas’s shifting between diegetic and non-diegetic music itself widens the scope of *Onegin’s* domestic drama to universal significance. As the figures of Tatiana and Eugene stand amid the snowdrifts in the final scene, their little tragedy seems borderless, implicating the whole of humanity. For Banasiukevich, the musical score drives Tuminas’s adaptation be read as a story for all time.

In the dramatic adaptation of *Eugene Onegin*, Tuminas and Latenas make the musical soundtrack as prominent as the narrative. Unlike incidental music, Latenas’s score does not act in the background or as musical interstices between scenes. Instead, the sound score forms the core of the play’s affective content. The variety, complexity, and multitude of layers stimulated many spectators to make sense out of the musical pandemonium, often with their own poetic language. As audience members engaged with the domestic music performed on stage by the actors, the howling of the winter wind, or the overwhelmingly loud blare of a cheerful Soviet-style band, they came to terms with the generalized affect of melancholy and nostalgia. In their responses, they addressed

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their own relationships with Russian cultural history, negotiating a collectively experienced nostalgia with every description.

Redefining the Feminine

In the same reviews, audience members also engage with Tuminas’s themes of aging, disappointment, and femininity. Through their discussion and interpretation of Tuminas’s images of women, reviewers broach the fate of women in Russia while avoiding the polarizing discourse of feminism versus family values. For instance, commenting at the Vakhtangov Theater forum, Maria Vasina characterizes Tuminas’s Onegin as “very … feminine. About how all women are looking for love, and never finding it, they remain unhappy and alone.” Yet another commentator immediately responds to her pessimism. The commenter Ol’ga Mishina contradicts Maria’s assertions about women’s fate, writing: “Dear Maria! You are wrong when you write that women ‘never-ever’ find happiness! It’s there. Remember Masha Mironova from The Captain’s Daughter. And you will surely find it.” In all likelihood Ol’ga and Maria are strangers, yet their short interaction in the forum reveals how each woman’s interpretation of love in Onegin is strongly influenced by her own emotional needs. The forum also allows Masha to voice her compassion and encouragement for a stranger, Maria.

97 Maria Vasina, comment on “Evgenii Onegin,” Vakhtangov Theater (discussion forum), February 12, 2015 (12:05 p.m.), http://www.vakhtangov.ru/forum/messages/149. “А еще мне этот спектакль показался очень … женским. О том, как женщины ищут любви и никогда, никогда ее не находят и оттого несчастны и одиноки.”

98 Ol’ga mishina, comment on “Evgenii Onegin,” Vakhtangov Theater (discussion forum), February 13, 2015 (6:00 p.m.), http://www.vakhtangov.ru/forum/messages/149. “Дорогая Мария! Вы неправы пиша, что женщины "никогда-никогда" не находят щастья! Находят, вспомните Машу Миронову из "Капитанской дочки". И Вы обязательно найдете!”
Many reviewers focused on the character of the dance mistress, a comic figure dressed in an ballet-neck leotard and a long black tutu, played by Liudmila Maksakova. She is elegant, but also elderly. She walks with a cane, and when she demonstrates a graceful bow to the floor, she becomes stuck in her bent-over position. In the opening scene of Onegin, sarafan-clad girls follow the commands of this elderly ballet mistress. She commands them to show emotional propriety by wiping away just one tear.

Maksakova’s character insists that the girls “love the audience” (aimez la publique). The scene is a comic transposition of Pushkin’s Canto 1, in which the narrator describes Eugene’s early adulthood in the superficial and vain St. Petersburg. A light arrangement of the “Old French Song” plays over the P.A. for the duration of the dance class scene, providing a sonic backdrop for this little comedy. In the Moscow scenes, Maksakova appears again as a dance and comportment teacher, instructing Tatiana and the girls on etiquette and body carriage by knocking them on the legs with her cane.

At the Larin Estate, Maksakova appears in the role of Tatiana’s elderly Nanny, but she also as the embodiment of death. Dressed in a black headscarf and shawl, Maksakova leads Tatiana’s and Olga’s father from the stage. She later hands Eugene the dueling pistol with which he will kill Lensky. As Eugene confesses his love to Tatiana in the last scene, Maksakova inexplicably lies prone over a bench in center stage. Her character is important to the production, yet it is difficult to understand. Somehow she plays a comportment teacher, Tatiana’s peasant Nanny, and death incarnate. As mother, trainer, and angel of death, Maksakova’s character guides the beginning, middle, and end of female life.
Many reviewers emphasize the influence of the fictional dance mistress on the lives of her students. For instance, the blogger Evgenii Ponomarev described her ballet class as a “symbol of aristocratic upbringing for girls” that “did not hurt your eyes.” For Ponomarev, both the dance class scene and the “finishing schools” it represents are pleasant. His phrasing reveals his own position on the “training” of young girls. To borrow Laura Murphy’s term, Ponomarev is the gazing male. On the other hand, the blogger Illaria_P takes a critical view of the “unending” training of Tatiana and the girls. In their sarafan-clad state, Tatiana’s companions are “naïve, bright and trusting,” “primordial, living, and eternal.” Their training in “etiquette, manners, and French language,” however, forces them into “adult life.” In Illaria_P’s interpretation, the training of the girls’ bodies represents the death of their spirits. Their dance mistress is the woman responsible for training them in artificiality. She leads them from their girlhood freedom to their symbolic death in marriage. Unlike Illaria_P’s definite reading of the character, the blogger Sirmazka1 shied away the character. Sirmazka1 writes: “the symbolism of her role or roles was lost on me. In general, I don’t have the level of

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99 Ponomarev, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “балетный класс как символ воспитания дворянской девушки не очень режет глаз.”
101 Illaria_P, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “Это взрослеющие вчерашние девчонки, ещё наивные, светлые, доверчивые, ещё пока связанные тесно с природой, с Изначальным, Живым и Вечным [...]”
102 Illaria_P, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “символизирует эту бесконечную дрессировку девочек этикетом, полетесом, французским языком, манерами и прочими “женскими науками”, без которых барышню никогда не “пристроить удачно замуж”, ибо другого “будущего” для женщины не предполагалось.”
intelligence or understanding.” Sirmazka1 felt that Maksakova’s character was overly complicated, and thus out of place in *Onegin’s* familiar narrative. For her, entering the conversation through interpreting the symbolism of the dance mistress and was not worth the effort.

Under the guidance of Maksakova’s ballet mistress, Tatiana transforms into a marriageable noblewoman. A kind older man finds her snacking on raspberry preserves in the corner of a ballroom. A striking scene in which Tatiana and the other girls float in swings above the stage represents their marriage. As church bells and Russian sacred chant play over the PA system, chair-sized swings descend from the theater’s fly. Across the stage, each girl has been paired with a man in a tuxedo, who helps her into her swing which then rises about two meters above the stage. Recorded sounds of wind conjure up a gentle melancholy, and fans blow the white scarves and dresses into a delicate flutter.

Many bloggers appreciated the scene for its beauty. For instance, the blogger Daniil Nikitin talked about having the scene of the “flying Muscovite brides” stuck in his head. Another blogger, Lubov Kovaleva, likens the girls soaring in the air to “guardian angels” hovering above their male partners. Tuminas’s reference to the nineteenth-century conception of the woman as the “angel of the household” is not so distant from the contemporary Russia.

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104 Nikitin, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. "летающие московские невесты."

105 Lubovkovaleva, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. "напоминай ангелов-хранителей."
Others, however, extrapolated much more out of the Moscow scenes of marriage. According to the blogger Nothre, when Tatiana’s swing lowers her down to earth, she is “like a killed bird, brought down into the arms of her white-haired husband.”\(^\text{106}\) The blogger Illaria_P suggests that the girls have become “speaking dolls” given in marriage to “whoever comes along and happens to select them.”\(^\text{107}\) She argues that Tuminas’s \textit{Onegin} is about the “sad fate of women in that age,” that is, the nineteenth century.\(^\text{108}\) The fervor of Illaria_P’s comments and the length of her blog post suggest a deep investment in Tatiana’s fate.

During the short “haircut scene,” the male dancer assisted by the “birdman” use a saber to cut off each girl’s long braid, one-by-one. Each chorus girl approaches the bench with a different attitude. One is afraid, and clamps her eyes closed. Another welcomes the haircut, voluptuously spreading her legs over the bench and pulling one of the men into a long kiss. Tatiana is the last to sit down. Both men have great difficulty removing her braid. Although she patiently waits for them to finish, Tatiana finally takes the saber and removes her own childhood hair. Illaria_P interprets the haircut scene as the moment of entrance into “adult life… from which there is no return.” From that point on, according to Illaria_P, the girls become “dead angels, lost souls.”\(^\text{109}\) Illaria_P’s representation of marriage as death is not limited to women’s participation in it. The blogger, however,

\(^{106}\) Nothre, spectator review of \textit{Eugene Onegin}. “Татьяна, спрыгивает на землю, как сбитая птица, в объятия своего седовласого мужа.”
\(^{107}\) Illaria_P., spectator review of \textit{Eugene Onegin}. “И девочек дрессируют, подгоняют под диктуемый средой некий общий стандарт, и полученных в результате говорящих кукол отдают отнюдь не за принцев, а за кого выгодно или за кого получилось, кто взял.”
\(^{108}\) Illaria_P., spectator review of \textit{Eugene Onegin}. “новой постановке увиделось печальное размышление о женской доле в те времена вообще.”
\(^{109}\) Illariia_P., spectator review of \textit{Eugene Onegin}. “Мёртвые ангелы, погибшие души.”
also interprets the effects of a bad marriage on Vdovichenkov’s retired Hussar, who “drinks, plays pool, and lives in memory: He’s unhappy in his marriage, and his current life is shit.”\textsuperscript{110} Clearly, Illaria\_P’s engagement with Tuminas’s presentation of Tatiana’s adult life is linked to her own disenchantment with marriage as an institution.

\textbf{“Thematizing Life”}

Many of these audience members consider the effect that age and time have on the human spirit, and they infuse their interpretation of Tuminas’s main theme with their own relationship to the passing of time. For instance, the blogger Svet-Lana ruminates on the passage of time as a progression towards death, and she interprets every directorial gesture in Tuminas’s \textit{Onegin} as part of this process. She writes: “beauty dies, fading under the weight of years and the trials of life. Love dies.”\textsuperscript{111} The blogger even sees the theme of death in the reception of Pushkin’s prose over generations. “Even light melodious verses die, trivialized through decades of forced arrangement as prose.” Svet-Lana chronicles the inevitable decay of life, extending the metaphor of human mortality to culture. According to her, beauty and poetry are also caught in downward spiral like aging human bodies. Others reviewers praise Tuminas for exploring the end of human life, because it offers them a chance to examine their own views of life and death, as well as marriage, aging, and loneliness. As blogger Anna A. Stepanova puts it, Tuminas

\textsuperscript{110} Illariia\_P., spectator review of \textit{Eugene Onegin}. “пьёт, играет в бильярд и "убегает" в воспоминания: он несчастлив в браке, его сегодняшняя жизнь – мУка.”
“expands mortal limits and delves metaphorically downward towards the realm of Hades to deal with death.”112 Through this engagement with Tuminas’s visual gestures and scenography, audience members “thematize” their own concept of life, categorizing the experience of sadness and loss in different ways: bitter, dark, or sometimes, even ordinary.

While much of the audience reception focused on Tatiana and her young friends, some audience members did not thematically separate the men from the women. For instance, although Svet-Lana discusses the girls’ trip to Moscow, she presents both Tatiana and Eugene’s sorrow as part of the same phenomenon, a transformation from the hopeful illusions of youth to the extreme loneliness of maturity. Svet-Lana frames the entire play as the older Eugene’s backward glance toward his youth. Quite literally, the older Eugene played by Makovetsky gazes at his younger self, played by a handsome younger actor. Eugene, according to the Svet-Lana, is so lonely that he sometimes “wishes to relive the most painful moments ‘to kindle the weakened blood in his heart’” as he waits for death.113 The mature Tatiana is experiencing the same loneliness. Embodied by the elderly actress Yulia Borisovna, she is “elegant, beautiful and infinitely lonely.” In the blogger Farbensymphonie’s interpretation, the heroine, hero, and the other characters share their loneliness. The experience of loneliness as the ultimate fate of

113 Svet-Lana, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “Порой старый Онегин подменяет молодого в этой юбкой реальности воспоминаний, желая то ли заново пережить самые болезненные моменты, «зажечь в увядшем сердце кровь», то ли попытаться переиграть их, но нет у него власти ни остановить мгновение, ни повернуть время вспять, и остается лишь бродить по тому же проклятому кругу одиночества без надежды, без любви и ждать, «когда же черт возьмет тебя».”
humans, as unavoidable as the process of aging, outweighs Eugene’s responsibility for missing the opportunity to find love.

**Tatiana is a Bitch (Sterva)**

In the final scenes of the play, Tuminas presents Tatiana’s trip to the Moscow “bridal fair.” Together with the ensemble girls, Tatiana and her mother, travel to Moscow in a “sleigh” that resembles a Stolypin wagon, a closed train car used to transport political prisoners to camps in the Far East. In Moscow, the Larin women meet their cousin, an elderly woman. After a hilarious bit where Tatiana’s elderly cousin curses her old age on stage, Tatiana and the girls transform from rural teenagers into the married woman. The majority of this process is represented through a pantomimed journey, a ritualized slicing off the girls’ long braids, courtship, and a wedding. Always accompanied by music, these non-speaking scenes are comic, visually striking, somewhat sad, and pregnant with symbolism. Ultimately, Tatiana becomes the woman who will reject Eugene.

Many bloggers noted a serious change in the mature Tatiana during the final scene of the play. Through their descriptions of Tatiana’s transformation, responders confronted the representation of the ideal female. Their dialogue reveals that a cultural debate over the place of women in society is alive, even when not explicitly called feminism. When Tatiana (played by three different actresses on different nights) responds to Eugene’s declaration of love, she uses a sharper tone of voice than many audience members expected. According to their responses, her reprimand clashed with their conception of Tatiana as a gentle, lovelorn woman. Many of them described her with
Russian word *sterva*, which is challenging to translate into English. While it does not belong to the Russian lexicon of curse words (*mat*), it carries such an unpleasant connotation that it is rarely used in polite conversation. The rough English equivalent would be the word *bitch*.

Like the English word *bitch*, *sterva* connotes an unfeminine, ungentle woman; it is only used to describe women. Some Russian dictionary definitions of the word do not describe this female connotation, defining *sterva* as “damned wretch, stinker, shit,” or as a vulgar noun approximating “scoundrel, bastard.” Other possible translations for the word include *harpie*, *shrew*, or *hateful meanie*. According to at least one native speaker, the word is currently used to negatively describe a woman who usurps a man’s time, position, and wealth for her own satisfaction. The Russian word *sterva*, therefore, carries many of the connotations of the English word *bitch* when describing an authoritative woman or a grasping, mean-spirited woman. When bloggers call Tatiana a *sterva*, they apply all the negative connotations without venturing into the curse word lexicon, which would be considered too unseemly for educated conversation.

The application of the word *sterva* to Pushkin’s Tatiana reflects the shock that many audience members felt after listening to Tuminas’s Tatiana refuse Eugene. For instance, the blogger DinaDina notes the transformation into a “vengeful bitch” and summarily dismisses the scene and Tatiana’s mature character as “not interesting.”

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DinaDina, a stern or unkind Tatiana is not worth her time. Valentin Buianovskii complains that “Tatiana is in general not Pushkin’s Tatiana, especially at the end when all of a sudden with such fury and anger, she spits through her teeth ‘And I will never leave him,’ just like some kind of …. (ellipsis in original). For Buianovskii, the harsher tone of voice transforms the content of Pushkin’s strophes completely, and Tatiana becomes a shrew rather than a moral ideal.

A number of reviewers noted that Tuminas endows his Tatiana with more awareness and control over her own destiny, and that this agency bleeds Tatiana of her moral identity. The prolific blogger Lev Semërkin, who also wrote a review of Tcherniakov’s Onegin, describes Tatiana’s dynamic transformation throughout as the heroine of “her own important mystery novel. She changes, grows and ultimately gets the final word. And her words again dunk him in icy water.” In Semërkin’s analysis, Tuminas’s Tatiana transforms into the protagonist of Onegin, and her ultimate agency results in cool strength. Contrarily, the critic Irina Kaminaskaia describes Tatiana’s tone during her refusal:

‘I love you’ says Tatiana with a sharp emphasis on the pronoun. And when she speaks the fact that she is given to another and will never leave him, she sounds evil and desperate.

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116 Valentin Buianovskii, comment on “Evgenii Onegin,” Vakhtangov Theater (discussion forum), May 12, 2014 (4:36 a.m.), http://www.vakhtangov.ru/forum/messages/149. “Ничего подобного я не увидел от играющих его артистов. Татьяна вообще не та, не Пушкинская, особенно в конце, когда вдруг с таким остервенением и злостью сквозь зубы надрывно хрипит «И буду век ему верна», просто жест какая-то…”


Tatiana’s sharp tone and emphasis on her own feelings (I love you, rather than I love YOU) corrupt Pushkin’s guiding star, and make her unlovable. The critic Banasiukevich characterizes Tatiana’s maturation as “tracing the path from the naïve spontaneous girl to the worldly almost unmoving snow queen.”119 In Banasiukevich’s interpretation, as Tatiana gains agency, she becomes icy cold. The critic Marina Raikina also describes her in terms of temperature. The mature Tatiana has “the other-worldly look of a beautiful but cold face…. “120 When Tatiana takes control of her own agency, some audience members believe, she loses her loving qualities and her role as the ideal Russian woman.

Other audience members similarly noted the devaluation of Tatiana as an ideal female by her “bitchy” tone of voice. The blogger Daniil Nikitin calls Tatiana’s her mature character “strange.” Her “final encounter with Onegin elicits the same strangeness.”121 Nikitin hints at her transformation and conveys his disapproval of it by avoiding a direct description. The critic Arthur Grand likewise notes the negative maturation. “In the performance by Olga Lerman, Tatiana first appears as a lively, desperately dreamy girl who then transforms practically into a bitch who refuses Onegin
with a vengeful pleasure.” Grand interprets Tatiana’s vocal tone as so sharp, she loses all her goodness and begins to enjoy causing Eugene pain. The blogger Evgenii Ponomarev fully illustrates the strangeness Nikitin only mentions, calling the mature Tatiana exactly a *bitch* (*sterva*). He writes, “Tatiana in a terribly bitchy tone spits out her own monologue to Onegin—so much so that it becomes quite clear that Onegin did right to pass her up in the first act, better to live your whole life without a wife than to be chained to such a bitch.” According to Ponomarev and Grand, the sharpness of the mature Tatiana’s rejection of Eugene overturns the whole trajectory of the story, negating the missed connection between hero and heroine and invalidating the multiple pre-existing interpretations of Tatiana’s choice to stay with her husband. For these men, the image of angry Tatiana is invalid.

Other theatergoers, such as Iulia Konova, ascribe the relative heat of the character to the actresses rather than Tuminas’s direction. Konova describes Olga Lerman’s performance of Tatiana: “Her Tatiana blows cold, immediately makes a barrier without emotion, and everything is cold and awkward.” The critic Rudnev too blames the negative character of the mature Tatiana on an immature actress. He writes, Olga Lerman “doesn’t have the strength to take on the role of an adult Tatiana. Her final phrase ‘But I

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123 Ponomarev, spectator review of *Eugene Onegin.* “а Татьяна ужасно-стервозным тоном выговаривает Онегину в своем монологе - да так, что становится совершенно ясно: правильно все-таки послал ее Онегин в первой части, лучше совсем без жены, чем жить с такой стервой.”

am given to another’ sounds aggressive, shrill and flat […] Tatiana’s response to
Onegin’s unconvincing letter comes out unexpectedly harsh and cold and spoils the
whole thing.”

Even though Konova and Rudnev associate the temperature of Tatiana’s
character with the performer rather than with Tuminas, their comments reveal a
commitment to an emotionally warm Tatiana, a gentle and forgiving female ideal.

The blogger Lubov Kovaleva also brings up emotion and heat in her description
of Tatiana, but unlike Konova and Rudnev, she approves of the transformed Tatiana. She
is “not the quiet and calm girl, not the usual ‘ideal of femininity,” this little girl is not
afraid to express her emotions…’” For Kovaleva, Tatiana’s forceful tone conveyed
strong emotion rather than its lack. The critic Evgenii Mel’nikov also addresses Tatiana’s
transformation, but he attributes her coldness to despair, rather than to vengeance or
meanness. He writes,

Here Tatiana is alone; stoic, seemingly carved out of marble, Tatiana
becomes the embodiment of painful melancholy; […] and her unexpected
and seemingly warm feelings towards Onegin are actually a pathetic and
hopeless attempt to change winter into spring.

взрослой Татьяны. Ее финальная фраза «Но я другому отдана» звучит агрессивно, визгливо и
поэтому плоско. [...] И лишь финал с невнятно прочитанным письмом Онегина и неожиданно
режим, холодным ответом Татьены немного портит дело.”
126 LubovKovaleva, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “Здесь Татьяна (Евгения Крегжде) – это не
тихая и спокойная девушка, это не привычный нам «идеал женственности», это маленькая
dевочка, которая не боится выплеснуть свои эмоции [...]
http://newslab.ru/review/575209. “Татьяна здесь одна; стоичевая, высеченная из мрамора
Татьяна, воплощение болезненной меланхолии [...] и потому её внезапное и, казалось бы,
теплое чувство к Онегину кажется жалкой и потому безнадежной попыткой зимы стать
весной.”
For Mel’nikov, the loss of Tatiana’s goodness is not the result of her own deficiency as much as her interaction with Eugene. Because he is so hopelessly cold, her own potential for warmth is frozen, ruined forever.

Offering an opposite reading, the critic Liubov’ Lebedina also reads Tatiana as fundamentally transformed by her interaction with Eugene, though Lebedina depicts Tuminas’s Tatiana as strongly moral, rather than cruel or cold. Lebedina writes, “certainly Tatiana performed by Vil’ma Kutavichiute is stronger than Onegin. She doesn’t need to split her personality into two, she has integrity, and even the most dire pressures could not spoil her nature and make her into a common person.”128 For Lebedina, Tuminas’s use of a single actress for Tatiana instead of the doubled actors used for Eugene and Lensky reveals strength. In Lebedina’s view, Tatiana keeps her Soviet virtues of integrity and originality and the critic’s reading reveals her own priorities: her personal image of the ideal woman is a strong one.

By contrast, Igor Nefiodov directly defines his ideal image of Tatiana as sexually innocent and vulnerable. Nefiodov writes:

Personally for me she has always been the epitome of immaculate fragility, tender trusting-ness. In Tuminas’s version, this kind of overwhelmingly passionate lass is ‘ripe’ and can’t sleep for her ‘sinful passion.’ Extremely vulgar.129


Nefiodov reads a budding sexuality into Tatiana’s restless excitement after her first meeting with Eugene, and her inability to sleep calmly in her bed. Even the hint of a girl’s budding sexuality is antithetical to Nefiodov’s image of an ideal woman, and he extends his criticism of Tatiana to Tuminas’s whole adaptation.

Unlike almost all of these descriptions, the blogger M_Lifshits did not discuss Tuminas’s representation of Tatiana as opposed to Pushkin’s. According to M_Lifshits, Tuminas “poured out Pushkin’s heroine, the same look, the same love and trust. But she becomes inaccessible in marriage, a romance with Onegin simply would not happen.”

Although M_Lifshits acknowledges the heroine’s personal characteristics of love and trust, he emphasizes Tatiana’s commitment to her marriage vows over all other aspects of her character. M_Livshits reads Tuminas’s Tatiana as Dostoevsky reads Pushkin: Tatiana’s moral strength lies not in her ability to love, but in her willingness to deny herself pleasure in order to save others from pain.

Clearly, the image of Tatiana is still associated with the ideal woman. Lubov Kovaleva, Semërkin, Ponomarev, Nikitin, and many others redefine their own concept of an ideal woman in their positive or negative reactions to Tuminas’s Tatiana. Moreover, the conversation reveals the continuing power of Tatiana as an icon of femininity but also of morality. Her image becomes a link or a portal between the everyday world and the realm where individuals negotiate their identity as contemporary and educated Russians.

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Feeling Close to Pushkin

Among spectators who positively responded to Tuminas’s *Onegin*, many described a feeling of being connected to the audience and to Pushkin—the icon of Russian beauty and creative potential. Their comments reflect the power of Tuminas’s adaptation, but also demonstrate how performances of *klassika* create a sense of belonging among Russia’s “educated people.” In their sentimental statements, audience responses reveal how the name Pushkin becomes a point of connection through which the Russian intelligentsia defines itself as a positive social group.

The blogger Nothre described a sense of belonging created by the aesthetic appeal of the program notes. Instead of the usual booklet containing the performance information, Tuminas printed the program on small name cards collected in a faux antique envelope. (These were sold in the lobby for 150 rubles, or around five dollars in 2013.) On each card, the names of the actors were written in an old-fashioned script beside a hand-drawn profile of each character, copies of the pencil sketches Pushkin drew for *Onegin*. In addition to the name cards, the envelope-program included a long piece of paper on which Tatiana’s letter appeared in beautiful nineteenth-century handwriting.

The blogger Nothre described feeling that “Pushkin had drafted the cards himself.” For Nothre, in combination with the performance, the envelope-program inspired an “extraordinary sense of belonging to the birth of a masterpiece that does not leave you throughout the performance.” Nothre goes on to describe the experience of witnessing

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131 Nothre, spectator review of *Eugene Onegin*. “Это необыкновенное чувство сопричастности к рождению шедевра не покидает на протяжении всего спектакля [...]”
Pushkin’s own images of his famous characters and their story, as captured before the master committed the story to verse.

Another blogger, Dima Verner, likewise described the experience of being close to Pushkin, using the second person personal to invoke a feeling of community with the whole audience. “Pushkin is our everything. We cry, we laugh, we never want to wrest ourselves from his bearlike hug.”

Werner extends the positive connection with “our everything” to everyone in the audience who shares the identity of Russian educated people. The blogger Olga Belan extended membership in this social group to Pushkin himself. She suggested that Pushkin would have liked Tuminas’s adaptation. “I can just see his face and his enthusiastic laughter somewhere in the fifth row….”

Belan describes such a close connection between the figure of Pushkin and her educated companions that she imagines him experiencing Tuminas’s play alongside the audience.

Belan’s imagined Pushkin appears in many comments, as commentators like Inna Kuzina envision Pushkin attending the play. Kuzina writes: “We all have our own intimate relationship with Pushkin, so I think Aleksandr Sergeevich would be satisfied with this production. It is alive, as if it was a dusted-off novel.”

Kuzina praises Tuminas for proving that Pushkin’s novel-in-verse continues to play a powerful role in

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the lives of people like her. The critic Nikolai Berman even suggested that Pushkin would have performed his own verses with same intonation. He writes, “Tuminas actually managed to find a stage equivalent to the language of Pushkin […] Pushkin sounds joyful, inspiring and melodious—just as if he were reading his own work.”135 Commenting at the Vakhtangov Forum, Maria Vasina brings up the difficulty of adapting Pushkin for the stage. Even though she questions the fidelity of the adaptation, she ultimately concurs that Pushkin would have enjoyed Tuminas’s Onegin. She writes,

Is it Pushkin? I don’t even know… kind of. Pushkin in general is very difficult to film or to stage. It’s like Mozart. Brilliant in its simplicity, but to perform it—its incredibly difficult. […] I think that A.S. would have approved.136

When these audience members claim that Pushkin would appreciate the adaptation or that he might have performed his verses like Tuminas’s actors, they are conferring upon Tuminas’s work the approval of the whole social group, including everyone who knows and loves Pushkin. In 2013, Pushkin (the Pushkin myth) continues to embody the best of Russia.

Other spectators defend Tuminas’s Onegin by claiming that Pushkin is relevant or should be made more relevant by contemporary performances. The blogger Staraya_Koraga argues that alteration to the intonation patterns of the Onegin strophes

make “the Pushkin strophes sound new.”

Staraya_Koraga defends Tuminas’s work by claiming that the adaptation proves Onegin’s relevance and topicality. Anna Makarova agrees with Staraya_Koraga: “The characters and words are recognizable, but new at the same time.”

Similarly, Petia Petrova extends the audience to include the younger actors who:

got to know a Pushkin of their own and see the world through his eyes, trying to understand the main characters and then specificity of Russia at that time. […] they have kept what is most valuable, so as not to miss anything and not to destroy the plot structure of the novel in verse.

These voices praise Tuminas’s adaptation not on its own merit, but because it has strengthened the connection between Pushkin and educated audience members. Their comments reflect the almost sacred place that Pushkin holds among certain Russians, and demonstrates their commitment to Pushkin’s writing as a living repertoire.

Other bloggers tried to articulate what was most valuable in Pushkin and Tuminas’s adaptation, but instead they repeatedly emphasize Pushkin’s relevance. Blogger Lotta20 argues that the play is infused with a “deep Pushkinian optimism” thus

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138 Staraya_koraga, review of Eugene Onegin. “Да, нет бьющих в лоб сравнений, но разве Пушкин не актуален?”
proving that “Pushkin is alive!”\textsuperscript{141} The blogger Lubovkovaleva asserts that Rimas Tuminas shows the continuing relevance of the Russian classics. She writes,

he makes the viewer reexamine the classics, familiar from their school days with new eyes, re-read it, open it to the new and unknown, and show that these works are about us, about our life and still relevant.\textsuperscript{142}

For these bloggers, a successful adaptation demonstrates that the values Pushkin represents are still a part of contemporary Russian life.

Unlike the vast majority of comments asserting the continuing relevance of Pushkin and \textit{Onegin}, blogger Evgenii Ponomarev declares that “it is way too hard to seriously consider Pushkin’s text after the standard formulations of the textbook \textit{Russian Literature for the National Schools of the USSR}.”\textsuperscript{143} Ponomarev argues that he can’t hear Pushkin without remembering the weight and specific reading with which Soviet teachers and politicians endowed Pushkin’s texts. Pushkin’s work has already been desecrated by Soviet authorities, who ruined the novel-in-verse with their own political agendas. But for most of those audience members who wrote reviews, focus on the need to maintain Pushkin and \textit{Onegin} in their culture. Indeed, the vast majority of review writers for any production seem committed to continuing the tradition of \textit{Onegin} interpretation in the


\textsuperscript{142} Lubovkovaleva, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. “заставить зрителя взглянуть другими глазами на классику, знакомую со школы, заново ее перечитать, открыть в ней новое и неизведенное, показать, что эти произведения про нас, про нашу жизнь и актуальны они до сих пор.”

\textsuperscript{143} Рономарев, spectator review of Eugene Onegin. "А вот вдуматься в пушкинский текст поверх устойчивых формулировок учебника "Русская литература для национальных школ СССР" - это слишком сложно.”
twenty-first century. The legacy of the Soviet state’s cultural policies, felt so strongly by Ponomarev, does not factor into the majority of reviews.

For example, the blogger Illaria_P argues that stage adaptations of *Onegin* are useful when they successfully link audience members with the original work. In her opinion, “the theater has fulfilled its mission” only if audience members are inspired to reread and re-approach the classic text.¹⁴⁴ For Illaria_P, Pushkin’s verses remain primary. As icons serve as links between the human world and the spiritual one, adaptations of *klassika* should connect educated Russians with the world of Pushkin and the virtuous potential he represents.

A few bloggers recorded their experience of belonging in Russian culture that they felt while attending Tuminas’s *Onegin*, and explained how this encounter gave their life meaning. For instance, Irina Gulneva defends the adaptation by connecting Tuminas’s brilliance with the virtue of love. She writes, “And finally, to opponents: everything that A. S. Pushkin wanted to say, you can read it in his brilliant novel. But in the play, you can see how brilliantly Rimas Tuminas reads this novel, and his love for the authors and the characters, and in the end, for all of us.”¹⁴⁵ Gulneva’s defense the director subtly reflects the construction of Russian and educated identity, in which Pushkin and his characters belong to the same world those who read and love *Onegin*. As discussed in

¹⁴⁴ Illaria_P, spectator review of *Eugene Onegin*. “То есть в этом смысле со своей задачей Театр (где-то я это услышала или прочла: 'если после нашего спектакля зритель захочет перечитать 'Евгения Онегина' [...])
¹⁴⁵ Irina Gulneva, comment on "Evgenii Onegin," Vakhtangov Theater (discussion forum), February 23, 2015 (3:54 a.m.), http://www.vakhtangov.ru/forum/messages/149. “И, напоследок, к оппонентам: всё, что хотел сказать А.С. Пушкин, можно прочесть в его гениальном романе. А в спектакле можно увидеть то, как гениально прочел этот роман Римас Туминас, и его любовь и к автору, и к героям, и ко всем нам [...]
The blogger Podruga_Vetra describes a sensation of happiness, moral growth and acceptance. She writes:

For the first time in a long time, I left the theater with an absolute feeling of happiness. This is when a work of art, in addition to the statements directed at you by the author, brings you to be more than yourself, when you have time to think about everything and not miss anything in the text.146

Podruga Vetra articulates the role that art can play in the lives of her peers. Not only can a positive experience of klassika make one happy and stimulate one’s intellect, but also it can “bring you to be more than yourself.” For these two women, Tuminas’s Onegin became the point of connection between themselves, their society, and the spiritual world of the Russian classics.

Sharing Pushkin, Sharing Meaning

Audience responses to Tuminas’s icon-filled drama demonstrate how many contemporary Russians actively invest meaning in their shared cultural history. Spending the evening at Tuminas’s Onegin resonated with the experience that some believers encounter at a church service. The event stimulated each individual to a deeper connection with Russian culture as they sought to make sense of each musical, visual, verbal, or gestural icon. When audience members make connections between the emotional lives of Tatiana’s friends and the plight of contemporary Russian women, they demonstrate how klassika acts as a conduit through which people negotiate their own

146 Podruga_vetra, Bytiecegodniane-v-sebe, October 9, 2013 (12:42p.m.), http://podruga-vetra.livejournal.com/51514.html. “Это когда произведение искусства кроме высказывания, направленного к тебе автором, заставляет тебя быть больше себя, когда ты успеваешь подумать обо всём на свете и не упустить при этом ничего по тексту.”
lives. Even when audience members fume that Tatiana has been made into a bitch (sterva), they reveal how important the Marian image of “the ideal Russian woman” remains in their own systems of meaning. Most importantly, the experience of Tuminas’s Onegin was a communal one. Individual writers constantly discussed the influence of shared cultural heritage and education on the emotional atmosphere during the performance. For Tuminas’s audience members, Pushkin, Onegin, and Tatiana embody the best of Russia, its proud and moral past, and the creative potential that remains among the contemporary Russian intelligentsia.
Chapter 9: Articulating the Russian Moral Project Online

In the introduction to this dissertation, I defined membership in the Russian intelligentsia as participation in a dialogic practice; this definition allows individual voices to come to the foreground of attention. This interpretive angle validates the membership of those who would consider themselves “ordinary” people, rather than prioritizing only public intellectuals or creative leaders. As my analysis of spectator reviews has shown, traditional models of attributing active production to musicians and writers and passive consumption to readers and audience members do not account for the participatory nature of arts reception in Russia among members of the intelligentsia.

In this dissertation, I have highlighted the active engagement of individual audience members with works of art and with larger systems of meaning through spectator reviews. These voices are not equally heard, of course. Levels of authority do exist—evaluations by critics and prominent artists travel further and are heard by more people than the interpretations posted as spectator reviews. Yet the perception of authoritative hierarchies diminishes neither each individual’s process of engagement nor his contribution to the whole conversation, however small. The process of engagement is powerful; it opens the audience member to new ideas and new ways of perceiving life. As
Merleau-Ponty insists, the process of *expression* is a continuous one. Even as the writers of reviews feel that they have reached a judgment by the end of the review, their engagement with that work of art and others has only just begun.

Moreover, I reconceive the intelligentsia as a process, as participation in an ongoing conversation that blurs the boundaries of literature, the arts and life. In this sense, the literary critics of the 1840s, the social critics of the 1860s, Dostoevsky and the Christian humanists, the anarchists, revolutionaries, and symbolists of the late nineteenth century join with the 1960s *shestidesiatniki* in a shared and continuous conversation. Likewise, the National Patriots who yearn for the Tatiana and Pushkin of the Soviet period and the moral clarity and national pride they represent are also joining in the tradition of working for the moral progress of Russia. As I have demonstrated, contemporary iterations of the moral project of the Russian intelligentsia are clearly alive in literature, music, theater, and arts reception. Indeed, this conversation reaches a much broader swath of Russia’s educated people than does political dissidence, and thus it carries more power. Furthermore, it reveals the voices of “ordinary” audience members and readers as full participants in the Russian moral project.

In Russia today, new stagings and adaptations of classic works are extremely prominent in Russian theater, dance, music, as well as television and film. In this dissertation, I reframe adaptation of classic works—from theater and dance adaptation to Regie theater opera—as a dialogue with a whole tradition. Visibly and purposefully altering known signifiers in any artistic production, especially one as well known as *Eugene Onegin*, prompts audiences to draw on their received knowledge in order to
interpret the work. Furthermore, adaptation prompts audience members to “make sense” of newly placed signifiers, and to situate them into the context of their own perspective on the world. In so doing, each individual audience member contributes to the systems of meanings shared by the group, especially when they voice their ideas in conversations, newspaper reviews, or semi-public online forums. Additionally, in the process of engaging with an adaptation, writers may also rework their own perspectives on life. The practice of writing and posting reviews online offers each person a space to reconsider her ideas. This discourse also opens each individual to the influence of others through dialogue. The result is a live, productive integration of the arts and society into each individual person’s experience of life.

This process magnifies the importance of shared symbols because they form the link between conversation participants, artist and audience members. For the Russian intelligentsia, Pushkin and Tatiana Larina take central positions in this discussion as icons of Russian creative potential and moral strength. Pushkin’s life as he actually lived it may have been filled with good and bad choices, with as many moral failures and successes as any other human being would experience. Nevertheless, his iconic image represents the creative ideal. It gives Russians a “window” into their own creative and moral potential through shared ownership of his legacy. Partially detached from the character in Pushkin’s novel, Tatiana Larina has become the primary secular icon of Russian moral beauty. Yet like icons in a church that become darkened by the smoke from votive candles lit by believers, the iconic images of Pushkin and Tatiana also change over time, reflecting the needs of those who believe they are important.
The dynamic and continuous adaptation of Tatiana and Pushkin as icons occurs through literary criticism, artistic adaption, intertextual references in newly written literature, but also in cultural policy. Classroom education, state-sponsored Pushkin festivals, specials on the Russian Kul’tura television channel, and newspaper articles also influence the course of the conversation. Thus, the social and the individual, the government and the educated peoples of Russia are in constant dialogue, and each changes the other.

**Conservatism in Contemporary Russia**

My perspective allows us to see more clearly the conservative turn in contemporary Russia. Frustration with the unfulfilled promises of post-Soviet democracy and nostalgia for past eras may be more than successful social engineering by the public relations machine of the current government. After all, the moral project of the intelligentsia is not just a liberalizing one; to work for moral progress, one needs to emphasize the problems of the present. Violence, corruption, poverty, and cultural anxiety about the future permeate life in Russia. In order to move forward, individuals may choose to address these issues through their traditional model of discourse—arts reception. In the contemporary period, this conversation often comes to light as a wish to replace the problems of the present with the idyllic image of the past. Along with nostalgia for the stability and ideological clarity of state socialism, individuals often speak of what Russia has lost—its moral center. The traditionally virtuous Tatiana seems infinitely better than the contemporary one.
In practice, the conservative turn in Russian life does not fall neatly into an American-style political binary. The Western media consistently misrepresent Russian politics as clearly divided between the Putin Administration’s conservative social policies and the “socially liberal” supporters of free speech, legislation of rights for women and minorities, and a limited presence in international affairs. In actuality, Western-style social liberalism has become closely tied to personal experiences of post-Soviet Russia’s free market, including the stresses of economic instability and poverty following the chaos of perestroika and the collapse of the USSR. For some people, post-Soviet suffering seems to result from democratic reforms. In addition, many liberal social ideas such as the gay rights movement and feminism seem to Russians to be emanating from the West, rather than developing organically to meet homegrown needs.

Indeed, the anti-Putin opposition is also distanced from the larger community of Russian intelligentsia, at least in part because they do not speak through the long-standing conversation that blurs arts, literature, and life. Alexei Navalny and other dissidents associated with the For Free Elections movement employ “Western” methods of political expression—direct criticism of specific government figures, street protests, political pamphlets and blog writing, and attempts to win elected positions in government. In the eyes of Western observers, these voices are leading the liberal agenda of Russia’s educated people living in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Yet they are actually outliers within the traditional models of negotiation among the Russian intelligentsia; they do not work through literature, the arts, and arts reception. Moreover, they are not necessarily
working for the general moral progress of the nation, but for a specific political goal—the overthrow of the Putin administration.

By emphasizing direct political speech over the literary and arts interpretation, the For Free Elections movement participates in a Western, rather than Russian, conversation. Of course, the same individuals may also read and attend arts events. Certainly, Navalny and his colleagues are members of Russia’s educated class. They may even also write spectator reviews or otherwise participate in the traditional conversation about literature and Russian life. But the Western media’s emphasis on their fight for elections through direct opposition to the government neglects to account for the traditional model of social negotiation through arts reception. The Western media’s focus on the For Free Elections movement and the Putin Administration’s censorship of direct political activism excludes the vibrant conversation about Russian life within which a much larger number of people discuss their goals for Russia’s future.

By paying attention to the conversation of “ordinary” members of the intelligentsia as they blur the boundaries of literature, the arts, and Russian life, articulations of conservatism can be seen as articulations of dissatisfaction. Indeed, highlighting what is problematic in Russia is in fact the most constant element of the Russian moral project. To work for the progress of the nation, critics must point out precisely what is wrong with the present situation. What matters most to each individual—their morality—becomes clear as each person struggles to articulate opinions about Onegin, art, and the path to making Russia a better place.
The Possibilities and Perils of Online Ethnography

The analysis of online writing allows scholars a new perspective on the interaction between state and citizen, and between artist and audience member. In the twenty-first century, online writing will become especially important for reception studies of the arts. In my dissertation, I provide a model of qualitative analysis that emphasizes the need to approach each source as a unique statement written by an individual person. Each post represents a single moment, a snapshot of the human experience.

Online reception offers scholars a wide lens into this mode of expression, but the conversation among “ordinary” members of the intelligentsia has taken place throughout the last two centuries. Being able to do a Boolean Internet search for spectator reviews allowed a fascinating and relatively clear window on this process of meaning-making alive in Russia today. In my next research project, I will try to uncover some of these voices from history. Extending my line of inquiry will be much more difficult because in the past, the discussion took place in more private forms of communication: letter and diary writing and face-to-face conversation. I will examine printed newspaper reviews, but they represent only one group of voices within a much larger story.

My project highlights these individual voices, but it also requires a great deal of risk. Throughout this dissertation, my interpretive voice has strongly guided the reader. My own themes and priorities have directed the course of conversation. Another scholar working with the same corpus of posts would probably structure the themes differently and select other examples. Because of this inherent openness, I have tried to create and
maintain my own ethics of representation. I have attributed statements to actual people, citing the names or handles they themselves chose. I have also provided their original words in Russian, and a link to their post in footnotes. I try to remain respectful of each person’s statements, even when their ideas seem preposterous or simplistic.

In this project, I have not advocated for social change or sought to reveal and contextualize bigoted opinions. Rather, I have demonstrated that ordinary individuals are as interesting as great artists and as social trends. People remain unique, even if they assert popular ideas or sentiments. The way that they present these ideas, and the effect of such restatement on their daily lives and beliefs, differs from person to person. There is a fascinating beauty in the variety of human expression and in life.
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Appendix A: Selected Adaptations of *Eugene Onegin* Produced in Russia

**Imperial Period**

**Dramatizations**
- G. V. Kugushev’s play, four scenes in 3 acts with added text
  Alexandrinsky Theater, St. Petersburg, 1846
  Incidental music by A. Verstovsky or A. L’vov
- “Evgenii and Tatiana,” recitation and dramatization, 2 garden scenes and Tatiana’s refusal
  Alexandrinsky Theater, St. Petersburg, 1849
- Scenes from *Eugene Onegin*
  Maly Theater, Moscow, 1862
- Scenes from *Eugene Onegin*
  Odessa, 1880
- Scenes from *Eugene Onegin*
  St. Petersburg, 1886-87
- Scenes from Eugene Onegin, Tatiana played by V. F. Komissarzhevskaya
  Puskhin Jubilee, Alexandrinsky Theater, St. Petersburg, 1899

**Musical Settings including Opera**
- A. Verstovsky, *Eugene Onegin*
  Moscow
- A. L’vov, *Eugene Onegin,
  St. Petersburg
- P. Tchaikovsky’s Lyric Scenes from *Eugene Onegin*
  Moscow, 1879

**Pre-Revolutionary Films**
- *Eugene Onegin*, Piotr Chardynin in the Role of Onegin
  Silent Film, 1911
- *Eugene Onegin*, with A. M. Davydov and M. E. Ivantsev
  Sound Film, 1915
- *Eugene Onegin*, Alfred Halm
  Silent Film, Germany, 1919
**Soviet Period**

**Opera Productions of *Eugene Onegin***
- K. Stanislavsky’s studio production Tchaikovsky’s opera
  Stanislavsky’s Theater Studio, 1922, revised 1926
- S. Prokofiev and S. Krzhizhanovsky ballet and recitation,
  Cancelled during Purges, 1937
- B. Pokrovsky’s production of Tchaikovsky’s opera
  Bolshoi Theater, 1944
- R. Shchedrin’s *a capella* vocal setting of Pushkin’s poetry
  1981,
- Y. Temirkanov’s production of Tchaikovsky’s opera,
  Mariinsky Theater, St. Petersburg, 1984

**Opera-on-Film**
- R. Tikhomirov’s opera-on-film of Tchaikovsky’s opera,
  LenFil’m, 1958

**Unperformed Stage Play/Ballet with Music**
1936 - Prokofiev/Krzhizhanovsky – stage play with music; unperformed

**Song Cycle**
R. Shchedrin *Evgenii Onegin* – a cappella setting of EO strophes
1981

G. Rozhdestvenskii’s *Pushkiniana* – symphonic suite

**Post-Soviet Period**

**Drama Theater**
- A. Vasiliev’s “From the Travels of *Onegin*,” 1995/2005
  Moscow, 1995/2005
- Y. Liubimov’s *Eugene Onegin*,
  Theater na Taganke, Moscow, 2000
- G. Entin’s “Is It Really the Same Tatiana?,”
  Ermolova Theater, Moscow, 2003
- R. Tuminas presents klassika as iconic Russia,
  Vakhtangov Dramatic Theater, 2013
- T. Kuliabin dramatic play *Eugene Onegin*
  Krasnyi Fakel, 2014

**Opera Productions**
- Two Act arrangement of Pokrovsky-Bolshoi production
  Bolshoi Theater, Moscow, 1994
- V. Riabov’s “fairy-tale” staging
  Sat’s Children’s Theater, Moscow, 1996
- E. Kobolev shortened chamber staging on a thrust stage
Novaia Opera, 1996
- D. Bertman’s realistic staging
  Helikon Opera, Moscow, 1997
- Reconstruction of B. Pokrovsky’s 1944 *Eugene Onegin*
  Bolshoi Theater, Moscow, 2000

-D. Tcherniakov’s scandalous production,
  Bolshoi Theater, Moscow, 2006
- Alexandr Titel’s contemporary but “spiritually linked” *Onegin*
  Stanislavsky Musical Theater, Moscow, 2007
- Andrei Zholdak, opera production
  Mikhailovsky Theater, St. Petersburg, 2012
- Aleksei Stepanyuk’s opera production
  Mariinsky Theater, St. Petersburg, 2014
- Vasili Barkhatov’s opera production
  Mikhailovsky Theater, St. Petersburg, 2015

**Ballets**
- B. Eifman’s “contemporary” ballet adaptation *Onegin*
  Eifman Ballet Theater, St. Petersburg
- J. Cranko’s *Eugene Onegin* conventional Russian ballet,
  Stuttgart 1967-69, Bolshoi Theater, Moscow 2013
- J. Neumeier, ballet *Tatiana*
  Stanislavsky Musical Theater, 2014

**Film**
- Dzhafar Akhundzade’s *Duel’* romantic morality tale
  Moscow-Georgia, 2011
Appendix B: Supplementary Material on Tatiana’s Letter Scene

Stage Directions and Text by Section for Tatiana’s Letter Scene

*All stage directions taken from authoritative score. There are some discrepancies in the directions between the authoritative score and the separately published authoritative libretto. My translations of the stage directions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section 1:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>m. 1-6</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Tatiana pauses for a while in thought, and then gets up in a hurry with an expression of determination on her face)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **m. 16-32** |
| Romance “Puskai Pogibnu Ia” (Let Me Perish!”) |
| (Text by composer) |
| (with feeling, strength and passion) |
| Пускай погибну я, но прежде я в ослепительной надежде блаженство темное зову, я негу жизни узнаю! Я пью волшебный яд желаний! меня преследуют мечты! Везде, везде передо мной Мой искушитель роковой! Везде, везде, он передо мной! |

| **m. 33-40** |
| Tatiana’s Leitmotiv in Orchestra |
| (Goes to the writing table and sits down, writes for a little while, then stops) |

| **m. 41-45** |
| Unmarked recitative: |
| (Tears up the letter) |
| Нет, все не то! Начну сначала! |
| Ах, что со мной! я вся горю! |
| Не знаю, как начать... |
### Section 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orchestral Intro</th>
<th>(Writes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>m. 46-50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>m. 51-55</th>
<th>(Stands and reads what she has written)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arioso A</td>
<td>Я к вам пишу, - чего же боле?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Ia K Vam Pishu”</td>
<td>Что я могу еще сказать?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(I write to you)</td>
<td>Теперь я знаю, в вашей воле</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Text by Pushkin)</td>
<td>Меня презреньем наказать!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. 56-69</td>
<td>Но вы, к моей несчастной доле</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Хоть каплю жалости храня,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Вы не оставите меня.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Сначала я молчать хотела;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Поверьте, моего стыда</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Вы не узнали б никогда,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Никогда!..</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recitative (marked)</th>
<th>(Lays letter to the side)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>m. 70-78</td>
<td>О да, клялась я сохранить в душе</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Text by composer)</td>
<td>Признанье в страсти пылкой и</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>безумной!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Увы! не в силах я владеть своей душой!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Пусть будет то, что быть должно со</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>мной!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ему признаюсь я! Смелей! Он все</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>узнает!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arioso A’</th>
<th>(writes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>m. 79-82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| m. 83-99            |          |
| (Text by Pushkin)   |          |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>m. 97-98</th>
<th>(Immersed in thought. She suddenly rises.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>m. 99-101</td>
<td>Другой!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Section 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arioso B</th>
<th>Нет, никому на свете</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>m. 102-137</td>
<td>Не отдала бы сердца я!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Net, Nikomu na Svete” (No, there is no one else)</td>
<td>То в вышнем суждено совете,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>То воля неба: я твоя!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Вся жизнь моя была залогом</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Свиданья верного с тобой;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Я знаю: ты мне послан Богом</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>До гроба ты хранитель мой.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ты в сновиденьях мне являлся,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Незримый, ты уж был мне мил,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Твой чудный взгляд меня томил,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>В душе твой голос раздавался.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unmarked Recitative</th>
<th>Давно ... нет, это был не сон!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>m. 138-147</td>
<td>Ты чуть вошел, я вмиг узнала...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Вся обомлела, запылала,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>И в мыслях молвила: вот он!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Вот он!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arioso B’</th>
<th>Не правда ли! Я тебя слыхала...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>m. 148-181</td>
<td>Ты говорил со мной в тиши,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Когда я бедным помогала,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Или молитвой услаждала</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Тоску волнуемой души?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>И в это самое мгновенье</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Не ты ли, милое виденье,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>В прозрачной темноте мелькнул,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Приникнув тихо к изголовью?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Не ты ли с отрадой и любовью</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Слова надежды мне шепнул?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Section 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orch introduction to Arioso C</th>
<th>(Comes to the table and begins to write again, stopping as if lost in thought.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Arioso C sung m. 195-221 “Kto Ty, moi angel li khranitel’” (Are you my Guardian Angel or Seducer?) m. 222-225 | (with great feeling) | Кто ты, мой ангел ли хранитель
Или коварный искушитель?
Мои сомненья разреш.
Быть может, это все пустое,
Обман неопытной души,
И суждено совсем иное?..
(again rises and walks in thought) |
| Arioso C-middle m. 226-239 (middle section, Tatiana leitmotiv sung) | | Но так и быть! Судьбу мою
Отныне я тебе вручаю,
Перед тобою слезы лью,
Твоей защиты умоляю,
Умоляю!
(Goes downstage.) |
| Arioso C’ m. 240-247 m. 248 m. 249-268 | | Вообрази: я здесь одна!
Никто меня не понимает!
(getting more and more excited) |
| 269-292 | (Quickly goes to the table and hastily finishes the letter) | Рассудок мой изнемогает,
И молча гибнуть я должна!
Я жду тебя,
Я жду тебя! Единим словом
Надежды сердца оживи,
Иль сон тяжелый перерви.
Увы, заслуженным укором!
(Coda) |
| Final Recitative m. 293-310 “Konchaitu!” (I finish) | (Stands and seals the letter) | Кончаю, страшно перечесть
Стыдом и страхом замираю,
Но мне порукой ваша честь.
И смело ей себя вверяю! |
Я к вам пишу — чего же боле?
Что я могу еще сказать?
Теперь, я знаю, в вашей воле
Меня презреньем наказать.
Но вы, к моей несчастной доле
Хоть каплю жалости храня,
Вы не оставьте меня.
Сначала я молчать хотела;
Поверьте: моего стыда
Вы не узнали б никогда,
Когда б надежду я имела
Хоть редко, хоть в неделю раз
В деревне нашей видеть вас,
Чтоб только слышать ваши речи,
Вам слово молвить, и потом
Все думать, думать об одном
И день и ночь до новой встречи.
Но, говорят, вы нелюдим;
В глуши, в деревне все вам скучно,
А мы... ничем мы не блестим,
Хоть вам и рады простодушно.

Зачем вы посетили нас?
В глушь забытого селенья
Я никогда не знала б вас,
Не знала б горького мученья.
Души неопытной волненья
Смирив со временем (как знать?),
По сердцу я нашла бы друга,
Была бы верная супруга
И добродетельная мать.

Другой!.. Нет, никому на свете
Не отдала бы сердца я!
То в вышнем суждено совете...
То воля неба: я твоя;
Вся жизнь моя была залогом
Свиданья верного с тобой;
Я знаю, ты мне послан богом,
До гроба ты хранитель мой...
Ты в сновиденьях мне являлся
Незримый, ты мне был уж мил,
Твой чудный взгляд меня томил,

I’m writing to you this declaration—
What more can I in candor say?
It may be now your inclination
To scorn me and to turn away;
But if my hapless situation
Evokes some pity for my woe,
You won’t abandon me, I know.
I first tried silence and evasion;
Believe me, you’d have never learned
My secret shame, had I discerned
The slightest hope that on occasion—
But once a week—I’d see your face,
Behold you at our country place,
Might hear you speak a friendly greeting,
Could say a word to you; and then,
Could dream both day and night again
Of but one thing, till our next meeting.
They say you like to be alone
And find the country unappealing;
We lack, I know, a worldly tone,
But still, we welcome you with feeling.

Why did you ever come to call?
In this forgotten country dwelling
I’d not have known you then at all,
Nor known this bitter heartache’s swelling.
Perhaps, when time had helped in quelling
The girlish hopes on which I fed,
I might have found (who knows?) another
And been a faithful wife and mother,
Contented with the life I led.

Another! No! In all creation
There’s no one else whom I’d adore;
The heavens chose my destination
And made me thine for evermore!
My life till now has been a token
In pledge of meeting you, my friend;
And in your coming, God has spoken,
You’ll be my guardian til the end…
You filled my dreams and sweetest trances
As yet unseen, and yet so dear,
You stirred me with your wondrous glances,
В душе твой голос раздавался
Давно... нет, это был не сон!
Ты чуть вошел, я вмг узнала,
Вся обомлела, запылала
И в мыслях молвила: вот он!
Не правда ль? я тебя слыхала:
Ты говорил со мной в тиши,
Когда я бедным помогала
Или молитвой услаждала
Тоску волнуемой души?
И в это самое мгновенье
Не ты ли, милое виденье,
В прозрачной темноте мелькнул,
Прилипнул тихо к изголовью?
Не ты ль, с отрадой и любовью,
Слова надежды мне шепнул?
Кто ты, мой ангел ли хранитель,
Или коварный искушитель:
Мои сомненья разреши.
Быть может, это все пустое,
Обман неопытной души!
И суждено совсем иное...
Но так и быть! Судьбу мою
Отныне я тебе вручаю,
Перед тобою слезы лью,
Твоей защиты умоляю...
Вообрази: я здесь одна,
Никто меня не понимает,
Рассудок мой изнемогает,
И молча гибнуть я должна.
Я жду тебя: единым взором
Надежды сердца оживи
Иль сон тяжелый перерви,
Увы, заслуженным укором!

Кончаю! Страшно перечесть...
Стыдом и страхом замираю...
Но мне порукой ваша честь,
И смело ей себя вверяю...

Your voice within my soul rang clear….
And then the dream came true for me!
When you came in, I seemed to waken,
I turned to flame, I felt all shaken,
And in my heart I cried: Its he!
And was it you I heard replying
Amid the stillness of the night,
Or when I helped the poor and dying
Or turned to heaven softly crying,
And said a prayer to soothe my plight?
And even now, my dearest vision,
Did I not see your apparition
Flit softly through this lucent light?
Was it not you who seemed to hover
Above my bed, a gentle lover,
To whisper hope and sweet delight?
Are you my angel of salvation
Or hell’s own demon of temptation?
Be kind and send my doubts away;
For this may all be mere illusion,
The things a simple girl would say,
While Fate intends no grand conclusion….
So be it then! Henceforth I place
My faith in you and your affection;
I plead with tears upon my face
And beg you for your kind protection.
You cannot know: I’m so alone,
There’s no one here to whom I’ve spoken,
My mind and will are almost broken,
And must I die without a moan.
I wait for you ... and your decision:
Revive my hopes with but a sign,
Or halt this heavy dream of mine—
Alas, with well-deserved derision!

I close. I dare not now reread….
I shrink with shame and fear. But surely,
Your honor’s all the pledge I need,
And I submit to it securely.¹

¹ Translation by James Falen. A. S. Pushkin. Eugene Onegin. 73-75.
Appendix C: Galina Vishnevskaya’s Open Letter

As printed in:


Article Preface: “Когда речь зашла о предстоящем в октябре праздновании юбилея певицы, Галина Павловна извлекла из сумки письмо, адресованное генеральному директору Большого театра, в котором она решительно отказывается праздновать свою круглую дату на Новой сцене театра. Галина Вишневская так прокомментировала свою позицию:

- Я сходила на премьеру "Евгения Онегина" в Большом театре, и меня охватило отчаяние от происходящего на сцене. Я двое суток не спала и написала письмо директору. О том, что я отказываюсь от празднования юбилея в этом театре. Выходит, зря прожита жизнь и зачем дальше вообще учить, если Большой театр выпускает такое... Когда прозвучало: "Куда, куда вы удались...", от унижения я просто заплакала...”

Galina Vishnevskaya’s open letter:

Галина Вишневская:
Не имею к этому театру никакого отношения

Уважаемый Анатолий Геннадиевич!

Простите меня, но я не могу принять столь любезно предоставленную Вами возможность отметить мой юбилей на сцене Нового оперного театра, что напротив Большого.

Присутствуя на премьере "Евгения Онегина" 1 сентября этого года, я вдруг поняла, что не имею к этому театру никакого отношения. Мой театр закрыт на ремонт, но именно там я испытала священный трепет, выйдя в первом своем спектакле в 1953 году в партии Татьяны в опере двух наших гениев П.И. Чайковского и А.С. Пушкина, поставленной моим учителем и великим режиссером Б.А. Покровским. А через 30 лет вместе с моей Татьяной в парижской Гранд-опера я простилась с оперной сценой. Как видите, с "Евгением Онегиным" связана вся моя творческая
жизнь. На этой постановке 1944 года публика нескольких поколений, обливаясь слезами, наслаждалась музыкой Чайковского и трепетала от каждого слова волшебных стихов Пушкина, произнесенных со знаменитой сцены великими певцами России.

То, что я увидела на премьере новой постановки "Евгения Онегина" 1 сентября, привело меня в ужас, от которого я никак не могу избавиться. Утешает лишь мысль, что это бесстыдство произошло не на сцене Большого театра, где я почти четверть века пела, отдавая всю себя театру без остатка, как и каждый артист, кто имел честь петь на прославленной сцене.

В театре через дорогу от Большого я никогда не пела, он не был моим, и в такой знаменательный для меня день, как мое восьмидесятилетие, я не хочу, выйдя на эту сцену, пережить еще раз чувство отчаяния и унижения, охватившее меня на премьере 1 сентября, и, наверное, до конца своих дней я не избавлюсь от стыда за свое присутствие при публичном осквернении наших национальных святинь.

Простите.

Ваша Галина Вишневская

Translation: “I can not have anything more to do with this theater.
Dear Anatolii Gennadievich!
Forgive me, but I cannot accept your kind offer to celebrate my jubilee on the stage of the New Opera theater across from the Bolshoi.
I was present at the premiere of Eugene Onegin on September 1 of this year, and I suddenly realized that I do not have any connection to this theater. My theater is closed for rennovation, and it was there that I experienced sacred trepidation before my first performance in 1953 in the role of Tatiana in the oepra of our two geniuses P. I. Tchaikovsky and A. C. Pushkin, an opera which was staged by my teacher and the great director, B. A. Pokrovsky. After 30 years, I said farewell to the opera stage together with my Tatiana at the Paris Grand Opera. As you can see, my whole creative life is linked to Eugene Onegin. Since 1944, several generations of audiences have enjoyed this production shedding tears, delighting in the music of Tchaikovsky and trembling at every word of the magical poetry of Pushkin, performed by the best vocalists in Russia on this famous stage.

On September 1, what I saw at the premiere of the new production Eugene Onegin horrified me, and I can not get rid of the feeling. One small consolidation is that this did nto happen on the stage of the Bolshoi Theater, where I sang for nearly a quarter of a century without a break, like every artist who had the honor to sing on the famous stage.

I never sang in the theater across the way from the Bolshoi, it I not mine, and I don’t want to go out on the stage on such an important day for me as my eightieth birthday, and feel the despair and humiliation that gripped me at the September 1 premiere and most
likely for the rest of my days I will not get over the shame of having attending a public desecration of our national shrine.

Forgive me,
Your Galina Vishnevskaya

**Anatolii Iksanov’s Open Reply:**

**Анатолий Иксанов:**

**Каждый вправе решать, где праздновать день рождения**

С большим удивлением я прочитал письмо Галины Павловны Вишневской. Больше всего меня удивило именно то, что такое письмо написала наша великая примадонна, которая сама многие годы страдала от эстетических штампов и ярлыков. Человек, который помнит политические процессы над Пастернаком и Бродским, который принимал живое участие в судьбе Солженицына. Она наверняка защищала Альфреда Шнитке после печально-знаменитой статьи о его версии "Пиковой дамы".

Большой театр сегодня показывает зрителям огромное количество постановок, в которых бережно сохраняются традиции русской оперной классики. Недавно мы провели реставрацию постановки "Бориса Годунова" 1948 года, которую с большим успехом показали в Лондоне. Мы сохраняем в репертуаре и тот спектакль "Евгений Онегин", в котором пела сама Галина Павловна. Но надо понимать, что Большой театр должен делать новые постановки "золотого фонда" русской национальной классики. Необходимость нового прочтения, интерпретации классики - веление времени. Жаль, что это не понимают такие талантливые люди. Что касается места для проведения юбилейного концерта Галины Павловны, то каждый сам вправе решать, где ему праздновать день рождения. Некоторые вообще отмечают юбилеи дома.

Анатолий Иксанов,
Генеральный директор
Большого театра

Translation: “I read Galina Vishnevskaya’s letter with great surprise. Most of all, I was surprised that our great diva, who herself suffered many years from aesthetic stamps and labels. A person who remember the political trials of Pasternak and Brodsky, and who took an active part in fate of Solzhenitsyn. She certainly protected Alfred Schnittke after the famously-terrible article about his version of The Queen of Spades.

The Bolshoi Theater today shows viewers a great number of productions in which the traditions of Russian classic opera are carefully preserved. We recently conducted a
restoration of the 1948 staging of *Boris Godunov*, which performed to great success in London. We have kept *Eugene Onegin*, the same production in which Galina Pavlovna sang in repertoire. It should be understood that the Bolshoi Theater should create new productions of the “Golden Archive” of Russian national classics. The need for new readings and interpretations of the classics is imperative to our time. It is a pity that such talented people do not understand that. With regard to the venue for Galina Pavlovna’s Jubilee concert—everyone should be free to choose where to celebrate their birthday. Some even celebrate their birthdays at home.

Anatolii Iksanov
General Director
Bolshoi Theater

From the Editorial Board:

От редакции

Мы публикуем эти два письма с огромным сожалением, но и с пониманием того, что в них отражен не просто частный интерес решительной и бескомпромиссной певицы. В них проявился конфликт более широкий, в который сегодня вовлечены самые разные области искусства и театра, разница творческих волн и взглядов на искусство оперы. То, что юбилей великой певицы состоится не в Большом театре, с которым ее неразрывно связала судьба, воспринимается как какая-то нелепая ошибка. Стоит вспомнить, как в 1992 году на сцене Большого состоялось triumphant celebration of the 45th anniversary of Vishnevskaya’s creative activity, and the whole hall applauded her, convinced that all divisive issues lay in the past.

Translation: “We publish these two letters with great regred, but with the understanding that this does not reflect only the private interests of a determined and uncompromising vocalist. This is the manifestation of a broader conflict which is taking place in a large variety of art and theater these days, differences in creative wills and views on the art of opera. The fact that the jubilee of the great singer will not be held at the Bolshoi Theater, which is inextricably linked to her history will be perceived as some kind of great mistake. It is worth remembers that in 1992 on the stage of the Bolshoi, there was a triumphant celebration of the 45th anniversary of Vishnevskaya’s creative activity, and the whole hall applauded her, convinced that all divisive issues lay in the past.
Meanwhile, the division which is political and artistic continues to rend social consciousness. The editorial board at *RG* is ready to continue talking about tradition and innovation, and their boundaries in modern theater on the pages of our newspaper.
Appendix D: Reception of Tcherniakov’s Opera Production of *Eugene Onegin*

**List of Newspaper Reviews of Tcherniakov’s *Eugene Onegin***


Selected List of Spectator Review Blogs about Tcherniakov’s Onegin


VALERY


GAZEQ


Selected List of Discussion Forum Threads about Tcherniakov’s Onegin

Forumklassika.ru
Thread: Sovremennyi Evgenii Onegin (Contemporary Eugene Onegin)

Ultrafiolet.forum24.ru
Thread: ‘Eugene Onegin’ Postanovka Tcherniakova

Teatromania.net
Thread: “Oposhlym Genial’noe (Evgenii Oneign Rezhissera Cherniakova)”
http://www.teatromania.net/showthread.php?t=1313

Teatral’naia Afisha (Teatr.ru)
Thread: “Evgenii Oneign: Bol’shoi Teatr: Zritel’kie Otyzy”
http://www.teatr.ru/th/perfcomm-view.asp?perf=960&rep=0
Appendix E: Reception of Eifman’s Ballet Onegin

List of Newspaper and Journal Reviews about Eifman’s Onegin


Maksov, Aleksandr. “Zaventyi Venzel’ ‘O’ ‘E.’” Review of Onegin, directed by Boris Eifman, Eifman Ballet, St. Petersburg. Balet 4 (2010), http://www.russianballet.ru/line/line2010/line04_10.html#%D0%97%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%BD%D1%8B%D0%B9%20%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B7%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%8C%20%C2%AB.


**List of Spectator Review Blogs of Eifman’s *Onegin***


Appendix F: Reception of Tuminas’s Play *Eugene Onegin*

List of Newspaper Reviews of Tuminas’s *Eugene Onegin*


List of Spectator Review Blogs of Tuminas’s *Eugene Onegin*


List of Discussion Forum Threads about Tuminas’s *Eugene Onegin*

Vakhtangov Theater Discussion Forum
Thread: “Evgenii Onegin,”
http://www.vakhtangov.ru/forum/messages/149

Vashdosug.ru
Thread: “Rimas Tuminas Postavil Entsiklopediu Russkoi Zhizni,” [Rimas Tuminas Staged an Encyclopedia of Russian Life.]
http://www.vashdosug.ru/msk/theatre/performance/510801/
Feb 14, 2013-Dec 13, 2013

Forum TBC: Discussion Klub of Ekho Moskvy
Thread: “Eugene Onegin: Where did they get so much plywood?” (Евгений Онегин, Где достать столько фанеры?)
March 3, 2014-March 5, 2014

Afisha.mail.ru
Thread: “Eugene Onegin, Production: Evg. Vakhtangov Theater (Евгений Онегин Постановка: Театр им. Евг. Вахтангова)
http://afisha.mail.ru/theatre/perf/765393_evgenii_onegin/

QnA Center
Thread: “Who saw *Eugene Onegin* at the Vakhtangov? How was it?” (Кто смотрел "Евгений Онегин" в Вахтанговском? Как вам?)