

Eugene Onegin's Journey Through Time:

An Analysis of the Meaning and Effect of Major Themes in Pushkin's Novel In Verse,
Tchaikovsky's Opera, and Other Adaptations of the Work and Their Relevance to Today's World

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Introduction

Few works have stood the test of time quite like Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. The novel in verse combined romanticism (the characters' internal, private, hidden agendas) and realism (the changing social norms) in a beautifully cohesive manner. A revolutionary work for its time, Pushkin's role in shifting cultural norms, opening new discussions, giving way to new forms of writing, and introducing novel approaches to interpreting the broad vision of life as a result of his publication of *Eugene Onegin* (over the period of time from 1823 to 1833) was enormous. The masterminds who later adapted the work to other art forms found themselves on the cusp of similar waves of influence on their respective societies. Namely, Tchaikovsky garnered much success with his operatic adaptation of the novel in an opera by the same name, which premiered in 1879, and John Cranko's choreography in the ballet *Onegin* drew much recognition when it premiered in 1965. Some adaptations of the work, I will argue, actually detract from the ideas that Pushkin was attempting to highlight. Similarly, some contemporary opera productions of Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* have new agendas that are not only unrelated to the ideas that Tchaikovsky was aiming to put forward in writing the opera (not to mention Pushkin's original ideas), but in some instances detract from those ideas.

When analyzing this work, one needs to consider not only the story being told but also the form in which it was written, which was important in defining the work by confining it to a rhythmic and rhyming scheme that impacts the reader's experience with it. As far as the work's substance, the lessons learned by the readers of the novel were no more significant when the novel was written nearly two centuries ago than they are today. While it is a beautiful story, compellingly written, and with a surprising ending, at the core, *Eugene Onegin* deals with the

most basic morality, and by providing case studies of individuals who approach morality very differently, it causes the readers to question their own.

In this analysis, I evaluate the overarching moral lessons that Pushkin offers, noting the manner in which he communicates these lessons to his readers. I then consider how the ideas and lessons presented in Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* have been applied to various artistic and film adaptations of the work and the relevance of the lessons throughout history, including their significance today. Finally, I discuss the relationship between art and society, including an analysis of how the medium in which a work is presented might influence the way in which the main ideas being put forward are imagined and interpreted by the reader or observer of the work.

Note on translation of the Russian text:

Pushkin's masterpiece has been translated into English by thirteen translators in numerous versions. Scholars agree that the most difficult problem posed by *Eugene Onegin* is the need to reproduce the form: the Onegin stanza (the novel in verse is written in iambic tetrameter with the following unusual rhyme scheme: AbAbCCddEffEgg). The form is "tight and terse, disciplined in the neoclassical manner, yet bouncy, racy, and adaptable to a dynamic poet's many changes of tone of voice and of pace."¹ Vladimir Nabokov argues that it is mathematically impossible to recreate both this flexible-inflexible stanza and the meaning that it conveys.² Only one or the other can be upheld; Nabokov chose to reject rhyme and form (deviating from the iambic pentameter on occasion) and instead focus on the meaning, which he translates with incredible skill. While Nabokov's translation is sometimes somewhat too literal, it

¹ Leighton, Lauren. "A New Onegin: Review" in Slavic and East European Journal, Volume 41, Number 4, Winter 1997. American Association of teachers of Slavic and East European Languages: Arizona, 1997. 662.

² Pushkin, Alexandr. Translated by Vladimir Nabokov. Eugene Onegin. Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1990. viii. (Forward).

is effective for my purposes in this discussion, as I am aiming to compare Pushkin's original intentions (without having them obscured by someone's interpretative translation) to Tchaikovsky's account of those intentions. Thus, a more literal translation serves my objectives far more effectively. While I also consulted translations by Walter Arndt and Charles Johnston, I used Nabokov's translation throughout the vast majority of this paper.

Chapter 1: Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*

I. The morality that Pushkin espoused as depicted in four key scenes

The central theme in *Onegin* is the conflict between dreams and reality, between ideals and the realities of life. The young characters in the novel dream of love and of happiness, but the rough, unforgiving, reality forces them to confront a very different life. Young Tatyana Larina's love for Onegin is burning powerfully within her, but she fails to find reciprocity from Onegin. Having survived this difficult disillusionment and having buried these feelings in the depths of her soul, Tatyana gives in to the inevitable laws of society. She marries Prince Gremin and as a result, she becomes morally obligated to be true to him.³ Lensky, who loves Olga with his entire young soul, idealizes his beloved; having met with Onegin's insulting cynicism, he feels compelled by his strong set of morals to defend his beloved and ultimately ends up sacrificing his life in the duel. Onegin's drama is more complex as he does not become a victim until the very last act, when he is forced to part with Tatyana because of her feeling of a high moral obligation to her husband, which stands between her and Onegin and impedes any possibility of a relationship or life together. In this way, the conflict unfolds in different fashion in the lives of the three young characters: Tatyana, Onegin, and Lensky. I will analyze Pushkin's key ideas through the lenses of these three characters, whose experiences serve as examples of how Pushkin might be suggesting that people should act, if not warnings of how people should not act.

Ia. Tatyana's decision to write and send Onegin the letter

³ Туманина, Л. *Чайковский и музыкальный театр*. Государственное Музыкальное издательство: Москва, 1961. 111. (Translated into English by Julia Torgovitskaya).

I believe that some of the most pivotal moral lessons take place in four key scenes, which I will examine in depth. The first of these scenes is the letter that Tatyana decides to write to Onegin. It is important to recognize that this was an unheard of act for her time. Women in this time were expected to play a submissive role and the idea of a woman boldly declaring her interest in a man to him directly in written form was all but inconceivable. Tatyana was a profound lover of books, particularly the sudden sorrows of virtue and deceit in romance novels, and she spent much of her time reading the fantasies of French literature. The novels that she read made her wish to escape the narrow confines of someone else's text and instead experience the beautiful stories of the novels' heroines in her own life. It is therefore possible to assume that Tatyana's idea to write the letter was encouraged by something that she read about in these romantic novels or that the idea was derived directly from these novels. Due to the fact that Tatyana's internal world was formed largely by the ardent novels of romance that she was reading, she believed that her reality would play out just as things did in her readings. Unfortunately, she would soon come to see that in reality, things do not progress nearly as smoothly. Shortly before she decides to write the letter, Pushkin describes her in the following manner:

With what attention she now
reads a delicious novel,
with what vivid enchantment
drinks the seductive fiction!
By the happy power of reverie
animated creations,
the lover of Julie Wolmar,
Malek-Adhel, and deLinar,
and Werther, restless martyr,
and the inimitable Grandison,

who brings upon *us* somnolence—
 all for the tender dreamer
 have been invested with a single image,
 have in Onegin merged alone
 his soul was warmed
 by a friend's hail, by the caress of maidens...
 He would amuse with a sweet dream
 his heart's incertitudes.
 Imagining herself the heroine
 of her beloved authors—
 Clarissa, Julie, Delphine—
 Tatiana in the stills of the woods
 alone roams with a dangerous book;
 in it she seeks and finds
 her secret glow, her daydreams,
 the fruits of the heart's fullness;
 she sighs, having made her own
 another's ecstasy, another's melancholy,
 she whispers in a trance, by heart,
 a letter to the amiable hero.
 But our hero, whoever he might be,
 Quite surely was no Grandison.⁴

Thus, Tatyana was strongly influenced by the literature that she was reading at the time. In deciding to write Onegin the letter, she was merely acting as a character in one of her novels might act. To her, the decision to write the letter was not a grave one; it was only natural that she do it based on the literature in which she had seeped herself. Similarly, she expected only an affirmative response from Onegin, just as the heroes in the novels that she was reading would have had. This expectation without consideration for a contrary response truly set Tatyana up for

⁴ Pushkin, Alexandr. Translated by Vladimir Nabokov. Eugene Onegin. Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1990. 153-154. [Chapter 3, Parts IX-X].

the grave disappointment that she later experienced when Onegin failed to react the way she wanted and expected.

Using Tatyana as an example, Pushkin was doing more than painting a beautiful scene here. He was also pointing to the effect of art and literature on culture and people's behavior; in Tatyana's case, art informed her very understanding of the world around her and the rules that govern it. As she soon learned, unfortunately, her rule set was based in fiction, which is not always the most accurate source of such information, particularly when left completely unchecked by actual experience.

Ib. Onegin's decision to reject Tatyana

In Pushkin's view, the main moral of the novel was that "complete moral independence is taking control over all lusts... We see how Onegin, discussing happiness and independence, puts the two at odds."⁵ In other words, on the one hand, Onegin wants to be happy and on the other he wants to be independent, not realizing that having both at once is impossible. "In the interest of independence, he tried to extinguish his lust [for Tatyana]."⁶ As I will discuss in the final chapter, this is a timeless problem that people of all ages have long faced and continue to face today: finding a balance between happiness in a committed, healthy relationship (that is limiting because of that very commitment) and the importance of and yearning for personal independence. Pushkin teaches a powerful lesson here: by choosing his independence over a potential relationship with Tatyana, Onegin satisfies his desires for the moment but ultimately ends up missing out on the one true love of his life; when Onegin is finally ready to part with his independence, Tatyana is no longer available as she is married to Gremin.

⁵ Бродский, Н. Л. «Евгений Онегин» Роман А. С. Пушкина. Просвещение: Москва, 1964. 153.

⁶ Бродский, 153.

Due to his fateful decision, Onegin fails to acquire the personal aims for family happiness that are generally taught in childhood and adolescence. It seems that Onegin's problems stem from his childhood, from which his parents appear to be absent. The reader meets Onegin as he is on his way to his uncle's estate in the country to claim his inheritance. Throughout the novel there is no mention of Onegin's parents or family, other than the uncle (who Onegin did not know well and who died before Onegin arrived at the estate). It appears that Onegin grew up with tutors and nannies, frivolously attending social functions and having casual sexual relations with women. Onegin therefore has no context of a family life (which stands at sharp contrast to Tatyana's experience, as the reader witnesses how close-knit her family is in the second and third chapters). Onegin is an isolate—he needs the love of another to validate him. However, his soul is desolate and alone—he ought to have learned about married life and family life from his parents, but he did not. As a result, perhaps for no fault of his own, Onegin is a demonic character in the novel, as he ends up hurting everyone he knows (himself included): he causes Tatyana much grief in rejecting her following her very bold gesture in proclaiming her love for him first; he fails to achieve personal happiness and fulfillment and is left at the end of the novel alone and lost; he manages to kill Lensky, the one truly pure, honest, and poetic character in the novel. Onegin's decision to reject Tatyana is part of a slew of erroneous decisions that he makes throughout the novel.

Ic. The duel and the moral repercussions of its outcome

When discussing the duel and its significance in Pushkin's novel, it is important to note that Pushkin's own death was a result of a similar duel. I will discuss this, along with other parallels between the author and the work in part II of this chapter.

In *Eugene Onegin*, Lensky prepares for the duel, the evening prior to the duel, by writing an elegy that truly shows his maturation as a character. At the beginning of the novel, Pushkin describes him in the following manner:

From the world's cold depravity
 not having yet time to wither,
 his soul was warmed
 by a friend's hail, by the caress of maidens...
 He would amuse with a sweet dream
 his heart's incertitudes.
 The purpose of life to him
 was an alluring riddle;
 he racked his brains over it
 and suspected marvels...
 He sang love, to love submissive,
 and his song was as clear/as a naïve maid's thoughts,
 as the sleep of an infant, as the moon,
 in the untroubled wildernesses of the sky,"⁷

Here we see a young, unsuspecting boy who is as naïve as he is poetic. Later, before the duel, we see a changed person. The poem Lensky writes opens with

Wither, ah! whither are ye fled,
 my springtime's golden days?
 What has the coming day in store for me?
 In vain my gaze attempts to grasp it;
 In deep murk it lies hidden."⁸

⁷ Pushkin, Alexandr. Translated by Vladimir Nabokov. *Eugene Onegin*. 128-130. [Chapter 2, Parts VII-X].

⁸ Pushkin, Alexandr. Translated by Vladimir Nabokov. *Eugene Onegin*. 236. [Chapter 6, Part XXI].

Later in that poem, Lensky remarks that he believes that fate is just and he is ready to accept whatever may be in store for him. These words are not spoken by the same naïve boy we observed before. Here we see a man who is realistic about the future (though still hopeful) rather than being blindly optimistic as he appeared before. Unfortunately, his optimism is ultimately for naught as he is killed by Onegin in the duel.

It is difficult for the reader to accept the fact that a seemingly flawless, caring individual such as Lensky would be killed at such a young age. I. L. Brodsky offers an explanation for Pushkin's decision to kill the character. "Pushkin depicted Lensky's character as a person of tenderness, full of hopes, purity, and an unassuming nature. Lensky is the final cry of Onegin's conscience because Lensky is the ideal that Onegin dreamed of being in his youth. The poet [Pushkin] saw that such a person [like Lensky] does not belong in Russia, and so he killed him at the hands of Onegin. Pushkin had nothing left to do with Lensky in the novel. People like Lensky...are not good in the sense that they either adapt to others or become old mystics and dreamers who become enemies of any progress."⁹ In other words, Lensky was a character who belonged in a different time; he could not survive in 1820s Russia. Pushkin was similar in his society, and perhaps this is what led to his demise, as well.

As for Onegin, the killing of Lensky is, in a sense, a killing of his own measure of caring for others. Initially, Onegin has the correct instincts. After Zaretsky delivers the letter from Lensky challenging Onegin to a duel, Onegin has the following thoughts:

On his part, it had been wrong enough
at timid, tender love
so casually to poke fun yesternight;

⁹ Бродский, 256.

and secondly: why let a poet
 indulge in foolery! At eighteen
 'tis pardonable. Eugene,
 loving the youth [Lensky] with all his heart,
 out to have shown himself to be
 no bandyball of prejudices,
 no fiery boy, no scrapper,
 but a man of honor and sense.
 He might have manifested feelings
 instead of bristling like a beast;
 he out to have disarmed the youthful heart.”¹⁰

Despite these honorable thoughts, Onegin, then decides that it is “too late; the time has flown away” and becomes concerned that the “duelist”, Zaretsky, will insist that the duel take place because he is a “gossiper, he’s glib.”¹¹ Therefore, Onegin never actively confronts Lensky and tries to make amends. Public opinion, he decides, is more important than love (as Pushkin expresses that Onegin loves Lensky in the excerpt above) or caring for friends. Instead of fighting for a peaceful resolution to the silly misunderstanding, Onegin takes the easy way out—the path of least resistance—and simply goes forward with the duel. As previously noted, the failure of his upbringing meant that he never could love others. Onegin has always been a loner and continues this trajectory by failing to do what he knew was right (talking to Lensky and trying to avoid the duel) and killing the one true friend he ever had.

Id. Onegin’s failed attempt to unite with Tatyana later and his regret

Toward the end of the novel, Onegin sees Tatyana at a party, realizes that he loves her, and writes her a letter expressing the errors of his ways in deciding to reject her years ago, and

¹⁰ Pushkin, Alexandr. Translated by Vladimir Nabokov. Eugene Onegin. 232. [Chapter 6, Part X-XI].

¹¹ Pushkin, Alexandr. Translated by Vladimir Nabokov. Eugene Onegin. 232. [Chapter 6, Part XI].

asking for another chance. He then goes to see her, but this time it is she that takes the firm stance, rejecting Onegin's pleas. In general, Onegin seems to always choose the path of least resistance and simply goes with life's flow, not questioning it until the very end. This pattern changes, however, when he sees Tatyana and suddenly realizes that now that she is no longer available to him, he wants to be with her. Tatyana, on the other hand, is far more intelligent throughout the novel, making informed decisions (including her daring and unconventional decision to write Onegin her original letter). Throughout the novel, Tatyana truly knows what she wants and pursues it, casting any lusts or momentary yearnings aside. Thus, though she does still harbor feelings for Onegin, she rejects his advances because she knows that the correct and moral thing to do is to stay true to her husband, Gremin, to whom she has committed herself for life.

As for the letter itself, "Belinsky was correct when he noted, "the letter from Onegin to Tatyana burns with lust; it lacks irony, lacks the mask of social correctness... In Onegin's eyes, love without a fight was not interesting, but Tatyana did not promise him an easy victory. And he threw himself into this fight without a hope for a victory, without calculation, fanatically chasing his yearning."¹² Though she clearly still harbors feelings for Onegin, Tatyana proves to be too good at maintaining control over herself and shying away from lust in the name of doing the right thing. It is interesting to compare Onegin's letter to that of Tatyana earlier in the novel. Both letters repeat largely the same information, differing only in that the two characters switched places. "Onegin's are the begging words of a helpless man that has been overcome with

¹² Бродский, 303.

hopeless lust. His letter is a symbolic reflection of Tatyana's letter."¹³ In Tatyana's letter, she writes

'Tis now, I know, within your will
to punish me with scorn.¹⁴

Onegin later writes,

What bitter scorn
your proud glance will express.¹⁵

Tatyana writes,

if I had had the hope,
even seldom, even once a week,
to see you at our country place,
only to hear your speeches,
to say a word to you...

Onegin later writes,

No—every minute to see you;
follow you everywhere;
the smile of your lips, movement of your eyes,
to try to capture with enamored eyes;
to hearken long to you, to comprehend
all your perfection with one's soul...

Finally, in Tatyana's letter, she writes,

¹³ Бродский, 303-304.

¹⁴ All references to Tatyana's letter in this paragraph are from the following source: Pushkin, Alexandr. Translated by Vladimir Nabokov. *Eugene Onegin*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1990. 165-167. [Chapter 3, Part XXXI].

¹⁵ All references to Onegin's letter in this paragraph are from the following source: Pushkin, Alexandr. Translated by Vladimir Nabokov. *Eugene Onegin*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1990. 297-299. [Chapter 8, Part XXXII].

“That has been destined in a higher council,
 that this is the will of heaven: I am thine;
 my entire life has been the gage
 of a sure tryst with you;
 I know, you’re sent to me by God,
 you are my guardian to the tomb...

Similarly, Onegin states in his letter

But let it be: against myself
 I’ve not the force to struggle any more;
 all is decided: I am in your power,
 and I surrender to you my fate.

Thus, it is easy to see the obvious parallels between the two letters. It is clear toward the end of the novel that Tatyana has matured and realized that her childish notions of love were not based in reality and could not exist in the real world. Onegin, however, has not yet learned this when he reaches the end of the novel, and though he formerly lectured poor Tatyana about the complexities of life (in response to the letter that Tatyana had sent him), he himself never fully comes to understand the meaning of morality and living a life of intention, because even in his pursuit of Tatyana, he is pursuing a lust rather than love or caring.

It is interesting that Pushkin himself did not believe that Onegin could have ever had a future with Tatyana. Discussing his own novel in the company of friends, Pushkin rejected a friend’s suggestion that had certain events been different, Onegin might have fallen in love with Tatyana sooner. In response, Pushkin simply stated, “oh, no. He [Onegin] was not worthy of Tatyana.”¹⁶ Throughout the novel, Onegin plays the role of a deceitful spoiler. He plays through

¹⁶ Бродский, 255.

a variety of roles but he never defines himself clearly. His love is deceitful because it is not pure. He does not love Tatyana for who she is or for the sake of the kind of family he could create with her; instead he loves the idea of being with Tatyana and the way he feels when he is with her. In other words, Onegin loves in a very selfish way. Before writing her letter and professing her love for Onegin earlier in the work, Tatyana spent days thinking about Onegin, learning more about him (by visiting him at his uncle's estate to borrow books and trying to interact with him there), and truly analyzing and considering how their life together might be. Upon encountering her at the ball some time later (after she was married to Gremin), Onegin, by contrast, reacted very spontaneously, filled with a sudden lust—not love—and a desire to satisfy it.

II. The relationship between the work and its author

When considering Pushkin's life and death, it is remarkable to note the similarities between him and the characters that he created. Like Onegin, Pushkin is challenged to a duel that he finds himself unable to avoid while retaining his dignity. However, his fate is that of Lensky's and he ends up getting killed in the process. "Pushkin died at a duel, overcome with grief from insults that he was receiving at the time... The poet's social consciousness by time had changed," and he no longer felt that it is correct or necessary to defend one's honor by participating in a duel.¹⁷ This is why he makes his hero, Onegin "admit his erroneous action and shudder at the sight of his dead friend."¹⁸ In the novel, after Lensky falls in the duel, Pushkin remarks,

Say: your soul
with what feeling would be possessed
when, stirless on the ground,
in front of you, with death upon his brow,

¹⁷ Бродский, 248.

¹⁸ Бродский, 248.

he by degrees would stiffen,
 when he'd be deaf and silent
 to your desperate appeal?¹⁹

Thus, Pushkin clearly questions the practice of the duel, by pointing to the fact that the victor, who should be celebrating, experiences such pain at seeing that he has killed another human being. Unfortunately, Pushkin's own society was not so quick to alter their conventions and end the practice of conducting duels. Pushkin's death at a similar duel sent an uproar through Russian society; their beloved poet had been slain (as aptly described in Lermantov's poem, *The death of the poet*”).

In addition to the fact that they died in the same fashion (which Pushkin certainly could never have predicted when he wrote the novel), Pushkin and Lensky have other characteristics in common. In his characterization of Lensky, there are many traits that could be attributed to young Pushkin himself. For instance, Lensky is described as believing that “his friends were ready/to accept fetters to defend his honor.”²⁰ Similarly, Pushkin had expected his friends to defend him when his own circumstances were such that he needed his honor defended. Furthermore, both Pushkin and Lensky were poets. Lensky is generally painted as a very pure, poetic soul, but it is interesting note that Pushkin really viewed him as a caricature. “While he was in the process of writing *Eugene Onegin*, Pushkin was sitting in the company of friends, reading parts of the novel and had just read the line, “dear friends, you pity the poet.” One of his friends said, “not at all.” Pushkin asked, “how is that?” “Because,” answered his friend, “you yourself depicted Lensky as more silly than attractive. In his portrait, we see traits of a

¹⁹ Pushkin, Alexandr. Translated by Vladimir Nabokov. *Eugene Onegin*. 243. [Chapter 6, Part XXXIV].

²⁰ Pushkin, Alexandr. Translated by Vladimir Nabokov. *Eugene Onegin*. 129. [Chapter 2, Part VIII].

caricature.” Pushkin laughed at this in agreement.²¹ Furthermore, it is interesting to take note of the fact that Onegin himself took on poetic tendencies in his darkest moments. For instance, when he found himself bored with his high-society life, he “wanted to write; but persevering toil/to him was sickening.”²² Later, when he encountered Tatyana and decided to attempt to rekindle their relationship, he once again turned to poetry, writing Tatyana poems. “How much a poet he resembled/when in a corner he would sit alone,/ and the hearth flamed in front of him...”²³ Tatyana, too, was acted as a poet in her drafting of the beautiful letter to Onegin, professing her love to him. Since Pushkin himself was a poet, it seems that some of these references to poets, both through the character of Lensky, who was a poet through and through, and through other characters’ periodic slips into poetic territory, are an interesting intersection between the novel and Pushkin’s reality.

III. Are the experiences of the characters a reflection on the conventions of the time or do the experiences call these conventions into question? Was Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* revolutionary for its time?

Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin* very effectively depicts Russia in the 1820s. Vissarion Grigoryevich Belinsky, a literary critic who was Pushkin’s contemporary called “*Eugene Onegin* “an encyclopedia of Russian life,” a work that is “traditional in the highest sense.” He also called the heroine of the novel, Tatyana, a characteristic representation of a Russian woman of that time,” and noted that the other characters similarly represent typical Russian people of that time.²⁴ Later generations admired Pushkin’s novel for its vivid depictions of “provincial life and high society, the heroine’s noble sincerity, the figure of a naïve, idealist youth, and, above all, animated, elegant, sparkling verses. Pushkin’s verses had become a household phenomenon;

²¹ Бродский, 254.

²² Pushkin, Alexandr. Translated by Vladimir Nabokov. *Eugene Onegin*. 113. [Chapter 1, Part XLIII].

²³ Pushkin, Alexandr. Translated by Vladimir Nabokov. *Eugene Onegin*. 302. [Chapter 8, Part XXXVIII].

²⁴ Туманина, 110. (Translated into English by Julia Torgovitskaya).

people knew them by heart [in Tchaikovsky's time]."²⁵ Thus, in many ways, the experiences of the characters were a reflection on the conventions of the time.

The novel was truly revolutionary for its time and resonated very clearly with Pushkin's contemporaries. U. M. Lotman, a literary critic called *Eugene Onegin* "a realistic novel—though a novel of an unusual kind," quite unlike the kinds of novels that had been written prior to it.²⁶ Looking back on the impact that the novel had had, Fyodor Dostoevsky observed that "Pushkin strongly influenced this epoch [Pushkin's lifetime], seeing as he was the first to talk in an independent and deliberate Russian language... Yes! This is the child of the epoch. This is the entire epoch having for the first time consciously looked at itself."²⁷ In other words, Dostoevsky is noting that Pushkin influenced his generation to consciously look at itself and analyze its own conventions for the first time. Specifically, "depicting Lensky as "boiling with impatient hatred," Pushkin criticizes the young generation of his class, noting its tendency to look down upon people of lower classes. "We consider everyone else zero's and ourselves ones."²⁸

IV. The significance of the form in which it is written

The prologue of Pushkin's novel states, "he is in haste to live and hastens to feel."²⁹ Already the reader is challenged to recognize the dichotomy between living hastily and feeling profoundly—a problem that today's society certainly faces. The overarching moral lesson of the novel seems to be that it is impossible to hurry to live and lead an extremely active life while also expecting to feel profoundly. Ultimately, most people yearn to feel and to share a deep

²⁵ Gasparov, Boris. *Five Operas and a Symphony: Word and Music in Russian Culture*. Yale University Press: New Haven, 2005. 63

²⁶ Проскурин, О. *Поэзия Пушкина, или подвижный палимпсест*. Новое литературное обозрение: Москва, 1999, 141.

²⁷ Достоевский, Федер. «Книжность и Грамотность». Статья первая, 1861. (Translated into English by Julia Torgovitskaya). Dostoevsky Fyodor. About Eugene Onegin

²⁸ Бродский, 147.

²⁹ Pushkin, Alexander. Translated by Walter Arndt. *Eugene Onegin*. Ardis: Dana Point, California, 1981. 3.

connection with other people. However, often people are unwilling to accept that in order to form this deep bond, they must first slow down and take time out of their lives in order to allow themselves to feel.

In my opinion, the poetic, somewhat meandering style in which the novel was written is very related to the prologue. By virtue of the rhythm of the form, one reads the novel at a very steady, constant pace. However that same rhythm, coupled with the rhyme scheme and the complex vocabulary that Pushkin often utilizes, cause the reader to refrain from reading the novel very quickly, as doing so would inevitably cause lapses in comprehension. This simply proves the fact that one who hastens to understand cannot also hasten to read the text, seeing as the two are mutually exclusive.

The novel is written in iambic tetrameter, which causes it to have a certain rigid fluidity to it. Strangely, the rigid nature of the rhyming scheme appears to be the very same factor that gives the novel its flow. Pushkin exercises some freedom within the structure, opting to leave some stanzas blank and representing parts of others with series of periods; this often happens at pivotal moments in the story, and this notation allows the reader to try their own hand at guessing at what might have been written there had Pushkin opted to finish a given stanza. The result of this combination is a flexible but rigid structure that enables the story that Pushkin relates to take shape.

Chapter 2: Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*

I. A comparison to Pushkin's original version

Tchaikovsky's opera today is arguably more famous than the novel and is regarded very widely worldwide. While the story line is preserved, there are a number of distinctions between Pushkin's novel and Tchaikovsky's operatic adaptation. Nearly the entire libretto of the opera is composed of Pushkin's verses, though not always in the same order and not always spoken by the same characters. Much of Pushkin's text is cut out, as is often the case in operatic adaptations, due to length, since sung phrases take far more time to utter than written or spoken phrases.

An important distinction between the opera and novel is the fact that while the novel has a narrator, the opera does not. This results in a very critical difference between the two, as many of the lessons shared in the novel are hidden in the narrator's sometimes lengthy orations, as the "narrator often rather unceremoniously pushes his characters aside, feeling free to chat about them with the reader over the characters' heads, as it were."³⁰ In the opera, many of these statements are given to the main characters, who, as a result, are sometimes put into the somewhat awkward position of reflecting upon themselves and their own choices, thoughts, and feelings. Richard Taruskin argues that in this opera in particular, "the music, quite simply, is the narrator. From the very first sung notes, Olga's and Tatyana's duet to the harp, the music acts as a very busy and detached mediator of situations and feelings." Taruskin further refers to Asafyev's observations, stating that "Chaikovsky "sings" his opera in an idiom intensely redolent of the domestic, theatrical, and ballroom music of its time and place—its not his—and

³⁰ Gasparov, 61

in so doing he situates it, just as Pushkin situates the literary prototype, in the years 1819-25.”³¹

In other words, where Pushkin used words and language to situate his characters in the given time period, Tchaikovsky used music both to evoke a flavor of the times as well as to paint each scene, depending on the location in which it is set. Furthermore, Taruskin argues that in some ways, music actually provides more flexibility for expressing particular ideas than words alone. Namely, “where the novelist must arrange things in a temporal sequence, the musician can simultaneously present and comment without recourse to digression.”³² This is because in music, two events or two conversations can take place simultaneously. Furthermore, even if an event or conversation takes place on its own, it can be accompanied by music that tells a different story. When Tchaikovsky was writing in the nineteenth century, he was well aware of the practices of his predecessors. By this point, it was standard practice in opera to have the accompanying music represent a character’s inner thoughts or trepidations, while the words being uttered by the character along with the tempo and stylistic components of the sung verses might paint an entirely different scene, because the character might be trying to conceal his/her true thoughts or feelings or, on the other hand, the character might simply not be aware of their own true thoughts or feelings and might be in denial.

It is interesting to consider the similarity between Pushkin’s novel in verse and Tchaikovsky’s opera in the sense that in both works, there were certain restrictions imposed upon the content by virtue of the forms in which they were set. Pushkin’s text was set to adhere to very complex rhythmic and rhyming schemes that made the language flow with a certain musical quality and enabled the language to resonate with increased impact. In the opera, the text had to fit the complex structure of numbers throughout the opera, had to be supported by music

³¹ Taruskin, Richard. Defining Russia Musically. Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1997. 53-54.

³² Taruskin, 54.

composed for it, and finally had to be uttered by singers who were acting in a manner that supports and expresses the text, adding a multitude of complicating elements. All of these elements, however, serve to further underscore the ideas brought forward by the text. Thus, both the novel and opera were subject to certain limitations that were enforced by the forms in which their authors decided to operate.

In the duel scene, there are important differences between the novel and opera. First, there is some temporal discrepancy that changes the effect of the scene. Specifically, in the novel, the narrator immediately comments on Onegin's remorse and sorrow, stating:

Deluged with instant cold,
 Onegin hastens to the youth,
 Looks, calls him...vainly:
 He is no more. The youthful bard
 Has met with an untimely end!³³

...

In the ache of the heart's remorse,
 His hand squeezing the pistol,
 At Lenski Eugene looks.
 "Well, what—he's dead," pronounced the neighbor [Zaretsky]
 Dead!...With this dreadful interjection
 Smitten, Onegin with a shudder
 Walks hence and calls his men.³⁴

³³ Pushkin, Alexandr. Translated by Vladimir Nabokov. Eugene Onegin. 241. [Chapter 6, Part XXXI].

³⁴ Pushkin, Alexandr. Translated by Vladimir Nabokov. Eugene Onegin. 243. [Chapter 6, Part XXXV].

It is clear here that Onegin is deeply affected by the fact that he has shot his friend. Furthermore, “a small but eloquent detail suggests the length of this mournful pause: when Zaretsky remarks at last, “well, he is dead,” and puts Lensky’s body on the sleigh, the body is already “frozen.”³⁵ In the opera, meanwhile, Tchaikovsky does not paint a similar scene. In the opera, it is Onegin who immediately asks, “is he dead?” and upon receiving confirmation from Zaretsky, most stagings of the opera show Onegin simply running up to Lensky and hovering briefly over his body as if to double-check that he is fact dead. Tchaikovsky does not leave any time for Onegin to grieve as the scene is over almost immediately after Lensky falls. Tchaikovsky clearly favored Lensky more than Pushkin appeared to have. Specifically, Pushkin makes several statements as the narrator of the novel, indicating that to him, Lensky’s vocation as a poet was questionable. For instance, Pushkin remarks about Lensky’s poem (which Tchaikovsky turned into an aria), “thus he wrote, “obscurely” and “limply” (what we call romanticism—though no romanticism here in the least do I see; but what’s that to us?).”³⁶ Meanwhile, Tchaikovsky’s “sympathy is entirely on the side of Lensky, whose “high gifts” he never places in doubt.³⁷ Indeed, in the opera, as a result of the pacing of the duel scene as described above, Onegin is truly painted as a negative, almost demonic character, who seems to be unmoved by his friend’s death. Lensky, meanwhile, is given an aria (on the text of the elegy that, according to the narrator in Pushkin’s novel, Lensky wrote himself the night before the duel), which is arguably the most lyrical and breathtakingly beautiful number in the entire opera. As Gasparov remarks, its theme (which is very similar to Lensky’s love arioso in the first scene of the opera) “seems to flow directly from the poet’s heart.”

³⁵ Gasparov, 89.

³⁶ Pushkin, Alexandr. Translated by Vladimir Nabokov. *Eugene Onegin*. 237. [Chapter 6, Part XXXIII].

³⁷ Gasparov, 89.

The result of these differences is profound for the audience. In Pushkin's work, the reader sees both characters' perspectives rather equally, and the decision of whether or not to pity Onegin despite the fact that it was his shot that killed Lensky, on the grounds that he was forced into this situation against his will, lies with the reader. In the opera, as a result of the fact that Lensky is given an aria to share his torment with the audience just prior to being killed, while Onegin is not given the same privilege after realizing what he had done predisposes the audience to take Lensky's side and demonize Onegin. This results in a very different perception when witnessing the later scene in which Onegin begs Tatyana to be with him, as I will discuss below. In the novel, part of the reader yearns for Tatyana and Onegin to reunite because their union seems far more natural and right than that between her and Gremin. However in the opera, because the audience is already negatively inclined toward Onegin, there is no such desire on the part of the listener.

It is also important to consider the role that the music plays in the powerful duel scene. Throughout the beginning, the strings play a very ominous heart-beat-like pattern that creates a very tense atmosphere in the backdrop of Onegin and Lensky's brief interactions as they take their positions. The music then escalates in complex patterns as if to represent the anxiety experienced by both characters, slowing suddenly as Zaretsky orders them to move closer to one another, as if time suddenly stood still for an instant. Then the music once again speeds up in repetitive, ascending sequences that lead up to the gunshot that seals Lensky's fate. The addition of music in this particular scene is particularly effective in heightening the drama of the scene. Certainly hearing the climax to the gunshot, not to mention the gunshot itself, causes the listener to shudder suddenly. This is an effect that words, no matter how eloquently written, can never

express quite as adequately. In my opinion, this is a prime example of a situation in which the music truly adds another, crucial layer to the foundation that the novel provides.

In Lensky's aria, the music plays a somewhat foreshadowing role. While the aria is simply stunning musically, it features a very famous theme from Tchaikovsky's ballet *Swan Lake*, which occurs when the swan falls. Here, Lensky sings a very similarly-sounding passage just at the climax of his aria. Seeing as the ballet was composed just a few years prior to the opera and Tchaikovsky's public had the ballet's music fresh in their minds, it is quite probable that they were able to notice this reference and perhaps see it as a foreshadowing gesture that indicates that the duel will end poorly and that Lensky's demise is imminent. Just like the swan dances to those same fateful musical figures before her death, Lensky sings that same theme as part of his aria's climax before being killed in the duel.

In the end, when Onegin happens upon Tatyana's then-husband, Prince Gremin, at a ball, the opera once again deviates from the plot of Pushkin's novel. In the novel, Prince Gremin plays a very small role; he simply introduces Onegin (who is his longtime friend) to his wife, Tatyana, not knowing that the two are already acquainted. In the opera, however, Gremin is given one of the most beautiful arias in the opera, set to a text that is largely not based on Pushkin's work. It is believed that the text to this aria was written by Tchaikovsky's brother, Michael Il'ich Tchaikovsky.³⁸ In this aria, Gremin tells Onegin, "Onegin, I will not disguise the fact that I love Tatyana to distraction!" He describes how "my life was slipping drearily away; she appeared and brightened it like a ray of sunlight in a stormy sky." Gremin clearly sees the emptiness of the lives that the socialites that surround him are choosing to lead, as he also states "foolish pampered children, scoundress both absurd and boring... pious coquettes and sycophantic

³⁸ Бродский, 314.

slaves.” He also clearly worships Tatyana, as he notes, “to me she always appears in the radiant nimbus of an angel!” In an opera that features death and much heartache and pain, Tchaikovsky decided to create a truly positive character who does get what he wants in the end; Gremin really appears to be an image of true love, whose outpouring of love and truth in the aforementioned aria leaves poor Onegin jaded and tormented, reflecting on what he has lost and deciding that he wants it back. Gremin’s heartfelt aria seems to really propel Onegin to want to attempt to reignite the passion that Tatyana once carried for him. It is interesting to consider that in Pushkin’s novel, Gremin never says anything that remotely resembles this aria; he simply introduces Onegin to his wife, Tatyana (not knowing that they already know one another), Onegin recognizes her, and at the sight of her realizes that he wants to be with her. This makes Onegin’s decision to approach Tatyana seem somewhat more rash in the novel than it does in the opera, where hearing Gremin’s aria gives Onegin more reason to be jealous and makes his subsequent feelings and actions appear somewhat more inevitable.

Tchaikovsky initially wanted to change the plot, slightly altering the scene in which Onegin pleads with Tatyana to be with him and leave her husband, Gremin. In Pushkin’s novel, Tatyana strongly evades Onegin’s advances. A number of critics, including Belinsky noted how shocking it was that she rejected Onegin “so unequivocally, in such a self-possessed manner.” Tchaikovsky wanted to amend this by having “Tatyana, after a moral struggle, fall into Eugene’s arms...at that crucial moment, the husband appears, Tatiana regains her self-possession after her momentary weakness, and Onegin flees the scene in despair.”³⁹ This is how the first production of the opera (staged in 1879) appeared. However, the public was shocked to see “the most

³⁹ Gasparov, Boris. Five Operas and a Symphony: Word and Music in Russian Culture. Yale University Press: New Haven, 2005. 88.

revered heroine in all Russian literature corrupted on stage (if for a fleeting moment)” and Tchaikovsky therefore had to revise the scene to adhere to Pushkin’s original version.⁴⁰

II. The relationship between the work and its author

Like the parallels between Pushkin’s life and that of the character he created (Onegin), it is astonishing to consider the striking similarities between the experiences of Tchaikovsky with those of the same character (Onegin). The beginning of Pushkin’s work on *Eugene Onegin* happened to coincide with the “dramatic story of his marriage to Antonina Ivanovna Milyukova.”⁴¹ In the months preceding the marriage, Tchaikovsky was experiencing a “loneliness which had been growing worse for the last two years at least” and this convinced him “that he must have a family of his own, the sexual aspect of life with a woman [which was a concern since Tchaikovsky was homosexual] being far outweighed by the prospect of a stable and responsible life.”⁴² He was thirty six years old and at this point, thoughts of marriage dominated his correspondence with his closest friends. He desired a “purely legal arrangement with a woman who would be prepared to help him silence the rumours [of his homosexuality] without risking his ‘peace and freedom.’ It was an unlikely recipe.”⁴³ Tchaikovsky had met Antonina in 1865 at a gathering of mutual friends, when she was sixteen. She later enrolled at the Moscow Conservatoire, where he taught as a professor. Over the years, she slowly fell in love with the composer, and finally in May 1877, she got up the courage to write him a letter, “pouring out the accumulated love” that she had for him.⁴⁴ Because, according to Tchaikovsky,

⁴⁰ Gasparov, 88.

⁴¹ Gasparov, 65.

⁴² Mundy, Simon. The Illustrated Lives of the Great Composers: Tchaikovsky. Omnibus Press: New York, 1998. 95.

⁴³ Mundy, 96.

⁴⁴ Mundy, 103.

“the letter was written with such sincerity and such warmth,” he decided to respond to it [both via a return letter and by visiting her in person], with the purposed of “making it clear to her that he could not feel toward her “anything but sympathy and gratitude for her love.” Afterwards, however, he felt that, as a consequence of these actions, his relationships with Milyukova had reached a point at which it became a duty for him to propose marriage...because he “had encouraged her by replaying and making visits,”...[and therefore,] he had no other choice.”⁴⁵

These events were happening alongside Tchaikovsky’s decision to compose *Eugene Onegin*, and it is impossible not to draw a parallel between the events in his life and the ones that he was composing music for. Not only is there a similarity in the two plots, but there are also “textual coincidences between the novel and Tchaikovsky’s account of the situation. He describes how he was touched by the “sincerity and warmth” of the young woman’s letter; on receiving Tania’s epistle, Onegin is “vividly touched” by its “language of maidenly dreams” and feels himself plunged into a “sweet and sinless” reverie.”⁴⁶ Perhaps Tchaikovsky was influenced by the language (by Pushkin) that he was reading, or perhaps this similarity in his choice of words was a true coincidence. Ultimately, (contrary to Onegin’s response) Tchaikovsky did follow through with the marriage. However, this was a mistake that ended quite badly for both parties, as he ultimately found himself unable to stay in the marriage due to his inability to be with a woman. The two ended up getting a divorce, which was very difficult for both of them. It is impossible to ignore the similarity of the situation in which Tchaikovsky finds himself upon receiving the letter to the situation in which Onegin was upon receiving Tatyana’s letter. It is interesting to observe that though the two men’s’ decisions were very different, the outcomes were both negative.

⁴⁵ Gasparov, 65.

⁴⁶ Gasparov, 66.

In the opera, Tchaikovsky makes Tatyana's letter scene, where she composes and writes her letter to Onegin, one of the most poignant and central scenes in the opera. Certainly his own letter-exchange as described above is reason enough to pique his interest in letter-writing and thus choose to make Tatyana's act such a large scena. It is interesting, too, however, to consider how Tchaikovsky viewed letters. In a diary entry dated 27 June, 1888, Tchaikovsky writes

“It seems to me that letters are never entirely sincere. I judge, at least, by myself. Regardless to whom or why I write, I always worry about what impression the letter will produce not only on the correspondent but even on some casual reader. Therefore, I am posing. Sometimes, I *try* to make the tone of the letter simple and sincere, i.e. make it *seem* so. But, except for letters written in a moment of emotion, I am never myself in a letter. On the other hand, the latter kind of letters are always a source of regret and sorrow, at times even very tormenting. When I read letters of famous people, published after their deaths, a vague feeling of falseness and mendacity always disturbs me.”⁴⁷

Here, Tchaikovsky is particularly candid about his intentions and tendencies when writing letters. It is particularly interesting to consider these opinions in the context of his real-life correspondence with Antonina. Perhaps he was more concerned with appearances than he was with expressing his honest thoughts. This stands at sharp contrast to the letter that Tatyana writes to Onegin in *Eugene Onegin* as well as the letter that Onegin writes to Tatyana toward the end of the work; both of these letters were written directly from the heart and were truly the “latter kind of letters” that Tchaikovsky refers to in his diary entry above a letters “written in a moment of emotion” which always end up being a “source of regret and sorrow.” True to Tchaikovsky's

⁴⁷ Tchaikovsky, Pyotr I. *The Diaries of Tchaikovsky*. Tr. Wladimir Lakond. W.W. Norton and Company, Inc: New York, 1945. 249.

analysis, these letters do prove to be a source of regret and sorrow for both characters, particularly Tatyana who feels as though her whole world has fallen apart when Onegin rejects her upon receipt of her letter.

III. How Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* was revolutionary for its time

“Tchaikovsky was the creator of a new direction of Russian theater: lyrical psychological musical drama. He dedicated his work in opera to the human soul and within it he depicted the nation's soul.”⁴⁸ Tchaikovsky himself believed that he was musically representing the sentiments of his nation. In a letter to a friend (quoted by Taruskin), Tchaikovsky states, “it seems to me that I am truly gifted with the ability *truthfully, sincerely, and simply* to express the feelings, moods, and images suggested by a text. In this sense I am a *realist* and fundamentally a Russian.”⁴⁹

“In *Eugene Onegin*, Tchaikovsky reached the heights of his operatic skills. This fantastic composition presented a new type of opera, a type in which the composer created a completely novel musical dramaturgy. In *Onegin* one can find the aesthetic principles of Tchaikovsky. Here, for the first time, he presented a single symphonic development in direct succession [without interruption] and the extraordinary plot of Pushkin's novel played a critical role in this.”⁵⁰ The novel's effective depiction of life and human relationships during his era gave way for Tchaikovsky to similarly depict this reality in music. “Tchaikovsky saw in *Eugene Onegin* deep opportunities for the creation of a psychological-musical drama, which he had long been searching for. Choosing to use a plot depicting life in the 1820s, Tchaikovsky exhibited great bravery; this choice went against the established opera traditions, following which the plot or subject of the opera needs to be sufficiently distant in time from the present day, but this did not

⁴⁸ Туманина, 8. (Translated into English by Julia Torgovitskaya).

⁴⁹ Taruskin, Richard. *Defining Russia Musically*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1997. 54.

⁵⁰ Туманина, 110. (Translated into English by Julia Torgovitskaya).

scare Tchaikovsky but rather attracted him all the more to the work. He wanted to express in music the feelings, the desires, and the thoughts that were meaningful to him and his contemporaries, and *Onegin* perfectly filled those requirements.”⁵¹

The opera is also very unusual in its structure. *Eugene Onegin* is divided into three acts, in between which substantial lengths of time elapse. Between the first and second acts, six months elapse and between the second and third acts, approximately three years elapse. Each act, in turn, is divided into scenes. The first act is completely devoted to Tatyana, introducing the audience to Tatyana in the first scene, allowing Tatyana’s love for Onegin to reach its climax in the second scene, and showing Onegin’s rejection of Tatyana, which effectively bursts her dreams, in the third scene. The second act is devoted to Lensky: in the fourth scene of the opera, he feels that his sincere feelings and love are threatened by Onegin and protests against this, demanding a duel. In the fifth scene, the tragic climax of the opera is reached as Lensky is killed in the duel. In the third act, the drama reaches a new stage: Onegin meets Tatyana at a ball in St. Petersburg and sudden feelings for her completely enrapture him; he comes to her, but though she still loves him, she is now married to Prince Gremin and for her, moral obligations are more important than love. Thus the opera ends. This logical sequence of events serves as the foundation of the musical development of the opera. Tchaikovsky does not reject traditional approaches to musical development in an opera, however in *Eugene Onegin*, while he uses repetition and rich instrumental episodes, he does something unusual: he connects all of it into a single process of musical development. The duets, quartet, and quintet are also included in larger scenes and act as a major part of those scenes; monologue-scenes are used widely. All the main operatic forms in *Eugene Onegin* match one another, creating a wonderful whole. The musical

⁵¹ Туманина, 112. (Translated into English by Julia Torgovitskaya).

numbers sung by the main characters—a great achievement of Tchaikovsky—are responsible for the fact that the opera commands such popularity, as these numbers possess an unusual gentleness and genuine quality.⁵²

IV. How the operatic form both limits and elaborates on themes in Pushkin's work

The reception of Tchaikovsky's opera, *Eugene Onegin*, within Russia was mixed. Seeing as Pushkin's novel was a beloved work in a culture that was dominated by literature, Tchaikovsky's decision to adapt the work to the opera stage naturally attracted much scrutiny as many questioned whether Tchaikovsky's version was true to the original. In fact, "complaints about "sacrilege" could be heard almost from the beginning, most famously from Turgenev in a letter to Tolstoy: "Undoubtedly remarkable music; particularly lyrical melodious passages are good. But what a libretto!" Even Chaikovsky's close friend...Herman Laroche's highly positive review of the opera acknowledged...a high sense of "violation" of Pushkin's poetry."⁵³ Many complained that the most significant thing lost in the opera is Pushkin's irony and ever-shifting tone. As Hugh McLean (introduced and quoted by Richard Taruskin) argues, "when the gloriously intrusive narrative voice...is turned off, as it is assumed to be in opera, the atmosphere becomes sticky, the underpinnings of the wonderfully delicate, intricate, balanced structure rot, and it collapses. You are left with a banal, trite, and sentimental bore—which may nevertheless be a vehicle for some delightful music."⁵⁴ Taruskin disagrees with this claim, stating that those who make such claims are simply missing the role that music plays in the operatic *Eugene Onegin*. Specifically, Taruskin argues that in *Eugene Onegin*, "the music, quite simply, is the

⁵² Туманина, 112-113. (Translated into English by Julia Torgovitskaya).

⁵³ Gasparov, 60.

⁵⁴ Taruskin, 53.

narrator. From the very first sung notes, Olga's and Tatyana's duet to the harp, the music acts as a very busy and detached mediator of situations and feelings."⁵⁵

Gasparov also argues that Pushkin's characters lack finitude such that the path that they will opt to follow is unclear. The opera, meanwhile, pushes the characters into black and white zones of either being unambiguously "good" or unambiguously "bad." This lack of unambiguity in the opera in situations where there was arguably a deliberate ambiguity in the novel is an important issue to consider when analyzing what might be lost in the operatic version of the work. For instance, the novel ends with the uncertainty of what fate might await the characters, as Tatyana's husband appears in his wife's private chamber and encounters Onegin there; the outcome of this meeting will never be known because it is at this point that the narrator once again springs to the foreground to announce the end of the tale. The possibilities of what might happen next are endless: there could be another duel between the two men that love Tatyana, the two could befriend one another and plan another meeting, or any number of scenarios could occur. What is clear is that in the novel, the two characters part without any melodramatic gesture. The opera, meanwhile, displays a scene in which Tatyana sings "Farewell forever!" on a high A (which is certainly melodramatic, to say the least), exits the stage and leaves Onegin alone, as he makes his own exit with a final remark, "shame...anguish...oh my pitiful lot!"⁵⁶ These words are not entirely made up by Tchaikovsky; the farewell forever comes from the epigraph to the last (eighth) chapter of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, which states, "Fare thee well,

⁵⁵ Taruskin, 53-54.

⁵⁶ Tchaikovsky, Peter Ilyitch. *Eugene Onegin in full score*. Dover Publications, Inc.: New York, 1997. 495.

and if for ever, Still for ever, fare thee well. –Byron.”⁵⁷ Certainly, the opera is creating finality where there was none in the novel.

As far as the worldwide reception of the opera *Eugene Onegin*, Richard Taruskin quotes David Brown in arguing that the reason why this particular opera managed to achieve supreme repertory status across the world (unlike Tchaikovsky’s other operas and also unlike many of his Russian contemporaries’ works) is the fact in this work, “the musical idiom is not stylistically marked with national character in a way that immediately advertises itself to the “Western” ear. Yet...[according to Stravinsky,] Tchaikovsky drew *unconsciously* from the true popular sources of our race...and...[according to Prokofiev] *Eugene Onegin* is the most intrinsically Russian opera in which every role corresponded completely to the Russian character, each in its own way.”⁵⁸ After Tchaikovsky’s death, the opera’s popularity continued to grow, to the point where it can be argued that the opera became more popular than Pushkin’s novel. In 1941 Boris Asafyev states, “I am afraid even to utter this, but I think that the ratio between those who have read the novel and heard the music of *Eugene Onegin* would come out not to the advantage of the novel; it would turn out that the listeners (many of whom, alas, never read the novel) have been more numerous.”⁵⁹ Others, including Alexander Blok, agreed with this assessment; Blok referred to “Chaikovsky’s victory over Pushkin” in the public’s perception of the work.⁶⁰ This simply shows that the story is very compelling and that audiences prefer to experience the story with the incredible music that Tchaikovsky composed to Pushkin’s pure verses. Some is lost in

⁵⁷ Pushkin, Alexandr. Translated by Vladimir Nabokov. *Eugene Onegin*. 279. [Chapter 8, Epigraph].

⁵⁸ Taruskin, 52.

⁵⁹ Asaf’ev, Boris. “Evgenii ONEgin, liricheskie stseny Chaikovskogo: Opyt intonatsionnogo analiza stilia I muzykal’noi dramaturgii,” in *O muzyke Chaikovskogo*. Leningrad, 1972. 76.

⁶⁰ Klimovitsky, Arkadii. “Tchaikovsky and the Russian ‘Silver Age,’ ” in Ed. Leslie Kearny. *Tchaikovsky and his World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998. 323-24.

the process of transforming the work into an opera. However, as previously discussed, I believe that far more is gained.

Chapter 3: Other adaptations

I. Ballet by John Cranko (music by Tchaikovsky)

John Cyril Cranko was a choreographer with the Royal Ballet in Covent Garden, London England (then called the Sadler's Wells Ballet) and the Stuttgart Ballet in Germany. He choreographed the ballet *Onegin*, an adaptation of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. This adaptation was set to music by Tchaikovsky and orchestrated by Kurt-Heinz Stolze. However, interestingly, the music is not from Tchaikovsky's opera, *Eugene Onegin* but rather from Tchaikovsky's other works—primarily *The Seasons*, which is a set of short character pieces for solo piano by Tchaikovsky. *Onegin* was first premiered by the Stuttgarter Ballet in April 1965. For many years, Cranko questioned the origins of his name; “at one time, Cranko himself believed he was of Russian origin, an attractive idea which seemed to explain a Slavic sensibility in his work.”⁶¹ While this was ultimately disproved, he choreographed *Onegin* while continuing to operate under that assumption and this may have influenced his work. Cranko was known for his sense of suffering and love of pathos. He had a very difficult childhood, which led him to a lifelong struggle with alcoholism; some believe that the misery that he experienced throughout much of his life influenced his work and increased his sensitivities to the expression of pain and struggle. Interestingly, like Pushkin and Tchaikovsky, Cranko, too, suffered an early death, in his case as a result of a bad reaction to a sleeping pill. However, also akin to Pushkin and Tchaikovsky's legacies, “ten years after his death [John Percival states in his book, *Theater in My Blood: A biography of John Cranko*], John Cranko's ballets are more widely and more frequently

⁶¹ Kerensky, Oleg. “Review: Cranko Remembered”. *Dance Chronicle*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (1983). Taylor & Francis, Ltd., 1983. 375. < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1567589>>.

performed than in his lifetime...the prospect is high that some of them will be numbered among those few ballets which survive indefinitely the changes of fashion.”⁶²

Onegin is considered one of the several ballets that are “most typically Cranko...and also his most popular...the ones that make us laugh or cry, or both.”⁶³ By its very definition, the ballet differs from both the opera and novel in that it strips the work of its verbal component and showcases all of the content and events through movement and music. It is interesting to observe the same scenes being performed in dance... This medium almost automatically makes the viewer’s experience more emotional than when watching the opera or reading the novel because there are fewer verbal distractions; instead, the viewer must concentrate on listening to Tchaikovsky’s powerful music and watching Cranko’s very beautiful and specific choreography. The resulting effect is absolutely breathtaking, and I found myself having an even stronger emotional response to Cranko’s ballet than I did to witnessing the same sequence of events in the opera and novel.

A particularly powerful scene is when Onegin comes to Tatyana’s quarters, asking her to forgive him and give him one more chance, whereupon she feels torn but ultimately chooses to do the right thing and stay with her husband. In this scene, Cranko stages a beautiful interplay between the two characters, where Tatyana’s suffering and struggle to decide how to act is depicted in movement. The two characters dance together, leaning away from one another and then towards one another multiple times, showing both the deep bond and chemistry between the two of them and their stark divide, at least on the part of her perception. Several times, Tatyana

⁶² Kerensky, Oleg. “Review: Cranko Remembered”. *Dance Chronicle*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (1983). Taylor & Francis, Ltd., 1988. 378. < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1567589>>.

⁶³ Kerensky, Oleg. “Review: Cranko Remembered”. *Dance Chronicle*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (1983). Taylor & Francis, Ltd., 1983. 375. < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1567589>>.

collapses in Onegin's arms out of weakness, only to regain composure moments later and motion for him to leave. The struggle on the part of both characters is depicted incredibly well.

Compared to the opera and novel alike, somehow watching the two characters' emotions displayed in a physical manner was a far more powerful experience for me.

II. Film by Martha Fiennes *Onegin* (1999)

Making her directorial debut, London-born Martha Fiennes directed a film version of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* in 1999. The film stars Ralph Fiennes (Martha Fiennes' brother) in the role of Eugene Onegin, Liv Tyler as Tatyana, and Toby Stephens as Lensky. While the film effectively depicts the story expressed in the novel, this film is a terrible representation of Pushkin's novel, and is truly a distortion of the novel. In the interest of time, the film compresses many of the events in the novel. For example, the Naming Day celebrations take place on the same day as Onegin's speech to Tatyana (in which he rejects her). In the confusion, it is unclear why Onegin chooses to dance with Olga and his ill-placed sarcastic remark regarding Olga to Lensky (which Lensky interprets as an insult, which fuels the duel) is no longer placed in the correct context. As a result, Onegin appears in a particularly bad light, dancing with Olga just moments after rejecting Tatyana. This is not how Pushkin situates these events in the novel and this creates a critical distortion of Onegin.

Overall, in the movie, Onegin is a dark, negative, and almost demonic figure. The lighting with which the character is shot aids to create this dark effect, as he is often obscured by shadows. This stands at a sharp contrast to Tatyana, who is generally shown in the light, wearing white. When Onegin approaches Tatyana at the end, Fiennes' Tatyana admits to Onegin that her life is empty with Gremin, which takes her statements made in the original novel a step too far. In the original novel, she states

my triumphs in the vortex of the World,
 my fashionable house and evenings,
 what do I care for them?...At once I would give gladly
 all this frippery of a masquerade,
 all this glitter, and noise, and fumes,
 for a shelfful of books, for a wild garden,
 for our poor dwelling.⁶⁴

These statements made by Tatyana in Pushkin's text are an attempt on her part to tell Onegin that her worldly possessions and high-society life are of little interest to her and that she would gladly return to her former simple life and give it all up. She says this in order to pose the question, why is Onegin suddenly interested in her now, when she has acquired so much wealth? Is it her wealth and position in society that interest him? Is this why he rejected her when she had nothing? Here, Tatyana is not telling Onegin that she is miserable or unhappy, but rather just that her high-society lifestyle is not what fulfills her. Certainly, in Pushkin's work Tatyana also expresses that she wishes she were leading a different life, but this does not mean that she is so terribly unhappy in her current position. In Tchaikovsky's opera, Tatyana's unhappiness is even less likely considering how much Gremin loves her, as expressed in his beautiful aria. In the movie, however, Tatyana is portrayed as truly unhappy with Gremin but unwilling to leave him. She therefore appears to be a true victim. This truly makes the film end in a very depressing manner, with a finality that depicts unhappiness on the part of both parties—Onegin, who does not achieve what he wants in reuniting with Tatyana, and Tatyana, who is left to forever remain in an unhappy situation as Gremin's wife. In other words, the film does what Tchaikovsky wanted to do with the opera but was forbidden to do by the public: the film gives the story a finality that Pushkin purposely avoided providing. The film shows what happens after the

⁶⁴ Pushkin, Alexandr. Translated by Vladimir Nabokov. Eugene Onegin. 306. [Chapter 8, Part XLVI].

conversation between the two takes place: Tatyana tells Onegin to leave, Onegin leaves, and then, some time later, Onegin is shown helplessly waiting for a letter or some sign from Tatyana that she wants to take him up on his offer and leave Gremin for him. The film shows how destroyed Onegin is, and ends showing him walking aimlessly forward through the thick snow of Russia's winter.

In my opinion, Fiennes' interpretation makes conclusions that alter the effect that the story has on the viewer. I believe that Pushkin made very specific choices with his text for particular reasons and that altering these choices serves to diminish the work rather than make it stronger. For this reason, while the film is beautifully filmed and is certainly entertaining, I believe that it is a distortion of Pushkin's intentions and thereby a poor interpretation of the original novel.

Chapter 4: Is *Eugene Onegin* relevant today?

I. Controversial contemporary artistic choices and how they affect the original works' message.

In analyzing the ways in which Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* has generally been performed in the years following its premier, it is very interesting to note that many of the choices made by artistic directors are a departure from Tchaikovsky's vision for the piece. The most striking issue is that when Tchaikovsky first made the decision to write an opera based on Pushkin's novel in 1877, "he was convinced from the very beginning that it would be unfit for, or unacceptable to, "big" opera houses. This "modest work," which he refused to call an opera, preferring the subtitle "Lyrical Scenes" instead, was meant for small audiences and a private atmosphere."⁶⁵ In fact, Tchaikovsky insisted that the first production of the "Lyrical Scenes" be staged at the Moscow Conservatory studio. Two years later, however, the "Lyrical Scenes" were performed at the Bolshoi Theater and three years after that, they were finally premiered in St. Petersburg. Tchaikovsky had very modest expectations for *Eugene Onegin* and it is interesting that though he had high hopes for major success with his other operas, those operas never gained significant success. "It was *Eugene Onegin*, an opera written, as the composer emphasized, as a piece of intimate self-expression and in defiance of any expectation of large-scale success, that brought him national and world fame in the last years of his life."⁶⁶ Today, the opera's worldwide popularity has exceeded that of Pushkin's novel. One need only peruse the offerings throughout the world's major opera houses over the last decade to observe that Eugene Onegin is easily the most often performed Russian opera outside of the Russian borders. Thus, the

⁶⁵ Gasparov, 59.

⁶⁶ Gasparov, 59.

popularity and size of scope or reach of the opera was many times greater than anything Tchaikovsky expected or intended in writing the opera.

The troubling trends today are the attempts on the parts of some artistic directors to re-envision the opera, attempting to better understand what it was that Tchaikovsky was thinking when he wrote it. Unfortunately, some of these interpretations are a far cry from correctly understanding Tchaikovsky's convictions when writing the opera. For instance, while it is true that Tchaikovsky was homosexual and that his sexual preferences dictated a very difficult sequence of events in his life, leading to his divorce from his wife, his sexual preferences did not directly affect his interpretation of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*. While there is much evidence that he was intrigued by the story and believed it to teach important lessons about morality, there is absolutely no evidence that he interpreted the story differently because of his homosexuality. Polish director Krzysztof Warlikowski felt differently, and "based his entire concept for Munich's [October-November 2007]...production of *Eugene Onegin*...on Tchaikovsky's homosexuality. Warlikowski placed the action on an isolated estate in America, updating the time frame to the 1960s."⁶⁷ The opera, according to Warlikowski, is a drama of suppressed homosexuality and a desire to break out from society. Singers were dressed in miniskirts, short dresses, and jeans and there were several scenes with partial nudity. Guests danced the twist at Larina's first-scene party and Tatyana's letter to Onegin was a music cassette rather than a letter. There were gay cowboys and drag queens doing erotic dances interspersed throughout some of the scenes.⁶⁸ "With nothing short of sledgehammer methods, Warlikowski centered on Onegin's "homosexuality." The dual scene took place in a cheap motel populated by half-naked cowboys,

⁶⁷ Leipsic, Jeffrey A. "Reviews: Munich." *Opera News Magazine*. Ed. F. Paul Driscoll. Feb. 2008: 58.

⁶⁸ A preview of this production can be viewed on YouTube.com at the following web address: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V_KOU4qilUM

with Onegin and Lenski portrayed as clandestine lovers. There was no ball at all—the polonaise was mimed by transvestite. The final two scenes took place in that very same lowlife motel: Onegin, after being rejected by Tatiana, simply lit up a cigarette and nonchalantly shrugged his shoulders.”⁶⁹ Based on the issues discussed previously and based directly on Tchaikovsky’s own journal entries, it is unmistakably clear that this kind of treatment was in no way related to Tchaikovsky’s own interpretation of Pushkin’s work or his intentions in writing the opera. Furthermore, the music itself paints a completely different—in fact, opposite—scene. Of this production, Jeffrey Leipsic writes in the magazine, *Opera News*, that he believes Warlikowski’s directorial overindulgence to be an inaccurate depiction of the opera that is indicative of the fact that Warlikowski did not understand the music that he was directing. Leipsic remarks, “that the music tells us something completely different did not seem to bother Warlikowski in the least. Opera directors should be locked in a room until they can prove they have understood the music they are about to direct! To turn the work into an operatic *Brokeback Mountain* by making the Lenski/Onegin relationship the focal point of the work is directorial overindulgence that does the opera a serious injustice.”⁷⁰ Shirley Apthorp of the Bloomberg News also perceived the production unfavorably, noting that “there is no novelty value left in the outing of Tchaikovsky. Half-naked cowboys and men in ballgowns are cheap cliches. An exploration of the two men’s relationship is legitimate, since it is one of the opera’s deepest and certainly its most tragic.”⁷¹ However Warlikowski went too far, turning “this classic romance into a gay love triangle, and was roundly booed for his efforts at the premiere.” Based on bloggers’ reviews of Warlikowski’s production, it was not only a far cry from Pushkin’s original work and Tchaikovsky’s intentions,

⁶⁹ Leipsic, Jeffrey A. “Reviews: Munich.” *Opera News Magazine*. Ed. F. Paul Driscoll. Feb. 2008: 58.

⁷⁰ Leipsic, Jeffrey A. “Reviews: Munich.” *Opera News Magazine*. Ed. F. Paul Driscoll. Feb. 2008: 58.

⁷¹ Apthorp, Shirley. “Gay Cowboys Evoke ‘Brokeback Mountain’ as Munich Boos Onegin.” *Bloomberg News*. 2 Nov. 2007. < <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601100&sid=a3JyDv6GeaDE&refer=germany>>.

but also failed to deliver the drama that both works (when read or performed as intended) invoke.⁷² This is just one example of how an interpretation that fails to do justice to the incredible work that is *Eugene Onegin* can completely obscure if not mar the morals that the original work espouses. Unfortunately, in the current climate of “modernizing” classic works, this is by far not the only case in which such distortion has occurred, and will likely not be the last. It is important to consider the effect of such skewed productions of the general perception of the work, as it does slowly begin to change it, if only subconsciously.

II. Is *Eugene Onegin* relevant today? How does it reflect today’s society and in what ways does it reflect *on* today’s society?

“Pushkin in his novel constantly underscores the inconsistencies in the relationships between people in the higher society circle: friendship, love, family—these were words that lost their true meaning. “His enemies, are his friends,” says the poet.”⁷³ In other words, in Pushkin’s time, society had grown to view important concepts so lightly that the lines between friendship and animosity, between love and indifference became so unclear that the meanings of the words and the concepts that they represented lost their meaning. This is certainly reminiscent of many of the issues that today’s society faces. We believe them to be new issues, caused by the impersonality of an age of communication via telephones, e-mail, and electronic devices and often blame the information age that we live in on the fact that we are so often very unspecific in our use of important words such as friendship and love. However, Pushkin shows us that this problem is hardly new and is not a sign of our times. It is an age-old problem that his society was battling just as we are today. This shows us that it is not technology that we should be fighting against; perhaps we should take it upon ourselves and take responsibility for the fact that we are

⁷² <<http://mostlyopera.blogspot.com/2007/11/new-eugene-onegin-in-munich-hidden.html>> ; <<http://ionarts.blogspot.com/2007/11/yee-haw-onegin-preview.html>>

⁷³ Бродский, 147.

choosing to use these important terms frivolously and that these choices gradually dull these terms' important meanings. Pushkin states,

Whom, then, to love? Whom to believe?
 Who is the only one that won't betray us?
 Who measures all deeds, all speeches
 obligingly by our own foot rule?
 Who does not sow slander about us?
 Who coddles us with care?
 To whom our vice is not so bad?
 Who never bores us?
 Unlike a futile phatom-seeker
 who wastes efforts in vain—
 love your own self,
 my honorworthy reader.
 A worthy object! Nothing
 more amiable surely exists.⁷⁴

In a world that is increasingly interdependent and interconnected on a global scale, do I believe that we are at the same time only more alienated from one another. In our society, particularly in America, at the end of the day, most people are truly on their own, and though they may have friends and lovers, it seems that much of the world is constantly reminding us that we can only truly rely on ourselves. Pushkin's words cannot be more applicable than today; oddly enough, despite our increased connection to one another through the online medium, we are not more supportive or more trustworthy than individuals were in Pushkin's time. Friendships are often not treasured and people do not view friendship and loyalty as serious matters. This is just another example of how this incredible work is applicable to our lives.

⁷⁴ Pushkin, Alexandr. Translated by Vladimir Nabokov. Eugene Onegin. 185. [Chapter 4, Part XXII].

Onegin's experience with love is another example of the important lessons espoused in the novel that are extremely relevant today. Throughout his life as depicted in the novel, Onegin enjoys sexuality but not in a loving context. Perhaps the reason for this is that he never had an example of a loving relationship from his parents, since they appear absent from his childhood. When he was young, he was "mad about balls" and spent his time thinking about "Diana's bosom, Flora's cheeks," "the Okhta girl [who] hastened with her jug," and similar things.⁷⁵ However, as Pushkin remarks, Onegin was not happy or fulfilled by this life.

But by the ball's noise tired,
 and having morn into midnight transformed,
 sleeps peacefully in blissful shade
 the child of pastimes and of luxury.
 He will awake past midday, and again
 till morn his life will be prepared,
 monotonous and motley,
 and next day same as yesterday.
 But was my Eugene happy—
 Free, in the bloom of the best years,
 Amidst resplendence conquests,
 Admist daily delights?
 Was he, midst banquets, with impunity
 Reckless and hale?
 No, feelings early cooled in him.
 Tedious to him became the social hum.
 The fair remained not long
 the object of his customary thoughts.
 Betrayals finally fatigued him.
 Friends and friendship palled,
 since plainly not always could he

⁷⁵ Pushkin, Alexandr. Translated by Vladimir Nabokov. Eugene Onegin. 108-114. [Chapter 1, Part XXIX-XLIV].

beefsteaks and Strasbourg pie
 sluice with a champagne bottle
 and scatter piquant sayings
 when his head ached;
 ...toward life [he] became cold.
 ...nothing moved him,
 he noticed nothing.⁷⁶

Pushkin wrote these verses largely to challenge his readers to contemplate their lives and see if they can find a little bit of Onegin within themselves. Pushkin does not present Onegin as a mere caricature—a character who had every opportunity to succeed, the intelligence to truly question social conventions and choose his own path, and a woman of both high intellect and high social stature (Tatyana) who even took the first step of admitting affection for him into her own hands, thus paving the way for him; instead, I believe that Pushkin presents Onegin as an example of person who, like many members of high society in the early 1800s, chose to forego reason and simply accept social norms and conventions as rules that they blindly followed throughout their entire lives. Pushkin’s novel prompted much discussion among members of his society and later, much literature, including works by Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, that delved deeper into the human psyche and argued for the importance of morality and intentionality in individuals’ actions. However, it is sad to realize that we, as a global society, have failed to listen to these great writers and thinkers. Looking at today’s society, it is abundantly clear that while women have gained more rights, little in the way that members of our society (particularly young people) go about their lives has changed. It is mind-boggling to consider the stark similarities between Onegin’s reality growing up and the reality that my peers choose to experience. Certainly, balls have turned into parties, duels have turned into other (fortunately usually less deadly) forms of

⁷⁶ Pushkin, Alexandr. Translated by Vladimir Nabokov. Eugene Onegin. 111-114. [Chapter 1, Part XXXVI-XLIV].

public humiliation (including the use of the internet), champagne has turned into beer, and casual sexual relations have become a subject that is no longer taboo. However, at the core, the issues are the same. Young people spend their social lives under constant intoxication, going to parties or clubs, spending many evenings doing things that they later regret or forget altogether, and seldom questioning why they do it or whether they truly enjoy it.

In Pushkin's time, divorce was not a realistic option for most as it was a complex, time-consuming, and embarrassing process that was socially unacceptable. Today, however, divorce is prevalent. Onegin's failure to realize that his choice to blindly follow convention was not what he truly wanted resulted in his ultimate solitude and pain. At the end of the novel, Onegin is left standing alone

as if by thunder struck.

In what a tempest of sensations

His heart is now immersed!⁷⁷

Where before he was unmoved by anything, he suddenly experiences a surge of emotions. Unfortunately for him, it is now too late to act on these feelings. I feel that the same might be proving true for my society and generation, and perhaps this accounts for the prevalence of divorce. Rather than thinking things through and holding themselves to moral standards, young people today merely follow conventions and satisfy their lusts without a second thought to the potential repercussions of these choices. When they realize the errors that they have made, it is too late as they cannot undo the things that have been done and they often cannot make up their lost opportunities. The readers do not know what ultimately happens to Onegin. Perhaps he learns from his mistakes and finds another love. However, it is also possible that after a lifetime

⁷⁷ Pushkin, Alexandr. Translated by Vladimir Nabokov. Eugene Onegin. 307. [Chapter 8, Part XLVIII].

of conformity and failure to live conscientiously and with specific intention, he will soon fall back into his old patterns of attempting to satisfy his aching, empty heart with the fulfillment of passing lusts. Unfortunately, this satisfaction is superficial and short-lived, and will ultimately bring Onegin to feel the same boredom that he experiences with his ball-going lifestyle in his youth, as noted at the beginning of the novel. The consistency between Onegin's experience and that of members of my generation make me wonder whether the society will ever truly learn from the mistakes of the generations that came before them and change their ways. It is sad to think that people's desire to take the path of least resistance outweighs their desire to lead truly fulfilling lives, often only to ultimately regret this choice.

The issues that I raise are just some of the questions discussed in *Eugene Onegin* that I believe hold much relevance in today's world. If I was attempting to be exhaustive, I could fill hundreds of pages with further examples and additional lessons that can be learned from this masterpiece. However, providing an exhaustive list of relevant factors falls out of the scope of this paper and is not my goal. I wish only to highlight some of the similarities between the society that Pushkin was attempting to move and the society that we find ourselves in today.

III. Broader question: to what extent is our society shaped by art and to what extent do we reshape art to fit our society's norms in a given time?

To conclude this paper, I would like to discuss the extent to which society is shaped by art and the extent to which we reshape art to fit our society norms. Art is generally created as a response to the author's experience in the world. Whether the author is attempting to make a statement about his society, appeal to his society to change their ways, or simply document his society's customs by recording them, the author can never completely separate him or herself from the society that he/she inhabits. Similarly, society is absolutely shaped by the art to which it

is exposed. Within the novel *Eugene Onegin*, we see Tatyana completely influenced by the literature that she reads, expecting the world to function according to the rules set forth by her favorite authors. Tchaikovsky's generation, having grown up reading Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* and works by the authors that followed Pushkin, including Lermontov, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky, was far more concerned with morality and intentionality. I thus firmly believe that a given generation's culture is formed largely by the art that it is exposed to. This is why I feel that it is very important to preserve timeless masterpieces such as Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin* as much as possible when adapting these works to other artforms. To revise the plot or to draw out the ending is to reshape the work and to obscure some of its critical lessons. In my view, our society has much to still learn from Pushkin, and it is important that we be enabled to do that by being exposed to his ideas in as pure a form as possible.

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