

## Psychological Analysis of One Modern Pushkin's Performances of "Eugene Onegin"

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### Abstract

The article presents two plans for the analysis of the famous production of Rimas Tuminas "Eugene Onegin". The first discusses the problems and difficulties of translating Pushkin's poetic work into the language of the theatre. At the same time, the author uses the analysis of this production, carried out by Alexander Minkin in the book "Mute Onegin". In particular, a number of techniques are considered (splitting the heroes, Onegin and Lensky, into two persons, giving historical events a modern form of existence, which involves rethinking them); they, according to Minkin, were used in his production by Tuminas. The author provide the voice to Alexander Sergeevich. Pushkin does not recognize his work in Tuminas' production. The second part proposes a reconstruction of the logic according to which Tuminas most likely acted when creating his production. The author shows that, firstly, Tuminas does not try to present Pushkin's brilliant work in a new, modern way, but creates a new work, his own; secondly, the artistic reality of this new work is composed of very different events, including reflexive ones. He raises the question of how these heterogeneous events create a whole. If in traditional aesthetics the artist depicts the world and life that exist outside of a person (or inside him), which are considered as generally significant for everyone, then in the new aesthetics the world and events of the consciousness of the personality of the artist and viewer are described and constituted.

**Keywords:** *Understanding; Art; Theater; Staging; Interpretation; Reality; Communication; Consciousness; Action; Event*

The production is legendary, but perhaps at least half of the reviews from the audience are negative. Here is one characteristic.

"The play "Eugene Onegin" - the theater. E. Vakhtangov (Russia, Moscow) - The director and actors were too clever. Minus impression...

I was pleased that much of Pushkin's imperishable work remained in my head - I remember almost the entire text very well, and due to poor visibility and an uncomfortable place. I mainly perceived the sound range - that is, reading the novel in verse. My husband, as the artist looked visuals - he liked the design of the stage. Son (12 years old turned out to be very small, he was uninteresting and boring, he was waiting for when to laugh, for some reason he perceives going to the theater as something cheerful and funny)...



**Figure 1**

Some characters raise doubts about their authenticity. For example Olga Larina. Reading the work, I could not imagine Olga running all evening around the stage with an accordion in an embrace. It looked kind of stupid.

The character "bunny" - I don't remember this in Pushkin at all, I need to re-read it. An aunt runs onto the stage, in white tights, in a white tutu, in a large white cap with long hare ears (how, remember, in kindergarten we dressed up children of three years old?). So, here such an overgrown hare ran onto the stage with some kind of secret mission.

Everyone laughed. My son, too, is lucky here.

But I didn't understand at all - what kind of hare and what the hell is he needed here???

And so on - much is incomprehensible and it was unpleasant for me to watch. And yes, it's AWESOME!!!

I wanted to leave in the middle of the second act. But I'm with my son. It is not pedagogical to leave the performance "Eugene Onegin"...

We sat out! We won!" [9,10].

Many reviews - is incomprehensible, some kind of circus, where are the real Pushkin and "Eugene Onegin"? One would like to ask, where are the critics and art historians, because it is their direct duty to make a new work understandable to a wide audience. Or Tuminas counted only on a fine connoisseur of the theater?

Yes, but subtle connoisseurs believe that it is impossible to stage Pushkin in the theater. Alexander Minkin is clearly from this category, and here is what he writes.

"... After a newspaper article about "why Eugene", they called from the Vakhtangov Theater. Like, Rimantas Tuminas is going to stage Onegin, he has read the article, he wants to talk to you.

We met. He told me that he wanted to show what Onegin is a bad, insensitive, cruel cold cynic, destroys everything... I said that the performance about Onegin is unlikely to succeed.

- Why?!

Because there is no plot. Nothing to play. And Onegin is empty. How long can you look at a dummy with enthusiasm?

Why does everyone love it so much?

- Not all. Only Russians, Russian-speaking people love it. And most importantly: it seems to people that they are reading "about Onegin", but in fact they are reading Pushkin, and that's what they like...

... Pushkin wrote several plays. "Boris Godunov", "Mozart and Salieri" are real masterpieces, but... "They are not scenic," the directors say. We dare to object: Pushkin's dramas are staged, but incredibly difficult ("Boris Godunov" staged by Pyotr Fomenko is the only exception known to us; the performance was brilliant, it disappeared without a trace)... The performance is the same conversations, dialogues.

There are very few of them in Onegin. Lensky with Onegin ("Let's go to the Larins!" - "Okay"); Onegin with Tatyana ("Learn to rule yourself"); Tatyana with her nanny ("How slow-witted you are, nanny!")... - where are Pushkin's thoughts here? There is not.

There are descriptions of events ("The poet silently drops the pistol"); pictures of nature ("Winter! Peasant, triumphant"); genre ("The boys cut the ice with their skates"); portraits ("Oh, legs, legs, where are you now"). All this can be played: to release a horse, boys, even

legs can be waved on the stage... but where are Pushkin's thoughts? There is not...

Where is the real Pushkin? In his poetry. Now, if you play them, then Alexander Sergeevich will come out.

How to do? - that's the main question. A novel (even in verse) is not a play. In the play people only talk, but in the novel they also think...

Or maybe Pushkin's thoughts to distribute to the characters? - But he is a genius; he is smarter than them so much that his thoughts are not for their height. Or they should sharply grow wiser for the time of pronouncing Pushkin's wisdom, and then (returning to "their" words) become stupid again. Either Pushkin should be reduced and shortened [4,5].

The problem is that in "Eugene Onegin" Pushkin has two hypostases. He is the author, and in this sense he is not in the novel as a character, he is, so to speak, in the space of the reader's consciousness, visually he is a phantom, not visible. And at the same time, Pushkin is one of the main narrators of the poem, on his behalf the story of Onegin and Tatiana is told, and the duel, he shares with readers a variety of thoughts and impressions. However, even as a narrator, Pushkin is not shown as a character by Pushkin the author. True, as I show, Pushkin the narrator conveys his thoughts and impressions to the heroes of the poem (Onegin, Tatyana) (and they really get smarter, filled with genius, but for some reason they often forget to become stupid (but I will not make claims to Pushkin!) [6]. So, the question is how to bring to the stage and make the visually invisible Pushkin the author, Pushkin the narrator, who acts only verbally (but the monologues on the stage look bad and tire), Pushkin-Onegin and Pushkin-Tatyana, who also exist only in our minds and imaginations? It is quite possible to agree with Minkin when he says that "a performance about Onegin is unlikely to succeed".

Nevertheless, Minkin is forced to admit: yes, Tuminas somehow managed to solve all the problems: "Another year has passed - the premiere at the Vakhtangov Theater on February 13, 2013. Incredible masterpiece! Genius staging. Amazing music. Grandiose scenography" [5]. From Minkin's point of view, it was possible to solve it through a number of tricks. Firstly, in order to deceive Onegin at the beginning of the poem and at the end (let's not forget that the poem was written by Pushkin for more than eight years, and Onegin's life in the poem lasts even a couple of decades), and also, so as not to confuse the enthusiastic and naive Lensky with Lensky, knowing the price of Olga and Onegin's betrayal, Tuminas, according to Minkin, introduces two Onegin's and two Lensky's in the production.



**Figure 2:** Old Onegin (artist Makovetsky) and young (Dobronravov).

"There are two Onegins on the stage: young and old. The young man hardly speaks. The old one talks a lot. Old Onegin has grown wiser (everyone is strong in hindsight), softened (Sivka was tortured by steep hills) and recalls his outrages (they once seemed to him witty amusements): "How wrong I was! How punished!" His snake of memories, his remorse gnaws...

For old Onegin, these thoughts of 23-year-old Pushkin are just right.

And Lensky got old. Smiling, he looks at his young self (there are also two Lenskys) and recalls himself sympathetically, but also with irony.

Kant's admirer and poet!

Yes, he died young; Onegin killed him, it happened. But, excuse me, the soul is immortal, and what prevents it from entering the stage in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and remembering its youth (just think - only 200 years have passed)" [5].

All this is fine in a literary sense, but does not explain why Tuminas divided into two persons Onegin and Lensky. Are they the same as they were before? Let us look, for example, at the old Onegin. Not only did he grow wiser (by the way, Pushkin's Onegin did not become much smarter, judging by the way he seeks Tatyana), Onegin was fed by the thoughts of Pushkin himself.

He who has lived and thought is certain  
to scorn the men with whom he deals;  
days that are lost behind the curtain,  
ghostlike, must trouble him who feels --  
for him all sham has found rejection,  
he's gnawed by serpent Recollection,  
and by Repentance...

(A.S.Pushkin. Eugene Onegin (tr.Ch.Johnston; )

[http://lib.ru/LITRA/PUSHKIN/ENGLISH/onegin\\_j.txt](http://lib.ru/LITRA/PUSHKIN/ENGLISH/onegin_j.txt)

Such an old Onegin, in my opinion, has nothing to do with Pushkin's Onegin, even at the very end of the poem. I think that the wiser Lensky bears little resemblance Lensky in Pushkin's poem.

Another method, according to Minkin, is the "modernization" of historical events. For example, Lensky becomes modern by giving Olga an accordion.



Figure 3

"Accordion! He is so beautiful. Olga is happy, and Lensky is happy. A witty and brilliant theatrical (exactly in the style of Pushkin) decision! It is said:

He is from foggy Germany  
Brought the fruits of learning.

Here it is - a luxurious sparkling mother-of-pearl fruit of foreign scholarship. It never occurs to the public that this is an anachronism. Lensky brought something that did not exist at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Favorite trophy fruit of German learning among Soviet soldiers in 1945. Encyclopedia of Russian life" [5].

Modernization is only one of the types of a more general device - "rethinking" the events and contents of "Eugene Onegin". Minkin most vividly illustrates this technique with two examples: a scene perceived by Lensky as a betrayal of Onegin and Olga, and a duel that turns into a real murder.

"The scandal with Olga - a scandal that will lead to a duel - Onegin also arranged in cold blood, prudently, professionally. But Lensky himself is to blame: he dragged a friend into a provincial gathering of rabble (Akhmadulin), and he could not stand a vulgar crowd...

Now Onegin, in front of the groom, in front of everyone, will disgrace Olga. He invites her to dance, and she rejoices - she takes the flattering attention of a metropolitan gentleman at face value. And this is a dirty trap. Olga is just a tool for him...

Silent scene. The calculating cold bastard comes up to Olga from behind, puts his hands under her armpits and puts his palms on the accordion. And stroking the keyboard. The audience involuntarily hears the Russian word "лапать" in their ears (it's illegal to caress a girl).

At first everyone stares, and then hides their eyes - they cannot look at this shamelessness. And poor Lensky sees what his dear friend is doing to his fiancée.

For the accordion - but it is clear: for the chest. For the soul. For music. Touches Lensky's muse. Plays on other people's pure feelings.



Figure 4

"The duel is staged like a bad dream. It starts realistically, according to all the rules. Onegin and Lensky take pistols, disperse... the command "Now get together!" sounds, and immediately the realism stops, the nightmare begins. Lensky, bewildered, climbs onto some benches, the seconds climb into the same place and rip off his shirt, submissive; and then across the whole stage, with a clear, icy officer's gait, a dear friend walks towards Lensky, bare to the waist, comes close, hugs his neck with his left hand, presses him to himself - and Lensky, who does not understand what is happening, it seems as if this is friendship, reconciliation - but in Onegin's right hand there is a pistol, the barrel rests on his bare stomach. - Shot, Lensky begins to sag.



*Figure 5*

The duel has turned into some kind of gangster Hollywood murder in slow motion of the fall, because Lensky, swaying, falls for a long, long time.

We saw such a shot (in the stomach, at point-blank range) not only in *The Godfathers*, not only in *The White Sun of the Desert* (where the Black Abdullah, obviously thinking about something of his own, indifferently shoots an old museum curator in the stomach). Such hugs are for all time" [5].

Let us now give voice to Pushkin (I used this technique before, when analyzing the evolution of the personality of our poet [7, p. 129]). Let's imagine that Alexander Sergeevich watched Tuminas' performance and shares his impressions with us.

"Strange, if not for my poems, I would not have recognized either Onegin or Lensky. The comedian Tumin as, like Zeus, for some reason divided each into two persons, but each half not only does not strive for each other to form a whole - an androgyne, but on



the contrary behaves independently and oppositely. I tried to show that, despite the past time and circumstances, Onegin and Lensky remained themselves, personalities. They changed and developed, not split. Then, is a duel really a murder, well, yes, ladies often asked me why I killed Lensky. But, firstly, not me, but Onegin, besides, he later regretted it very much, and secondly, he did not kill, but allowed the duel to determine the player who was dying. The convention of light is a terrible force, remember, I wrote:

Foes! Is it long since from each other  
the lust for blood drew them apart?  
long since, like brother linked to brother,  
they shared their days in deed and heart,  
their table, and their hours of leisure?  
But now, in this vindictive pleasure  
hereditary foes they seem,  
and as in some appalling dream  
each coldly plans the other's slaughter...  
could they not laugh out loud, before  
their hands are dipped in scarlet gore,  
could they not give each other quarter  
and part in kindness? Just the same,  
all modish foes dread worldly shame.

The duel is faceless, it is the action of nature, albeit a social one. And the comedian Tuminas is very personal, and a real murder makes no sense. Then he depicted some unfamiliar world to me. Everything in it boils, rushes, sparkles, collapses, and like shadows, but the loud-voiced heroes of my poem. I involuntarily perceive them as demons, and the story of Onegin and Tatyana has turned into a farce. I don't know this reality".

But I will try to help Alexander Sergeevich by explaining that Tuminas did with his poem. On the one hand, both Tuminas and Pushkin remain in the space (sphere) of art. As I show, this means work to create an artistic reality, a special convention and aesthetics of the events of this reality, the author's orientation towards artistic communication and help to viewers who are trying to understand the created work (to enter artistic reality and experience its events). At the same time, both the artist (author) and the viewer live a full life: they solve the problems they face, express their attitude to life, and communicate with each other [7,8].

On the other hand, the artistic goals of Pushkin and Tuminas do not coincide. Alexander Sergeevich talks about Russian life at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, thought over his life, how it could have turned out if, if only, he shared his thoughts and impressions with an educated public about almost everything that worried him. He did all this as a brilliant artist, using words and poetry. Poetry also sets boundaries for imagination and vision. Yes, for example, we can almost see the early morning of the capital and hear the crunch of snow:

And Eugene? half-awake, half-drowsing,  
from ball to bed behold him come;  
while Petersburg's already rousing,  
untirable, at sound of drum:  
the merchant's up, the cabman's walking  
towards his stall, the pedlar's hawking;  
see with their jugs the milk-girls go  
and crisply crunch the morning snow.  
The city's early sounds awake her;  
shutters are opened and the soft  
blue smoke of chimneys goes aloft,  
and more than once the German baker,  
punctilious in his cotton cap,

has opened up his serving-trap.

Tuminas is more concerned with the task of constructing a theatrical reality, and a reality of the modern rather than the nineteenth century. Naturally, at the same time, he also does not hide his attitude to life, but still the main thing for Tuminas is to develop and conduct an attitude towards Pushkin's poem, its events and heroes, and only secondarily solve his own problems. On this path for Tuminas, indeed, a very difficult problem arose: how can verbal content, albeit ingenious, but not visual, be expressed visually, theatrically? In art history reflection, it sounds like this: how can one create a "theatrical action" on the basis of Pushkin's images that involve imagination, show what Pushkin is talking about with the help of the actors' play, infect the audience, enter into communication with them? [2]. To solve this most difficult task, the techniques that Minkin writes about were required, but only they need to be correctly understood.

Why, for example, two Onegin's? But the fact is that at the end of the poem Onegin has changed so much that, from the point of view of the theatrical action, this is a different person. Of course, if Tuminas, like Pushkin, believed that a person develops and therefore changes, then he would have to think about how to express the "development" of the hero on stage. He went the other way: he depicted only the beginning and the end, besides, this solution gave a lot in the visual plan, as well as images of the character. True, it is unlikely that a person's character can change so much, but if Onegin is only material for the work of Tuminas and not a real person, then why not?

This shift (from a real person to material for creativity) is especially noticeable in other techniques and images. For example, Tatyana's confession in a conversation with a nanny.

``So to strange kinsfolk I was taken...  
but you're not paying any heed."  
``Oh nurse, I'm sad, I'm sad, I'm shaken,  
I'm sick, my dear, I'm sick indeed.  
I'm near to sobbing, near to weeping!..."  
``You're ill, God have you in his keeping,  
the Lord have mercy on us all!  
whatever you may need, just call...  
I'll sprinkle you with holy water,  
you're all in fever... heavens above."  
``Nurse, I'm not ill; I... I'm in love."  
``The Lord God be with you, my daughter!"  
and, hands a-tremble, Nyanya prayed  
and put a cross-sign on the maid.

Only the text remained from Pushkin. Everything else is from Tuminas: the bed on which Tatiana rushes about and does acrobatic steps, Tatiana lifts her bed (bench) and drags it around the stage; Tanya's enthusiastic emotional state - in short, a magnificent theatrical action, brilliantly performed by actresses Olga Lerman and Evgenia Kregzhde.







*Figure 6*

Here you can't say that it's just imagination: you see, you experience, you become emotionally infected, but the text is like that, the background, moreover, most viewers remember it by heart, that is, they no longer experience it.

Of course, this also begs the question: are these decisions of Tuminas (given, considered above the outrageous Lensky and the duel-murder) - these are Pushkin's ideas, only modernized, or are they Tuminas, already having nothing in common with Pushkin's? I think it's the latter, but maybe I'm wrong.

However, in Tuminas's production there are also such decisions that do not fit into the logic of reworking Pushkin's content in a modern way. They are clearly doing something else. I will give two examples. Almost no one understands the scene with the bunny: first, the hunter aims at him and wants to kill him, but then after a strange dance performed by the bunny, which ends with a kiss (the bunny kisses the hunter, who forgets about the gun and stands like a drunk), the bunny quietly hides.

The second example, a wanderer, reminiscent of a medieval itinerant artist; she often accompanies the characters in the production.



*Figure 7*

The plot with the bunny is placed by Tuminas in the event of Tatiana's moving from the village to Moscow. The move divides the events



*Figure 8: Onegin (Guskov), a wanderer with domra (Ekaterina Kramzina), photo Valery Myasnikov.*

of the poem into two parts (stories): in the first, Onegin rejects Tatyana's love, the second ends with Tatyana rejecting Onegin's love. But then a natural interpretation suggests itself: the plot with the bunny is a caricatured image of the development of Onegin's relationship with Tatyana (the hunter at first is young Onegin, and at the end is old). Why caricature, why, by the way, an accordion or why Tatyana rushes about on the bed and drags her around the stage, why is village hospitality at Tatyana's name day ridiculed, so Onegin is forced against his will to drink one cup of milk (lingonberry water?) after another? Probably because Tuminas is a postmodernist (hence, irony, deconstruction, humor, detection of simulacra) [1,3].

But the plot with the bunny allows us to understand a very important thing: this narrative is "reflexive" (suggests the analysis of "Eugene Onegin"), but Tuminas inserts it into artistic reality as one of the events. How to understand, in the unfolding relationship between Onegin and Tatyana, which has not yet ended (the completion is yet to come, at the end of the poem), a reflexive description of these relations is inserted, as having already ended. The whole within its part! But is it not so often that a piece of music is built: some motive, melody or theme is only outlined, begins to be developed, but is suddenly interrupted by a fragment in which the whole is visible, right down to the coda.

And the plot with the wanderer is reflexive. To understand its meaning, let us recall that in "Eugene Onegin" Pushkin is the most important narrator, and he addresses his reader [6]. But in poetry, as we said, this relation of the author-narrator is not visually represented, it is implied, read by an enlightened reader. You can't do this on stage: go guess that old Onegin is not just talking into space, but to someone, and to whom, you ask? Here Tuminas introduces the wanderer into artistic reality. It not only closes the monologues of the characters, but also makes the viewer think "who is it", is it not him, "what is this", perhaps an indication of the nature of communication.

The plot with the murder of Lensky, of course, is not reflexive. He reveals one of the problems of the author of the production: he probably reflected more than once on modern warfare and the senseless murders of our time. The duel scene in the theatrical interpretation of Tuminas allows the reader to think about these issues, to experience them in a specific duel scene that has shifted into a real murder.

### Conclusion

However, what did we get? Firstly, Tuminas does not try to present Pushkin's brilliant work in a new, modern way, but creates a new work, his own. Secondly, the artistic reality of this new work is composed of very different events, including reflexive ones. A sacramental question arises: how do these heterogeneous events create a whole (as Aristotle wrote in the Poetics, that "it was impossible to add or subtract"). After all, if this integer is not given, then it is not clear what is happening on the stage. For example, why an accordion, what does a bunny kiss mean, why does Tatyana rush about like crazy, is this a duel?

Again, perhaps, Tuminas, like Pushkin, relies only on an enlightened spectator, who himself will collect individual events and ups and downs into integrity and real life. I think not, he means the average viewer. But it only suggests that he has already abandoned the traditional aesthetics and conventions and adopted new ones. In traditional aesthetics, the artist depicts the world and life that exist outside a person (or inside him), which are considered as universally significant, common to all. In the new aesthetics and conventions, the world and events of the consciousness of the individual (artist, viewer) are described and constituted [8]. Since each person is a "microcosm" and is unique, in order to understand a modern work, one has to make efforts, to collect the different contents of consciousness into unity and wholeness. Here is the special task of the director and director, but also the artist - to help the viewer to do this work. Not the last role in this help is played by music, scenery, and the play of artists.

Perhaps if the author of the review with which we started the article connected to the new aesthetics and conventions, her review would look a little different.

"The play "Eugene Onegin" - the theater. E. Vakhtangov (Russia, Moscow) - The director and the actors made me do a great job. The

impression is complex, but not negative...

I was pleased that much of Pushkin's imperishable work remained in my head - I remember almost the entire text very well. Knowledge of the text helps, although it seems strange that Pushkin's poems are only a background. And the main content of Tuminas. But the name is the same "Eugene Onegin", and what was Tuminas to do? Son (12 years old turned out to be very small, he was uninteresting and tedious, everyone was waiting for the time to laugh, for some reason he perceives going to the theater as something cheerful and funny). When he grows up, he looks like different performances and directors, and then he will laugh on business. Tuminas has something to laugh and cry about. You can't refuse him humor and irony.

Some of the characters are questionable. For example Olga Larina. Reading Pushkin, I could not imagine Olga running all evening around the stage with an accordion in an embrace. It looked kind of funny. And on the other hand, how to portray Olga's naivete and at the same time her purity for the modern viewer, if not through music?

The character "bunny" - I don't remember this in Pushkin at all, I need to re-read it. An aunt runs onto the stage, in white tights, in a white tutu, in a large white cap with long hare ears (how, remember, in kindergarten we dressed up children of three years old?). So, here such an overgrown hare ran onto the stage with some kind of secret mission.

Everyone laughed. My son, too, is lucky here.

But I didn't understand at all - what kind of hare, you need to think... Although wait, because the roles change there: either the hunter aims at the hare, then the hare kisses the hunter and he becomes like a drunk, it's from the hare. True, I remember somewhere that Pushkin compares Tatyana with a bunny. Maybe this is Tatyana, then in the role of a victim of love, then Onegin in the same role? Then it's clear.

But much is still unclear. However, I read somewhere that you can't skip the incomprehensible, the thought begins with it. It is necessary to imperceptibly inspire the son. At first I wanted to leave from the middle of the second act, but then I got carried away - it's not often that you have to solve interesting riddles and worry at the same time. Moreover, my son and I - it is not pedagogical to leave the theater with "Eugene Onegin". Well, this is not Pushkin, but what material for thought and impressions. I will definitely talk tomorrow about this production with my son and husband".

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