

Onegin Dramaturgy Presentation

Content Notice: Sexual Assault,
Suicide

Left: Emiliano Ponzi's poster
design for 2014 Arizona Opera
production of *Eugene Onegin*



Overview

- Adaptation and Tone: Pushkin, Tchaikovsky, Gladstone and Hille
- Author Bios
- Illustrations of Pushkin
- Books the characters are reading
- Romanticism and Boredom
- Form and meter
- Text and Repetition
- Musical Connections

Tone

- “If we do not know Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*...we cannot be bothered by the fact that it satirizes what Tchaikovsky’s... adaptation of it offers seriously as deep emotions. But if we do... .”
–Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (p. 127)

Tone and Layers of Adaptation

- Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin* (1825): narrator makes fun of characters; Formal verse: “Onegin stanza/Pushkin sonnet”
- Tchaikovsky, *Eugene Onegin* (1879): Sincere, takes characters seriously. Sets much of Pushkin’s verse verbatim, but imagines moments of song.
- Gladstone and Hille, *Onegin* (2016): Mostly translates Tchaikovsky, adding in some details from Pushkin. Overall tone feels sincere, but with a presentational style and some irony.

Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837)



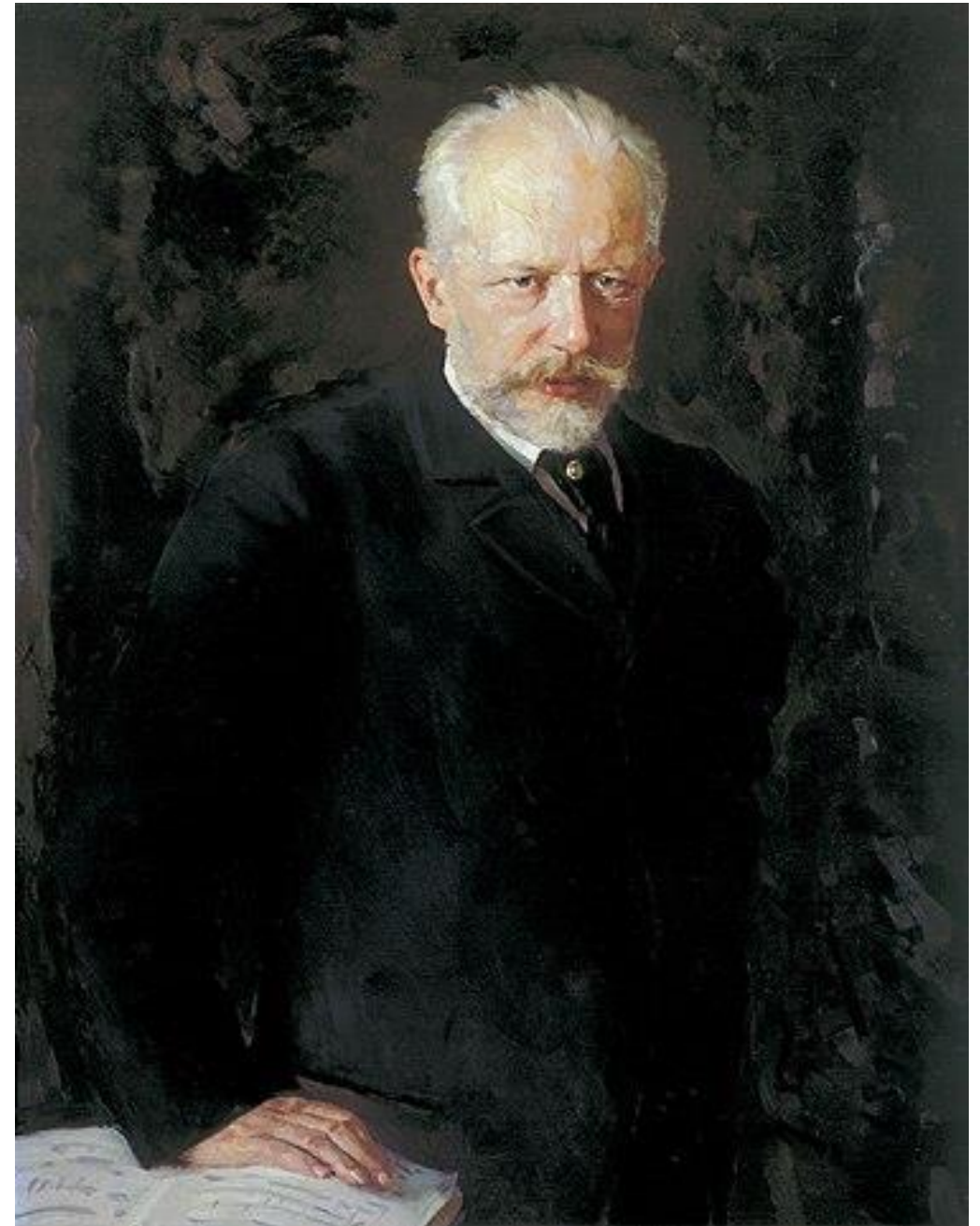
Russian nobility; some African ancestry

Duels fought over his wife's perceived infidelity

Prolific author for dying in his late 30s; *Eugene Onegin* is his best known and most important work.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

- Composer: Best known for ballets:
- *Swan Lake* (1877)
- *Sleeping Beauty* (1889)
- *Nutcracker* (1892)
- *Eugene Onegin* (1878): Lyric Scenes
- Tchaikovsky wrote letters to his brother Modest about struggling against same-sex attraction
- Married a woman who wrote him an unsolicited love letter, around the time he was adapting *Eugene Onegin*. The marriage failed.



Veda Hille (b. 1968) and Amiel Gladstone (b. 1972)



Hille: Vancouver Indie
Rock musician

Gladstone:
Playwright/director (now
Head of Theatre at Banff
Centre

Collaborated on *Do You
Want What I Have Got?*
A Craigslist Cantata
before working on
Onegin



Ilya Repin,
*Eugene
Onegin and
Vladimir
Lensky's
Duel*, 1899



Illustrations by E. P. Samokish-Sudkovskaya, 1908



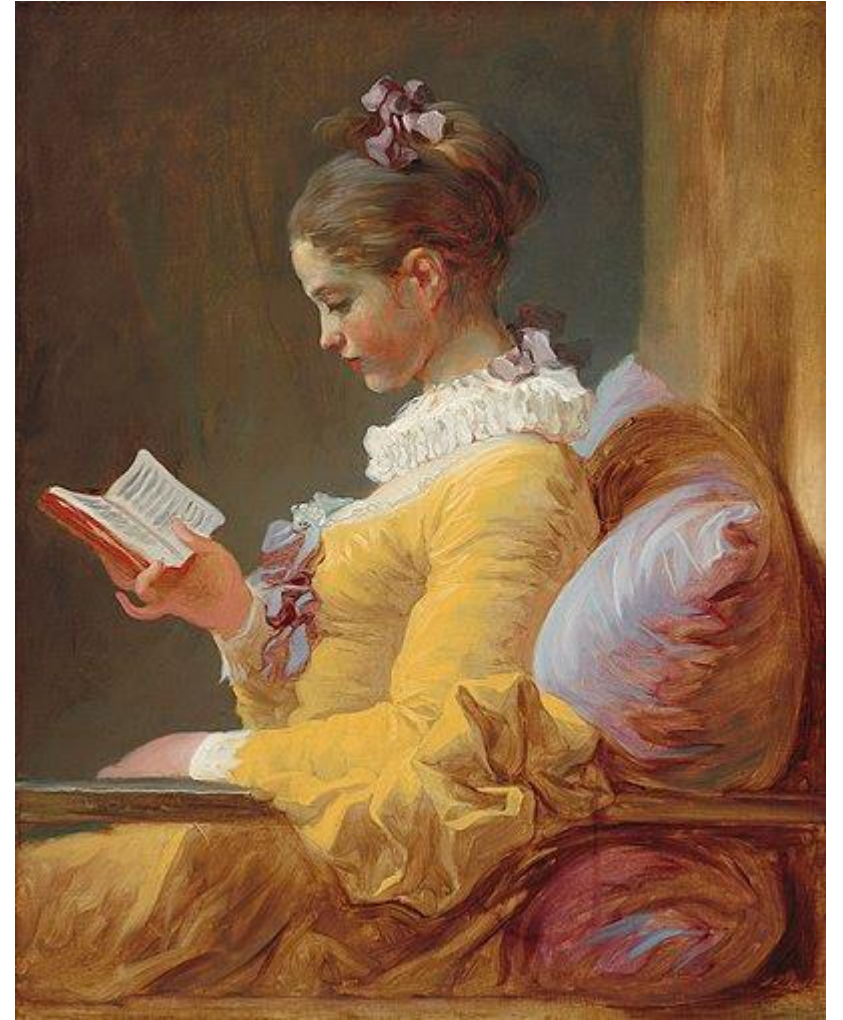
И, чувствъ изѣженныхъ отрада,
Духи въ граненомъ хрусталѣ;
Гребенки, пилочки стальные,
Прямая ножницы, кривыя,

И щетки тридцати родовъ —
И для ногтей, и для зубовъ.
Руссо (замѣчу мимоходомъ)
Не могъ понять, какъ важный Гриммъ



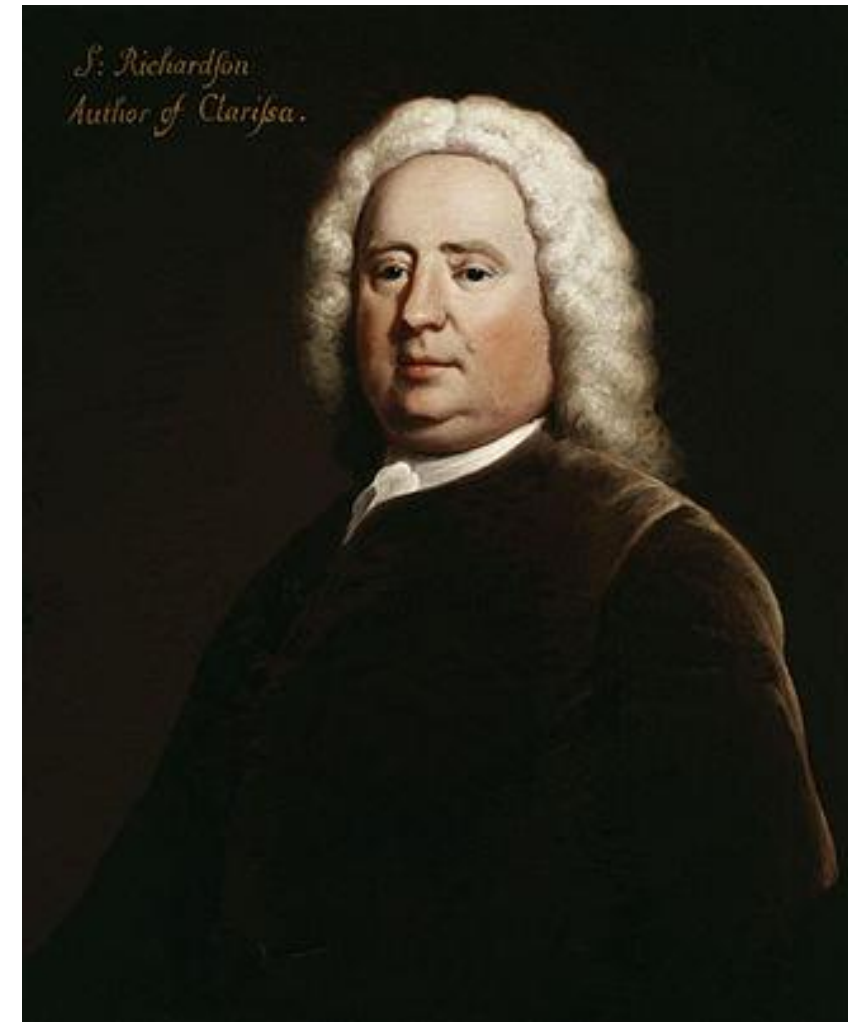


Fragonard, *The Bolt* (1777) and *La Liseuse* (1770)



Samuel Richardson: epistolary novels (Madame Larin loves them, but has not read them)

- *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740)
 - Resistance conquers the rake
- *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (1748)
 - The libertine Lovelace kidnaps Clarissa
 - Succumbing to the rake leads to her death
 - Lovelace is killed in a duel
- *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753)
 - Grandison rescues Harriet Byron from a rake
 - She falls in love with Grandison
 - Sir Hargrave Pollenfax (the rake) dies



Poetry vs. Prose

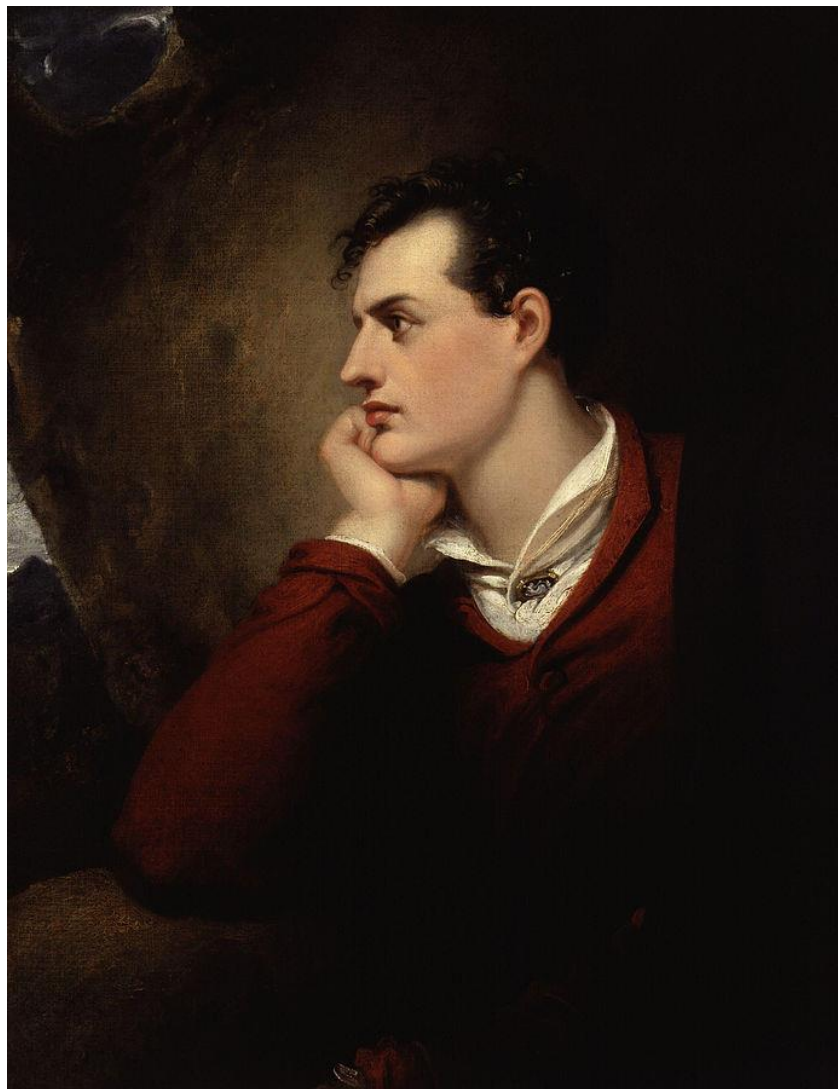
Lensky

- Kant, *A Critique of Pure Reason*
- Schiller, Goethe
- Shakespeare, in Schlegel and Tieck translations
- Tension between Classicism and Romanticism; traditional domesticity vs. singular individual genius

Onegin

- Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*
- 1808 Almanac
- Tissot, (*Onanism?*)
- Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*
- George Gordon, Lord Byron: *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*; "She Walks in Beauty"

George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824)



Romanticism: History and Geography

Begins in Germany (Storm and Stress)

- Sturm und Drang movement (1760s-1780s)
- Goethe, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774)

England (Gothic)

- Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764)
- Drama: Joanna Baillie, *De Montfort*
- Poets: Byron, P.B. Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Keats, Coleridge

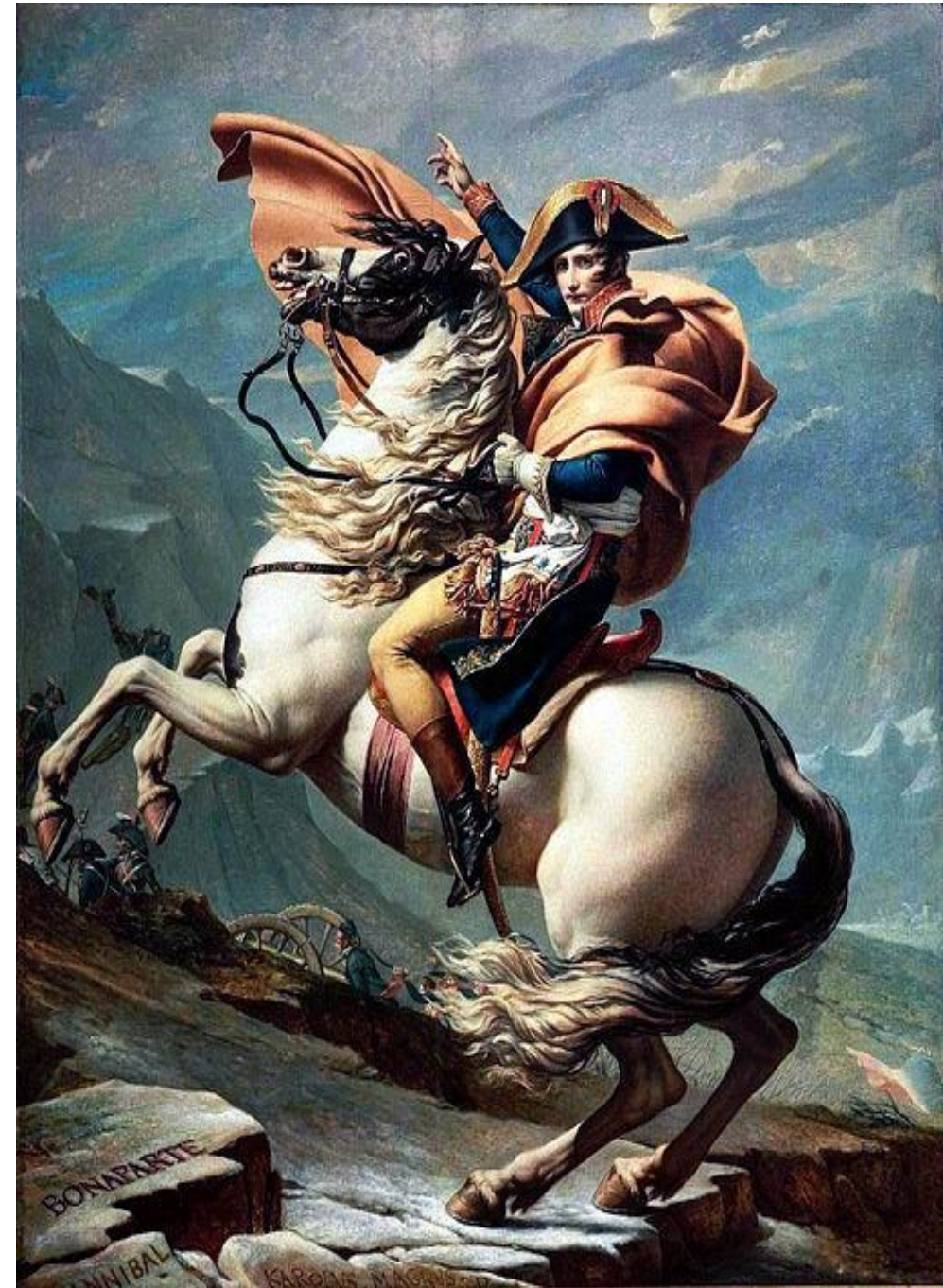
France (Ennui, Spleen, Mal du siecle)

- Chateaubriand, *Rene* (1804)
- Drama: Alfred de Vigny, Victor Hugo

Classicism vs. Romanticism



Onegin is a
Napoleon fanboy



Repeated Phrases and Wordplay

- “You are Society” / “I am Society” – Russian “svet” meaning “world,” related to French idea of “le monde,” meaning aristocratic society
- “I don’t care”
- “You are my only one”
- “I will stay this course. Undo my corset stays.”

Onegin Stanza/Pushkin Sonnet: Iambic Tetrameter and Showy Rhyme Scheme

Meanwhile Onegin's first session
At the Larins had produced
On one and all a strong impression,
All the neighbours were seduced.
There was no end of speculation,
Hosts of rumours in circulation,
Jokes and carping comments too,
Tatyana was betrothed: some knew!
Some claimed the marriage was agreed,
Stated it quite positively,
Delayed though, temporarily,
Fashionable rings they need.
As for Lensky's fate, you know,
All that was settled long ago.

A
B
A
B
C
C
D
D
E
F
F
E
G
G

Olga, my dear beloved darling	A
My long beloved country girl	B
I delight in watching as a starling	A
I delight in holding as a pearl.	B
I love you with my whole heart beating	C
I count the hours before each meeting	C

-Gladstone and Hille, “Lensky’s Proposal”

-A.S. Kline translation of Pushkin, Ch. 3 stanza 6

Musical Influences

- Gladstone specifically mentions Kanye West, Kendrick Lamar, Tom Jones, and Boney M. in addition to Tchaikovsky
- Russian-inspired musical theatre and rock? *Fiddler on the Roof*, Scorpions (“Wind of Change”)
- Triquet: French chanson: Charles Aznavour (“For Me, Formidable”), Jacques Brel (particularly Marc Almond’s Jacques Brel covers in the 1980s); Eduard Khil, Trololo?
- Indie rock: Veda Hille (“Illyria”), Decemberists (named for 1825 Russian Decembrists), Magnetic Fields