

MODES AND FUNCTIONS OF IMITATION: MOLIÈRE, FONVIZIN, AND GRIBOEDOV

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ABSTRACT

The imitation of one cultural or societal group by another is a measure not only of how the imitators view the culture they seek to emulate, but also of how they judge themselves. With its literary and performance aspects, theater is a genre with a dual capacity to manifest and comment on culture. This study examines character types in satirical theatrical works by Fonvizin and Griboedov and their connections to similar character types in the earlier French tradition of Molière's satires *The Misanthrope* and *The Bourgeois Gentleman*. Tracing these specific influences acts as a lens through which to view the development of Russian theater in relation to the foreign models it emulated and eventually transformed into native theatrical idioms. Broader context on the problem of Russian imitation of France and the West is provided via an analysis of contemporary travel texts and an overview of secondary critical literature on mimesis, performance and cultural transfer. This study illustrates one important aspect of historical socio-cultural exchange between late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century France and Russia, as well as the potency of imitation as a force within a society or culture.

This thesis is dedicated to my mother,
with all my love and gratitude for her support.

With appreciation,
ABBY

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INTRODUCTION

*"After the country, and with the serious mood she was in, Natasha found all this wild and astonishing. She was unable to follow the course of the opera; she could not even hear the music: she saw only painted cardboard and strangely dressed-up men and women, who moved, talked, and sang strangely in the bright light; she knew what it was all supposed to represent, but it was all so pretentiously false and unnatural that she first felt embarrassed for the performers, and then found them ridiculous. She looked around at the faces of the spectators, seeking in them the same feeling of mockery and perplexity that was in her; but all the faces were attentive to what was taking place on stage and expressed admiration—feigned, as it seemed to Natasha. 'That must be how it's supposed to be!' she thought."*¹

In this famous, much-analyzed scene from *War and Peace*, Tolstoy describes Natasha Rostov's experience of the opera in Moscow. A memorable aspect of Natasha's night at the opera and the way in which Tolstoy describes it is the theatricality not only of the action on the stage but in the audience and in Natasha's own mind.² Natasha is struck by the patent falseness of both the images on stage and the behavior of the audience. Something about the mimetic processes at work bewilders her and in turn, she does not know how she should behave. "The strangest thoughts [flash] through her head unexpectedly, without connection," and she considers jumping up on to the stage to join the actress in her aria or tickling the little old man sitting near to her. Like Natasha, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Russians struggled to make sense of the practice of imitation, in both art and life. In this period, imitation was a crucial topic in aesthetic arguments about classicism, sentimentalism or romanticism. At the same time, it also raised a

¹ Tolstoy 560-61.

² This scene, along with several others from different Tolstoy works, forms the part of the basis of Viktor Shklovsky's concept of *ostraniene* ("defamiliarization" or "enstrangement") in his famous essay "Isskustvo kak priyom" ("Art as Device"). Shklovsky posits that good prose should force the reader to see familiar things outside of their usual context. Natasha, and by extension the reader, experiences the mundane event of a night at the opera as something "wild and astonishing" instead.

fundamental question in larger cultural and national contexts, namely, that of whether Russia should seek foreign models for its betterment or eschew importation of manners and fashions that might corrupt some intrinsic Russianness and thereby result in an enervated Russian people. Using theater as a medium, this study will examine the question of the role of imitation and mimetic behaviors in the process of cultural transfer and eventual transformation, with specific reference to French presence and influence in imperial Russia.

The process of cultural transfer between France and Russia and the consequent transformation of Russian culture is evident in many artifacts from the ruling period of Catherine the Great through Alexander I (1762-1825). For example, it is vividly present in first-hand accounts of visitors and travelers to Russia, many of whom were French, but some of whom came from other parts of Western Europe such as England and Germany. What these visitors observed, described, and, in a number of cases, critiqued was a general Russian talent and proclivity (“genius,” according to some) for imitation, not only in “high” cultural and social contexts such as the court and educated, literary circles, but also in the conduct of everyday life, including linguistic behaviors. In the time period under consideration, this proclivity was engaged especially in the imitation of all things French. Among Western visitors as well as the Russians themselves, there was a range of opinion as to whether this imitation was beneficial or detrimental to the Russian people, but overall, there was consensus that it was a powerful cultural force. Among those who viewed it as detrimental, reaction to the theatricality of imitative behavior was not unlike that of Tolstoy’s Natasha: “it was all so pretentiously false and unnatural that she first felt embarrassed for the performers, and then found them ridiculous.”

From comparative literature and semiotics to sociology and anthropology, scholars from across the spectrum of the humanities and social sciences have explored the relationship between imitation and theatricality in human behavior and created text. Study of the development of theater and theatrical works in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Russia reveals the complex workings of imitation and theatricality in the context of a culture that was receptive to outside influence and eager to embrace theater as both a literary and performance genre. The imitations and adaptations of Molière's plays and characters that were created at this time represent well a facet of the process of cultural transfer between France and Russia, and they are important as starting points, given the fact that Molière proved to be both a durable and flexible influence on Russian theater, even through the Soviet era.³ In general, as a network of imperial, public and private/estate theaters was developing during this period, admiration, imitation and adaptation of works for French theater formed a large part of the repertoire of all types of theaters. Molière, in particular, was seen as the foremost writer of comedies of the seventeenth century and, ultimately, as the epitome of classical French comedy. Given the extent of their presence and influence, Molière's works can provide a useful vehicle for analyzing a narrow subject over a broad period of time, facilitating the tracking of changes in thinking on the theories and practices of imitation. In addition, theatrical comedy is a genre that permits, simultaneously, direct representation of imitative behavior and commentary on it. In the context of cultural transfer and

³ In 1971, one Soviet scholar writes that in the Soviet Union, "each Molière comedy is a celebration of theater" because in "exposing the dark forces of his age, Molière himself did not lose courage, because he believed in victory, he believed in the robust force of the people" (*"Каждая комедия Мольера — это праздник театра...Но обличая темные силы своего века, Мольер сам не терял бодрости духа, ибо верил в свою победу, верил в здоровые силы народа"*; Boiadzhiev 3-4).

transformation, such satirical capability makes for a particularly interesting case to study, with the rich potential for complex intersections between text and everyday behavior. Although theater is only one of the numerous possible avenues by which explore the problem of imitation, it is the chosen one for this study because of its satirical capabilities: it is a mechanism that engages in imitation while at the same time commenting on it; in this way, theater is able to function as both vector and mediator.

In undertaking this study, it is important to establish that the process of cultural transfer is not unidirectional. In the beginning, the process may be driven by purely aspirational motives, in this case to admire and therefore be like the French. This takes place on both a macro and a micro level: on the one level, Peter the Great sought to modernize Russia by borrowing what he saw as the superior parts of Western Europe, but on the other level, so too might an individual noble have decided to educate his children in French instead of Russian. The dynamic and interplay between these two levels is complicated to be sure, for what is culture if not an amalgamation of individual behaviors, shaped both from above and more organically from below? But even from the outset, not everyone subscribed to the aspirational position: some were critical, from the beginning, of Russians imitating the French. The criticism came from both French and Russian sources, and over time, much of the initial aspirational motive shifted toward the opposite pole, that of resistance. What is notable in such a shift is the reflexive process of self-criticism that came into play and eventually brought about the abandonment of the desire to copy. This idea of a reflexive continuum and the importance of self-criticism within the process of cultural transfer provide the basis of the conceptual framework for this analysis.

Thus, bearing this in mind, the cultural transfer that contributed to the development of a Russian theatrical idiom cannot be contextualized solely as aspirational. The evidence shows a mimetic dynamic that vacillated between appropriation and rejection, or between acceptance and resistance. It eventually moved squarely into a reflexive, self-critical mode, in which the “imitators” (more accurately defined at the “receptor culture”) ended up turning on themselves. What resulted from such self-consciousness can be encapsulated in two character types that evolved, in part, from Molière: 1) ridicule through satire, as represented by the character of the bourgeois gentleman; and 2) outright rejection, as represented by the character of the misanthrope. The two deeply contrasting types occupy the opposite poles aspiration and denial, with the continuum between the two extremes comprising varying degrees of reflexivity or ability to self-assess.

As has been noted, contemporary Russians had a wide variety of thoughts and approaches to the practice of Western imitation, and the mimetic complexity of the theatrical medium provides an appealing and useful complement to this variety of opinions. After outlining the history of the time period, I will take a brief detour into the travel text as a major manifestation of contemporary thinking on the process of cultural exchange and the role of imitation in these exchanges, in order to provide context for the later analysis of satirical theater that will form the core of my argument. The writings of French visitors to Russia (and in some ways, of Russian visitors to France) illustrate the prevalence of imitation as a trope through which people understood the behavior of those both similar to and different from them, both inside and outside of their own culture. The analysis of these travel texts will be complemented by an overview of relevant theoretical writings from different disciplines, to show the broad appeal of grappling

with the problem of imitation in a cultural framework. This will also bring clarity and consistency to the analysis to follow through definition of the terms, e.g., imitation (mimesis, simulation, mimicry, copying, etc.) and theatricality (performance, acting, etc.) that appear with frequency.

The analysis of the two types representing opposite ends of the continuum of approaches to the problem of imitation will be based on characters drawn from five plays of French and Russian origins: the bourgeois gentleman in Molière's *The Bourgeois Gentleman* and Denis Fonvizin's *The Brigadier* and *The Minor*, and the misanthrope in Molière's *The Misanthrope* and Alexander Griboedov's *Woe from Wit*.⁴ These theatrical texts illustrate the phenomena of imitation not only formally, due to the influence of French models on the composition of the Russian texts, but also because the characters in all of the plays both engage in and comment on imitation. These aspects connect the textual analysis to the preceding theoretical discussion. In this analysis, I will draw connections between the characterization of these types through their behaviors, the self-critical aspects of the medium of satire and the mimetic aspects inherent in the creation and production of theater. These specific theatrical examples will make it possible to extrapolate larger cultural conclusions about the problem of imitation in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Russia and about attempts to reconcile and resolve those problems within developing Russian cultural idioms.

⁴ The original titles of the plays are as follows: Molière's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* and Fonvizin's *Brigadir* and *Nedorosl'*; Molière's *Le Misanthrope ou l'Atrabilaire amoureux* and Griboedov's *Gore ot uma*.

CHAPTER I: MANIFESTATIONS OF CULTURAL TRANSFER BETWEEN RUSSIA AND FRANCE

France and Russia in the eighteenth century

Although France and Russia had been aware of each other as tangible entities since the Middle Ages,⁵ it was not until the middle of the seventeenth century that the two states had any sort of political relationship. The latter half of the eighteenth century was the first time that these two peoples came into contact with each other with any frequency, and while the numerous vagaries of the relationship between the two governments in the eighteenth century are not the focus of this study, it will take as its starting point the beginning of the reign of Catherine II, because the time period of her reign (1762-1796) comprises the latter half of the eighteenth century, which was the first time that the people of France and Russia began to comment on their contact with each other, and is thus useful in establishing the context for the discussion to follow.

The period between 1762 and the end of the reign of Alexander I (Catherine's grandson) in 1825 was the era during which Enlightenment ideas from France and the West gained currency with the educated classes in Russia, though it is an oft-studied peculiarity of the Enlightenment that, for example, a ruler like Catherine could be such a champion of French thought without actually applying any of its concepts to her government of Russia.⁶ Theater formed an important venue for the expression of Enlightenment thought in France and elsewhere, in large part because Enlightenment thought conceived of theater as an exercise in moral

⁵ The literary scholar Gregory Lozinski points to allusions in medieval French *chansons de geste* as evidence of this. See Lozinski, "La Russie dans la littérature française du moyen âge." *Revue des études slaves*, Vol. IX, 1929, cited in Von Mohrenschildt 3.

⁶ For example, see Gorbатов, Inna. *Catherine the Great and the French Philosophers of the Enlightenment: Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot and Grim*. Bethesda: Academica Press, 2006. Print.

instruction.⁷ In Russia, the roots of this concept reach back to the modernization efforts of Peter the Great. As Elise Wirtschafter concludes, “Peter’s early effort to establish permanent public theater based on a literary repertoire can be seen as a tool of social and cultural transformation. Theater not only served as the institutional locus for a new brand of public sociability, it also articulated social ideas and provided models of social behavior.”⁸

This period was also the height of a certain type of Western fascination with Russia and the East, a dynamic that forms the subject of Larry Wolff’s book *Inventing Eastern Europe*. In this work of intellectual history, Wolff uses Edward Said’s landmark *Orientalism* as a jumping off point to explore the attempted “intellectual mastery” of the Eastern Europe by the West.⁹ As defined by Said, Orientalism is a way for the Occident to intellectually dominate the Orient by using its position of relative cultural strength to speak for the Orient and thus, in a sense, “create” it.¹⁰ To be sure, the creation of an “other” as a cultural practice predates the creation of concepts like Orientalism; as Wolff writes, “Foucault has suggested this method as the essence of eighteenth-century epistemology, that ‘all designation must be accomplished by means of a

⁷ Not all forms of theater were considered suitable to this end. In his correspondence with Alexander Sumarokov (1717-1777), Voltaire railed against the bourgeois *comédie larmoyante* (Rogger 146-48) and Rousseau’s famous letter to d’Alembert questions the wisdom of opening a theater in Geneva. He takes *The Misanthrope*, a play Voltaire praised, as an example of a play in which the audience is made to ridicule a highly virtuous character — that of Alceste (“Letter to d’Alembert” 277).

⁸ Wirtschafter 4.

⁹ Wolff 8.

¹⁰ Other scholars have shown how Orientalism can be productively applied specifically to literary analyses of French travel texts on Russia. See Lin, Stephanie. "Image (and) Nation: The Russian Exotic in 19th-Century French Travel Narratives." *Dialectical Anthropology* 27.2 (2003): 121-39. Print.

certain relation to all other possible designations.”¹¹ Wolff was referring to the designation, both literally and figuratively, of Eastern European geographical spaces by the Enlightenment thinkers of Western Europe, but the idea is equally applicable to the topic of how a particular nation defines itself.

Just as Wolff posits that the West “invented” Eastern Europe by projecting its own imaginings onto the geographical space of the East, Russia, too, often chose to define itself in terms of its relationship to Western Europe, a relationship analyzed by countless numbers of Russian intellectuals from the Enlightenment era through to the present day.¹² Many scholarly works have been written on the multifarious contours of Russian thought on this topic, a thorough examination of which is beyond the scope of this study, it suffices to say that opinions are extremely diverse in all eras.¹³ Nonetheless, this phenomenon of mutual projection is a good window through which to introduce the concept of cultural transfer.

The notion of cultural transfer (originally expressed as *le transfert culturel*) was first articulated by a pair of scholars (one French, one German) studying German cultural history in France. As one of those scholars, Michel Espagne, puts it in his book on the same subject, “there exists a French history of Germany and a German history of France, distinct or at least much

¹¹ Wolff 92.

¹² In modern post-Soviet times, it is hard to conceive of a Europe that is not divided into East and West, but as Wolff aptly notes, before the eighteenth century it was more obvious to conceptually divide Europe into North and South, due to the role of Italian city-states as “almost unquestioned centers of art and learning, of painting and sculpture, rhetoric and philosophy, not to mention finance and trade” during both the Renaissance and antiquity (Wolff 4-5).

¹³ For example, see Walicki, Andrzej. *A History of Russian Thought from the Enlightenment to Marxism*. Palo Alto: Stanford UP, 1979. Print.

larger than that of their basic relationship.”¹⁴ Cultural transfer found fault with the usual with the usual ways of addressing issues of influence between different cultures — approaches in the field of comparative literature, for example, were predicated on the existence of national literatures that were distinct in their essences, which in turn presupposed “des aires culturelles closes” (“closed cultural spheres”). Especially in the early modern period before modern ideas about nationalism took hold in Europe, this style of approach seemed not to address many of the questions at the heart of the question of influence. In essence, “the comparison focuses on territories without thinking about the notion of borders.”¹⁵ Even so, why use the term cultural transfer? As Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel explains, one of the main benefits of the label lies in its emphasis on movement and transformation:

One would object that there's nothing new: historiography has already considered the question of influences. Isn't the theory of transfers just a disguised return to the old story of mindsets? Actually, the innovation exists in another domain. The work done on cultural transfers doesn't emphasize so much the basic fact of importation as it does the issues that importation disguises, the strategies that drive it, and the types of competition that it provokes. This method calls for two analyses: that of the contexts in which a transfer is welcomed and then abandoned; and that of its vectors. Travelers, translators, teachers, transplanted artisans, musicians, merchants... those who traffic between cultures are productive in a culturally diverse way. Cultural importation makes it possible, then, to either justify or call into question existing relationships within the importing country.¹⁶

¹⁴ “*Il existe une histoire française de l'Allemagne, allemande de la France, distincte ou du moins beaucoup plus large que celle de leur simple relation.*” Espagne 4.

¹⁵ “*La comparaison porte sur des territoires, sans réfléchir sur la notion de frontière.*” Joyeux-Prunel 152.

¹⁶ “*Rien de nouveau, objecterait-on : l'historiographie s'est déjà posé la question des influences. La théorie des transferts ne masquerait-elle pas un retour à la vieille histoire des mentalités ? L'innovation est en fait ailleurs. Les travaux sur les transferts culturels n'insistent pas tant sur le fait d'une importation que sur les enjeux qu'elle masque, les stratégies qui la motivent et les concurrences qu'elle suscite. La méthode insiste sur deux analyses : celle des contextes d'accueil et de départ d'un transfert ; et celle de ses vecteurs. Voyageurs, traducteurs, enseignants, artisans émigrés, musiciens, commerçants..., les passeurs entre cultures ont une action*

The benefit of using the term cultural transfer lies in both its flexibility and its emphasis on the back-and-forth of cultural influence, as Joyeux-Prunel puts it above, the role of “travelers, translators, teachers, transplanted artisans, musicians, merchants... those who traffic between cultures.” Although most would agree that Russia borrowed more from French culture than vice-versa, to speak of a one-way relationship leaves out the reflexive and transformational processes at work when one culture assimilates something from another — to say that something is “borrowed” runs the risk of oversimplifying the process.

In the case of France and Russia, this process was at first driven by aspirational motives: admire and therefore be like the French, through imitation. As has been stated, not everyone embraced the aspirational position: some adopted an overtly critical position, which manifested itself within the French as well as the Russian cohort. As much of the aspirational motive ultimately bent toward the opposite pole of resistance and rejection of French influence, such reflexive process of self-criticism eventually turned the process of imitation into one of transformation. To understand this process, it is necessary to consider the essential questions of who is imitating whom, in what way, and why? Further, one must identify the results or outcomes of such an effort.

Joyeux-Prunel specifically mentions travelers as an important category of people taking part in the process of cultural transfer; in his work Wolff too focuses on the role of the travel text. The popularity of the travel text for the educated public was beginning to reach newly high levels during the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. As Andreas Schönle

productrice de variété culturelle. L'importation culturelle permet alors de justifier ou de mettre en question des relations existantes dans le pays importateur.” Joyeux-Prunel 153.

documents in his history of the Russian literary travelogue, travel to the West began to increase under Peter the Great, especially state-sponsored travel for educational purposes. This in turn meant an increase in Russian travel texts, the production of which really began to increase under Catherine, as educational travel abroad became rare after Peter's death, and she sought to reverse that trend. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, "[Nikolai] Karamzin's *Letters* alone [had gone] through seven editions. V. Sopikov's 1816 *Essay of a Russian Bibliography* refers to 105 translated and original books published under the title *Journey of...* during the years 1751-1812, half of which came out in the first decade of the nineteenth century."¹⁷ This was not true just in Russia. In his *Letters of a Russian Traveler* Karamzin (1766-1826) observed that there were seven thousand travel books in the king's library in Paris, to give just one anecdotal example.¹⁸ These travel texts were often different in tone and scope from their counterparts from earlier periods, both in style and content. As knowledge of Western Europe increased and sentimentalism became fashionable, travelers began to emphasize both their cosmopolitan sophistication and their emotional responses to what they experienced. In general, "what emerged is a curiosity for ordinary life, for the values and institutions that organize everyday behavior—which represents, according to the philosopher Charles Taylor, one of the ingredients of the modern identity, as opposed to, say, a traditional Christian outlook, which dismissed ordinary life as sinful and irrelevant."¹⁹ Another change that is especially relevant to and will be brought to bear on this study is one scholar's observation that, "a review of texts from the Petrine

¹⁷ Schönle 3-6.

¹⁸ Wilson ix.

¹⁹ Schönle 3.

era demonstrates that elite travel writing at the beginning of the century rarely focused on issues of national identity or emphasized the importance of national character.”²⁰

In his work on Russia’s role in the intellectual life of eighteenth-century France, Dimitri Von Mohrenschildt summarizes well the general categories of French visitors to Russia in the latter half of that century, particularly during the reign of Catherine. During this time, the admiration of France by Russia reached a high point and was informed by the visits to Russia by French literary and intellectual luminaries, artists, diplomats, professionals, and other travelers who came out of sheer curiosity. There are important distinctions to be made among those who traveled to Russia at the invitation of Catherine (usually men of intellectual or artistic import — the *philosophe* Diderot and the sculptor Falconet being two well-known examples), those who came as official representatives of the French government, and finally, those who were neither. Perhaps because they came at Catherine’s request and typically spent their entire stay at the Russian court, the first group of visitors had nothing but praise for Catherine while taking a very dim view of all other aspects of Russia and its people. French diplomats, by contrast, generally held a much more negative view of Catherine, perhaps because diplomatic relations between the two governments were often strained. The third category of visitors, those who were neither invited guests of the court nor diplomatic personnel, did not fall as readily into one point of view or the other. They often spent more time out in the cities and country and while their accounts were far from impartial, they tended to produce more balanced accounts of their travels.²¹

²⁰ Dickinson 9.

²¹ Von Mohrenschildt 111-12.

In his study of national consciousness in eighteenth-century Russia, Hans Rogger posits that what was important about eighteenth-century visitors was not Russian contact with foreign ways in and of themselves, but rather “Russian receptivity to such contact. This receptivity was born of the needs of the state and the desires of its servants, and it was more persistent and intense than it had ever been before.”²² The needs of the state were pivotal in encouraging receptivity, but another historian notes that “recent historians of Russian society and culture tend to agree that the modernization process as it unfolded over several centuries in Russia cannot be understood as neatly linear or solely Western.”²³ This assertion would seem to support an interpretation of Russia’s relationship with France that privileges the perspective of cultural transfer and is not, in fact, a matter of national identity. As will be shown, contemporary travelers from France had a very different point of view.

Russian “genius,” or the talent for imitation

Travelers to Russia differed in background and status, were motivated to travel for varying reasons, and often expressed contradictory opinions of what they observed once there. However, whether they fell into the category of invited luminary, diplomat, or interested traveler, visitors of this time period remarked in a consistent way on the Russian capacity for imitation. It is important to consider why so many of them commented on what many saw as a talent or gift, a mark of Russian “genius,” and the frequency of these comments warrants a closer inspection in order to contextualize contemporary concepts of what it meant to imitate. For example, a French

²² Rogger 6.

²³ Schuler 11. To support her point, here she cites works by Simon Dixon (*The Modernization of Russia 1676-1825*), James Cracraft (*The Petrine Revolution in Russian Culture*) and Richard Wortman (*Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in Russian Monarchy from Peter the Great to the Abdication of Nicholas II*).

diplomat at the court of Empress Elizabeth, Claude Carloman de Rulhière notes in his correspondence with Rousseau from 1763: “The distinguishing character trait of this people is precisely the genius, or more generally, the talent of imitation...”²⁴ This trait was generally admired, and even French travelers who did not find much else to praise in Russia seemed to approve of the nobility’s “Western” manners. “This is a talent that Russians possess in great quantity, and this is the nation that imitates us for manners more than anything else,” wrote another diplomat, Burée de Corberon, who was posted at the Russian court from 1775 to 1780.²⁵

An early example of similar thinking can be seen in French astronomer Abbé Chappe d’Auteroche’s *A Journey to Siberia* from 1761:

The spirit of invention is as uncommon among the Russians as genius; but they have a peculiar turn for imitation. In Russia, locksmiths, masons, carpenters, etc. are formed as a soldier is in other countries. Each regiment has, in its own corps, all the necessary artists; and is not obliged to have recourse to manufactures, as is the custom every else [*sic.*]. They determine by the stature, what employment a man is most fit for. They give a soldier a lock for a pattern, with orders to make others like it, and he does it with the greatest dexterity; but the original must be perfect, otherwise he would copy it with all its defects, however easy it might be to correct them. The same may be observed with regard to artists and workmen of all kinds.²⁶

Compare Auteroche’s description of a soldier making a copy of a lock with this observation by Englishman Robert Bremner, written almost 80 years later (1839, the same year as the Frenchman Astolphe de Custine, who wrote perhaps the most well-known travel text on Russia from this period) in his *Excursions in the Interior of Russia*. Although he was English and not French, it is noteworthy that Bremner’s description and commentary so closely match those of

²⁴ “*Le caractère distinctif de ce peuple est précisément le génie, ou plus communément le talent de l’imitation...*” Cited in Von Mohrenschildt 67.

²⁵ “*C’est un talent que les Russes possèdent singulièrement, et c’est la nation qui nous imite davantage pour les manières.*” Cited in Von Mohrenschildt 107.

²⁶ Auteroche 331.

his French forebears. This shows both the prevalence and the persistence of this idea. “The facility of imitation possessed by the Russians is another remarkable point in their character,” he writes. “They cannot *invent*, but will *copy* anything you choose to set before them. Say only, I want the match of this; and done it is — as correct a facsimile as could be desired. They will make not only small things in this way, but even large articles of the most complicated construction.”²⁷ He gives the notably more hyperbolic example of a Russian man building a working pianoforte after only having seen such an instrument once.

Bremner also describes a scene apparently witnessed by many travelers whose ships docked at the harbor in Kronstadt on the way to St. Petersburg. All of the “laborers” he observes in Kronstadt still wear the long beards banned by Peter and, “knowing that these appendages are subjects of astonishment to strangers, they never pass an English ship without some drollery, such as bleating in long and helpless tones like a goat, with which the beard gives them title to clam kindred. In fact Russian peasants are excellent mimics, and in every way very merry, contented fellows.”²⁸

Even those French travelers who took a more nuanced view than the Abbé Chappe d’Auteroche, whose observations were refuted in a pamphlet written by Catherine herself, remarked on imitation. Among them was Madame de Staël, the famed Frenchwoman who was exiled from France by Napoleon around 1804 and spent part of her ten years abroad in Russia. “It cannot be repeated too often that this nation is composed of the most striking contrasts,”

²⁷ Bremner 141.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

wrote Madame de Staël in her memoir *Dix années d'exil (Ten Years of Exile)*.²⁹ Her reflections on her time in Russia convey an attitude that is more sympathetic toward the Russians than what was expressed other French travelers of her era, perhaps in part due to the circumstances by which she found herself there. In general, she sees the Russian people in more than one facet — in “des contrastes,” sometimes contradictory. She does not simplify them to a particular genre or type, and even describes a “véritable Russe” (“genuine Russian”) as being “impetuous, brave, confident, and not at all led by the spirit of imitation.”³⁰ Even so, she still documents the Russians’ mimetic talents. “They were often compared to the French,” she writes, “and this comparison seems to me the most false in the world. The flexibility of their organs makes imitation in all matters very easy; they are English, French, German in their manners as circumstances require.”³¹ Thus, even for a French visitor who was willing to admit that there were varied and admirable qualities in the Russian character and had mostly positive things to say about her time there, Madame de Staël still felt that the Russians excelled at imitation.

But what did Russians themselves think of these observations? In *Letters from a Russian Traveler*, Karamzin found that “the French were even worse [than other Western European cultures], combining a condescension towards the Russians as students of their culture with

²⁹ “On ne saurait trop le répéter, cette nation est composée des contrastes les plus frappants.” Staël 297.

³⁰ “impétueux, brave, confiant, et nullement dirigé par l’esprit d’imitation” Ibid., 284. The “genuine Russian” in question was General Mikhail Andreyevich Miloradovich, who was well known during his service in the Napoleonic Wars.

³¹ “On les a souvent comparés à des Français et cette comparaison me semble la plus fausse du monde. La flexibilité de leurs organes leur rend l’imitation en toutes choses très facile; ils sont Anglais, Français, Allemands, dans leurs manières, selon que les circonstances les y appellent.” Ibid., 298.

contempt for them as ‘monkeys who know only how to imitate.’”³² Furthermore, what did they think of French behavior? Some Russians drew a direct connection between the French love of theater and affectedness in their manners. Alexander Nikitenko, an educated serf who was later freed and worked as a censor under Nicholas I, wrote of the French in his diary that, “They seem to have been born with a love of theater and a bent to create it — they were created for showmanship. Emotions, principles, honor, revolution are all treated as play, as games.”³³ Later on, even “Dostoevsky agreed that the French had a unique talent for ‘simulating emotions and feelings for nature,’” in his *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*.³⁴ However, in his travels to France (1777-1778), Fonvizin himself observed that many of the same things could be said about Russians in Russia: “In general one can say that between the two nations there is a strong resemblance, not only in facial appearances but also in customs and manners. In particular it is fantastic how the people here resemble ours. In the streets one hears the same cries as at home and the women are dressed the same.”³⁵

Thus, it is not only the imitation of Western manners or the mechanical imitation of locks and pianofortes that the visitors defined and remarked upon as a “genius” for imitation. In a chapter on “popular amusements” in Russia, the Englishman Bremner connects the Russian capacity for imitation directly to the theater and especially comic theater: “These qualities of imitation and liveliness make them excellent actors. They are born comedians; even the most

³² Figes 63.

³³ Ibid., 65.

³⁴ Ibid., 65-66.

³⁵ “On peut dire, en général, qu’entre les deux nations il y a une très grande ressemblance, non seulement dans les physionomies, mais dans les coutumes et les manières. En particulier, c’est fantastique comme le peuple d’ici ressemble au nôtre. Dans les rues, ce sont les mêmes cris que chez nous et les femmes s’habillent pareillement.” *Lettres de France* 65.

vulgar of them showing a strong passion for everything dramatic. On the stage, consequently, they are extremely natural, and keep the audience in constant laughter.”³⁶ Russians make good actors because they excel at conducting themselves theatrically in daily life (cf., Bremner’s description of “goats,” above). Although in this instance the Russians in question are imitating goats rather than Frenchmen, the way the two types of imitation are described is noticeably similar.³⁷

Travel texts such as these can be read through a dual lens, as factual chronicle on the one hand, and as work of literature on the other. In both instances, however, the question of verisimilitude comes into play. In her study of an early example of French women’s travel writing, Nathalie Hester posits that: “A principal point of travel narratives is to represent that which is foreign, unusual, and perhaps, to many readers, apparently hyperbolic. How, then, can discourse satisfy the expectations of the public — their notions of believability — while at the same time introducing behaviors, events, and information that are expected to be removed from the public’s experience?”³⁸ In her analysis of Russian travel texts from the eighteenth century, Sara Dickinson emphasizes that it did not take a long time for individual observations to become tropes, and then for “the awareness of aesthetic rules, formulae, and prescriptions” to become equated with good taste.³⁹ Thus, Hester’s question acquires a different kind of relevance with regard to what Western Europeans have to say about Russians’ capacity and talent for imitation,

³⁶ Bremner 144.

³⁷ It is interesting to note that this capacity for imitation seemingly transcends class barriers. While Bremner and Auteroche are describing peasants, diplomats such as Corberon and Rulhière are describing the nobility and the educated class.

³⁸ Hester 95.

³⁹ Dickinson 13, 19.

something which is remarked upon so often in Western accounts that it seemingly becomes a nationalism-tinged literary trope. Schönle differentiates between “literary and non-literary travelogues” by noting that what distinguishes the literary travel text is its intertextual connections with its antecedents, such as those among Sterne (*A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*), Dupaty (*Letters on Italy*) and Karamzin. “They signal not only that the depiction of the world has already been mediated through textual models, but also that what matters in the text is this approximation of models.”⁴⁰

The fact that the two descriptions by Auteroche and Bremner cited above are almost identical provides an interesting twist on what Hester, paraphrasing Jean-Frédéric Schaub, calls “the surprise of the already known” that travel texts offer.⁴¹ In her formulation, readers of travel accounts are looking to have their suspicions confirmed even as they are reading about ostensibly about foreign places and peoples. Readers of multiple travel texts on Russia are similarly surprised by their intertextuality and the closeness with which they imitate each other — a kind of doubling effect of the surprise of the already known as one gets the feeling that one has read this or that passage before.⁴²

Although most French travelers to Russia were quick to praise the Russian capacity for imitation, there existed a parallel set of negative observations regarding this same trait that Rulhière praised as the Russian “genius.” In a set of comments Diderot wrote on Catherine’s

⁴⁰ Schönle 8-9.

⁴¹ Hester 95.

⁴² Scholars have also observed this tendency in Russian travel texts. Orlando Figes notes that “the terms Fonvizin used to characterize Europe [in his letters from the 1770s] appeared with extraordinary regularity in subsequent Russian travel writing,” including in Herzen and Dostoevsky (Figes 65).

Nakaz, he strongly advises against Russians traveling to Western Europe to receive an education: “Those Russians who have traveled have brought to their country the folly of the nations where they traveled, nothing of their wisdom, all of their vices, none of their virtues, and I believe that the young gentlemen corrupt more youths than they instruct.”⁴³ The Duc de Richelieu, a royalist who left France during the French Revolution and eventually served as a high-ranking officer in the Russian Imperial Army, would have agreed with regard to the influence of the French within Russia’s borders. “I did my best,” he wrote in his journal, “to devote myself, in my posture, my professional activities, my words, ten years more than my age, to deceive the Russian nation into believing that there existed a Frenchman measured in his ways, moderate in his discourse, approving rather than rebellious.”⁴⁴ Despite his use of the word “deceive” (*tromper*), it is clear that the Duc de Richelieu saw himself as one of the few scrupulous Frenchmen in Russia.

Voltaire, who conducted extensive correspondence with Catherine the Great and wrote a two-volume history of Peter the Great (despite never having traveled farther east than Berlin), might well have agreed with Diderot’s advice. In 1760 he published “The Russian in Paris,” an imagined dialogue in verse between a Parisian and a Russian traveler to Paris written by a “M.

⁴³ “*Ceux des Russes qui ont voyagé ont apporté à leur patrie la folie des nations qu’ils ont parcouru, rien de leur sagesse, tous leurs vices, aucune des leurs vertus, et je crois que les jeunes seigneurs corrompent plus de jeunes qu’ils n’en instruisent.*” Cited in Von Mohrenschildt 82. Indeed, sometimes Russians were actually prevented from studying abroad: “In his memoirs, Prince Ivan Mikhailovich Dolgorukov tells how, in 1777, he was prevented from studying in Paris and enrolled at the University of Moscow, for the reasons just mentioned” (“Dans ses souvenirs, le prince Ivan Mikhaïlovich Dolgoroukov raconte comment, en 1777, on l’a empêché d’aller étudier à Paris et inscrit à l’Université de Moscou, pour les raisons que nous venons d’indiquer”; Berelowitch viii).

⁴⁴ “*Je m’efforçai à me donner dans mon maintien, mes occupations, mes paroles, dix ans de plus que mon âge, à tromper la nation russe en lui faisant croire qu’il existait un Français mesuré dans ses manières, modéré dans ses discours, approbateur plutôt que frondeur.*” Cited in Haumant 51.

Ivan Alethof.”⁴⁵ (It is worth nothing that this poem was written between the publication of the two volumes of his work on Peter the Great, which appeared in 1759 and 1763.)⁴⁶ In the dialogue, the Parisian tries to explain to the Russian that there is not as much to learn in Paris as he might have hoped. The Russian seems dismayed to hear this:

Everything becomes a bit corrupted, if I’ve understood you.
But is there nothing illustrious in your debris, at least?
Is Minerva banished from these places?
Among a hundred noble minds is there no genius?⁴⁷

But the Parisian has already said it all with his initial rhetorical question to the Russian traveler: “What can you learn on the shores of the Occident?”⁴⁸

Thus, Russians may have been great imitators, but according to Diderot, Voltaire and other Europeans, they were imitating all the wrong things. This of course echoes some of the general Enlightenment thought (particularly Rousseau’s writings) on both the corrupting influence of education and the idea of “noble savage,” but more importantly, it exemplifies the duality of French opinion on Russian aspirations, as outlined above.

Voltaire’s aforementioned two-volume history of Peter the Great treated its subject in a positive way. Rousseau’s view and, therefore, treatment were different. In *The Social Contract*, he takes issue with Voltaire’s adulatory characterization of Peter the Great, of whom he says,

⁴⁵ The name “Alethof” is likely a derivative of the Greek word *aletheia*, meaning “truth,” and implying sincerity and openness. This type of “characteristic” name is itself a feature of classicist plays and a classicist convention that was borrowed by many Russian playwrights.

⁴⁶ Wolff 96-97.

⁴⁷ “*Tout se corrompt un peu, si je vous ai compris./ Mais n’est-il rien d’illustre au moins dans vos débris?/ Minerve de ces lieux serait-elle bannie?/ Parmi cent beaux esprits n’est-il plus de génie?*” Voltaire 237.

⁴⁸ “*Aux bords de l’occident que pouvez-vous apprendre?*” Ibid., 230.

Peter had a genius for imitation; but he lacked true genius, which is creative and makes all from nothing. He did some good things, but most of what he did was out of place. He saw that his people was barbarous, but did not see that it was ripe for civilization: he wanted to civilize it when it needed only hardening.⁴⁹

In general, Rousseau downgrades the Russian people:

There is for nations, as for men, a youth, or, shall we say, maturity, before which they should not be made subject to laws; [...] One people is amenable to discipline from the beginning; another, not after ten centuries. Russia will never be civilized, because it was civilized too soon.⁵⁰

What the French (and English) visitors observed and commented on was what the scholar Yuri Lotman would later interpret as the “ritualization and semioticization” of the manner of Russian elites. As Russia’s rulers and its elite gradually looked more and more to the West for guidance on cultural and behavioral conventions, Lotman writes that, “the area which is normally left to the unconscious, ‘natural’ behavior became something to be learnt,” and thus, it became total artifice: a true “sign” in the semiotic meaning of the word.⁵¹ Corberon might very well have agreed with Lotman’s assessment. “In place of our urbanity,” he wrote in his journal, “they have adopted our grimaces and taken licentiousness and foolishness for the facility and pleasing fashion of society.”⁵² Even some Russians agreed with this assessment. An anonymous Russian writing about St. Petersburg in 1810 pessimistically notes that, “We can adopt the

⁴⁹ *The Social Contract* 49.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Lotman 232-33.

⁵² “*Au lieu de notre urbanité ils ont adopté nos grimaces et pris la licence et les sottises pour l’aisance et le ton plaisant de la société.*” Cited in Von Mohrenschildt 106.

fashions and exterior aspects of the French, but we will never have their vivacity, nor their excellent imaginativeness, nor their social temperament.”⁵³

⁵³ “*Nous pouvons prendre les modes et l’aspect extérieur des Français, mais nous n’aurons jamais ni leur vivacité, ni leur riche fantaisie, ni leur humeur sociale.*” Cited in Haumant 221.

CHAPTER II: IMITATION: CRITICAL AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Imitation and theatricality

In her book *Theatre and Identity in Imperial Russia*, theater scholar Catherine Schuler introduces her topic by drawing a connection between the travel text and the theatrical. She quotes from Custine, who, after observing the nobles at Nicholas I's court decided he could not criticize Russians for being an "uncultivated" people, but he could reproach them for trying to imitate Western manners. "I see them incessantly occupied with the desire of mimicking other nations, and this they do after the true manner of monkeys, caricaturing what they copy."⁵⁴ While acknowledging that Custine's viewpoint, as a Frenchman, is undoubtedly prejudiced, she also finds a kernel of truth in his attitude.⁵⁵ The theatrical metaphors in travel texts such as Custine's and the others discussed in the preceding section are one supporting example of Schuler's central thesis that "both figuratively and factually, theater and performance were key components of a revolution in Russian culture and society" that began with Peter I's modernization efforts and continued throughout the imperial period.⁵⁶ While this study concerns both a shorter time period and a narrower set of examples, this connection between theater and the concept of behavioral theatricality is important to explore in order to understand not only the theatrical texts

⁵⁴ Custine 134. Cited in Schuler 1.

⁵⁵ The observations of the thoroughly Frenchified character Korsakov in Pushkin's unfinished novel "The Moor of Peter the Great" are an interesting fictional counterpart to Custine's comments. (The title character, Ibrahim, is loosely based on Pushkin's great-grandfather.) Having just returned from Paris, Korsakov expects an evening at Peter's court to be a pale imitation of French functions, but is surprised when he is criticized for not knowing proper dancing etiquette and is subsequently ridiculed by Peter while "drain[ing] the Goblet of the Great Eagle" as a punishment. Cleverly, Pushkin mocks both the Russian predilection for foreign models while also mocking those such as Korsakov who think that having lived in France makes them experts on correct behavior (Pushkin 18-22).

⁵⁶ Schuler 1.

themselves, but also the contemporary cultural context in which these pieces of theater were created, performed and interpreted.

The connection between the theater created on the stage and the performative aspects of daily life has been explored by numerous scholars of various disciplines, and here it is helpful to review some of the major works on this topic in order to gain a broader view of the theoretical approaches that can be applied to questions of theatricality and its relation to imitation.

The concept of mimesis has existed since Plato and Aristotle theorized about the relationship of art to nature, and over time the word has come to refer to a broad range concepts that have been the subject of critical inquiries in various fields. An enduringly flexible concept, mimesis can prove useful any time imitation or mimicry is addressed, whether the question concerns how various art forms represent reality, how people and societies behave, or the way the human mind works, to give just a few possibilities. An important distinction for the purposes of this study is the difference between literary mimesis and cultural mimesis, as both will be addressed.

Perhaps the most important work on literary mimesis, that is, the representation of reality in literature, is Erich Auerbach's sweeping history *Mimesis* in which he tackles the changing forms of literary mimesis from the ancient Greeks through the nineteenth century. His chapter on Molière ("Le Faux Dévot") is of particular interest here not only due to the subject matter, but also due to his contention that in his comedies "Molière is much less concerned with character types, he is much more intent upon rendering the individual reality, than the majority of the

moralists of his century.”⁵⁷ For example, Molière’s famous hypocrite Tartuffe is not an abstract character composed of typical, hypocritical traits because he is hardly “the embodiment of an intelligent self-disciplined hypocrite.” Tartuffe is far too concerned with baser pleasures, and he appears only to have become a bigot because “it seems to promise results and despite the fact that it is not becoming to him at all and clashes with his inner nature and outward appearance.”⁵⁸ These incongruities in his character are a large part of what strikes the audience as particularly funny about him. Auerbach’s postulation can equally be applied to the characters of the bourgeois gentleman and the misanthrope. The disconnection between inner nature and outward appearance, as Auerbach puts it, will become even more important later on in this study.

Analysis of the aspects of individual reality present in Molière’s comic characters leads Auerbach into a discussion of how much greater the limits placed on realism are in classical tragedy, because it is the most elevated theatrical style, whereas comedy is an “intermediate” style. In his view, the tragic personage is obsessed by his exalted role and its divorce from baser reality. He “is always in a sublime posture, in the foreground, surrounded by utensils, retinue, people, landscape, and universe, as by so many trophies of victory which serve it or are at its disposal,” and this break is heightened even further by classical French playwrights’ adherence to the Aristotelian unities of time, place and action.⁵⁹ Auerbach’s emphasis on the physical minutiae of the aristocrat — the “utensils, retinue, people, landscape” — is interesting from a semiotic standpoint as it introduces even another layer of artificiality and separation into the

⁵⁷ Auerbach 361.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 374-75.

tragic character's world. Thus, he concludes, for playwrights such as Racine, "being a prince is much rather a posture, an 'attitude,' than a practical function."⁶⁰

Auerbach's discussion of Molière and classical French tragedy dovetails nicely with the work of Lotman and other semioticians concerned with cultural practices, such as Roland Barthes. Lotman in particular often takes the development of Russian cultural idioms in the imperial period as his subject and a jumping-off point from which to explore the pragmatic consequences of cultural influence. In his well-known essay "The Decembrist in Everyday Life," he argues convincingly through textual analysis that the men who would go on to take part in the 1825 Decembrist revolt consciously modeled their behavior on tragic heroes of classical literary texts, such as Hector and the Horatii. Lotman connects this to the beginnings of Romanticism, though the heroic models in this case were often classical: "In a Romantic work of the new type of personal behavior emerges on the pages of a text and is transferred from there to real life," the exact opposite of literary realism.⁶¹ He thus argues that one of the most important contributions of the Decembrists to Russian culture was their creation of a completely new type of man whose attitude "meant that *every* act had to be seen to be significant, to deserve the memory of posterity and the attention of historians, and to be of the utmost value."⁶² This led to a certain theatricality of behavior, but one that differed from the theatricality of courtly life because it in no way "implies insincerity or any other negative characteristics. It is simply an indication of the fact that the behavior has acquired a certain sense beyond that of real life, that has become a subject

⁶⁰ Auerbach 377.

⁶¹ Lotman 87-88.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 114.

of attention, in which value is attached not the acts themselves, but to their symbolic meaning.”⁶³ He is like Auerbach’s proverbial tragic prince, but the Decembrist’s posture is meant to represent deeper ideological meaning, and as Auerbach notes, it is critical to remember that these influential cultural idioms did not exist in a vacuum. “The fact that the seventeenth century considered Racine’s art not only masterly and overpoweringly effective but also reasonable, in accord with common sense, natural, and probable,” he writes, “can only be understood in terms of the period’s own perspective.”⁶⁴ Definitions of what is “natural” in both art and human behavior have been changing throughout time.

One could say that linguistically, the Decembrists rebelled against what Schuler calls the “compulsory mimesis” of the aristocratic milieu. This compulsory mimesis was not only behavioral but also specifically linguistic. French was for all intents and purposes the first language of many members of the nobility and the educated classes not only in Russia but also across Europe, and to apply a modern conception of nationalism, where language is tantamount to national identity, to this historical period is simplistic. In reality, pragmatism was the main reason for such widespread use of French, and as scholars of the development of nationalism such as Benedict Anderson and E. J. Hobsbawm have shown, the idea that one’s language is inextricably linked to a primordial national identity — one of the hallmarks of modern, essentialist nationalism — was not fully developed until later in the nineteenth century, although thinkers such as Herder (in his 1772 *Treatise on the Origin of Language*) were, in fact, writing

⁶³ Lotman 81.

⁶⁴ Auerbach 388.

about the connection between language and nation in the eighteenth century.⁶⁵ Despite the pragmatism of French use, many Russians still felt there was something artificial about this linguistic mimesis. Sofia Kvoshchinskaia, who was a schoolgirl in the 1830s at an institute for well-bred young women outside Moscow, describes a typical scene between two young classmates in her memoirs:

The two girls were talking about their idols. One of them had said: ‘Elle est belle comme, je ne sais, a queen.’ The other replied: “Je l’aime comme, je ne sais, an angel.’ The point is that the Russian words [queen, angel] described her qualities more fully, but to be able to use the Russian words they had to qualify them with the words ‘je ne sais,’ otherwise they would be punished for violating the French-only rule and have a cardboard tongue pinned to their backs. When I too started saying such things, I used the same dialect. The words of praise might sound weaker, but they were safer. The cardboard tongue felt like a cockroach crawling up and down my back.”⁶⁶

What Kvoshchinskaia describes so vividly is the feeling of awkwardness and putative dishonesty of compulsory mimesis for many, as French words are inexact simulacra for the concepts the girls mean to express and they struggle to overcome the disconnection between inner nature and outward appearance.

To add more complexity to the mimetic role of the French language in Russian culture, as the historian James Billington notes, “French culture often reached Russia through intermediaries.”⁶⁷ This can be interpreted as the imposition of another level of artificiality (cf., Lotman’s ideas on the ritualization of everyday behavior) at the height of the transfer of French

⁶⁵ See Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 2006. Print.; Hobsbawm, Eric. *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992. Print.

⁶⁶ Clyman and Vowles 82.

⁶⁷ The idea of *relations triangulaires* forms a significant aspect of cultural transfer theory. For example, see the essays in Espagne, Michel, and Katia Dmitrieva, eds. *Transferts culturels triangulaires France-Allemagne-Russie*. Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l’homme, 1996. Print.

culture into Russian aristocratic circles during Catherine's reign. Theater, including that of Molière, played a large role in this. Billington writes:

Catherine herself acquired her own taste for things French during her education in Germany; the first systematic Russian translations of French works were by the German "Normanist" Gerhard Friedrich Miller, in a Russian journal which was an imitation of German imitations and Addison and Steele; Molière reached Russia largely through Baltic intermediaries, and his influence on Russian satire of Catherine's day was mixed in with that of Ludvig Holberg, "the Danish Molière." The Russian word for "French" is derived from German and the word for "Paris" from Italian.⁶⁸

This illustrates well the challenge of trying to tease apart cultural influence and practices when one is concerned with concepts of imitation.

While semoticians such as Lotman draw from both literature and historical examples and thus their work straddles the line between being a discourse on literary or cultural mimesis, cultural mimesis has also been studied from a different angle by sociologists and anthropologists, one that privileges real-world applications of these concepts. In his landmark work *The Civilizing Process*, the sociologist Norbert Elias posits that Western civilization began with self-consciousness. This school of thinking has come to be called process sociology, as Elias emphasizes the webs of individual actions and behaviors that effect "civilizing" change at a scale far greater than any one individual's set of actions could. Civilization is not an end result: although we might consider our ancestors' manners barbaric, we are not the pinnacle of civilization, and it is just as likely that future generations will consider us uncouth.

Relevant for the purposes of this study are the parts of Elias' work that address the effect of cultural hegemony — such as the influence of France and its culture throughout the eighteenth century — on this process. He emphasizes the connection in this time with civilization and

⁶⁸ Billington 218.

“civility,” citing the French marquis de Mirabeau, who was perhaps the first to connect the verb *civiliser* with the concept of *civilisation*. Mirabeau notes (in the 1760s) that this connection seems specious:

If they were asked what civilization is, most people would answer: softening of manner, urbanity, politeness, and a dissemination of knowledge such that propriety is established in place of laws of detail: all that only presents me with the mask of virtue and not its face, and civilization does nothing for society if it does not give it both the form and the substance of virtue.⁶⁹

In a section of *The Civilizing Process* titled “Literary Examples of the Relationship of the German Middle-Class Intelligentsia to the Court,” Elias reprints an aphorism from the German scientist and satirist Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742-1799) that mirrors, within Lichtenberg’s cultural context, the later words of Kvozhchinskaia by delineating what he saw as the difference between the French word *promesse* and the German *Versprechung*:

The latter is kept and not the former. The usefulness of French words in German. I am surprised that it has not been noticed. The French word gives the German idea with an admixture of humbug, or in its court meaning. ... A discovery (*Erfindung*) is something new and a *découverte* something old with a new name. Columbus discovered (*entdeckte*) America and it was Americus Vesputius’s *découverte*. Indeed, *goût* and taste (*Geschmack*) are almost antithetical, and people of *goût* seldom have much taste.⁷⁰

Echoing Mirabeau, Lichtenberg's aphorism shows the idea that there was an inherent falseness to the use of French, and that this type of compulsory mimesis was not strictly a problem faced by upper class Russians.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Cited in Elias 33-34.

⁷⁰ Cited in Elias 27. The modern form of the aphorism has its roots in the French philosophical tradition of writers such as La Rochefoucauld and Pascal, and thus, like so much else in this time period, questions of and reactions to cultural influence and imitation are complicated.

⁷¹ In 1848, the prominent Slavophile Konstantin Aksakov (1817-1860) wrote about the difference between *narod* (“the people”) and *publika* (“the public,” but with a connotation of polite society versus the “mob” of *narod*) in much the same way: “The *publika* is above the

Literary examples have also been successfully used by those in the social sciences, whose work is not primarily concerned with the analysis of literary texts but rather with that of broader cultural processes such as behavior and manners. In his work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, sociologist Erving Goffman also draws heavily from the Western philosophic tradition. This work is relevant here in that Goffman uses a “dramaturgical perspective” to analyze how people present themselves in everyday interactions; theater and performance serves as an extended metaphor and source of vocabulary for Goffman to support his thesis that people seek to control the impressions they give off to others in face-to-face interactions much in the way an actor might control his performance on stage. Thus, according to Goffman, there is an inherent layer of artificiality in many types of interactions. He cites a famous passage from Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* to illustrate this. Sartre is observing a waiter serving customers in a café when he realizes there is something interesting about the way the waiter behaves:

His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer. [...] All his behavior seems to us a game. He applies himself to chaining his movements as if they were mechanisms, the one regulating the other; his gestures and even his voice seem to be mechanisms; he gives himself the quickness and pitiless rapidity of things. He is playing, he is amusing himself. But what is he playing? We need not watch long before we can explain it: he is playing at being a waiter in a cafe.⁷²

narod, as if a privileged expression of it, whereas in fact *publika* is a distortion of the idea of *narod*. . . . The *publika* speaks French, the *narod*, Russian.” (“Публика является над народом, как будто его привилегированное выражение, в самом же деле публика есть искажение идеи народа. . . . Публика говорит по-французски, народ по-русски.”) To Aksakov, the idea of a *publika* was an imported, wholly Western construction.

⁷² Cited in Goffman 75.

For Sartre the waiter ultimately becomes an example of *mauvaise foi* (“bad faith”); societal pressures cause him to act inauthentically and therefore give up his freedom. But for Goffman it does not necessarily matter whether a performance is spurious. Both honest and dishonest actors “must take care to enliven their performances with appropriate expressions, exclude from their performances expressions that might discredit the impression being fostered, and take care lest the audience impute unintended meanings. Because of these shared dramatic contingencies, we can profitably study performances that are quite false in order to learn about ones that are quite honest.”⁷³ The connection between this passage and the work of semoticians is also clear, as use of signs is crucial in both.

This brings us back to what Richard Stites called “the desiccating effect” of the emphasis on form over content in aristocratic society, with the form being modeled on the French. He cites several telling examples from contemporary Russian writers, of which the most vivid — in its use of a theatrical metaphor that would not be out of place in Goffman — is a passage from Karamzin, writing in 1790:

It is at social gatherings that one enjoys friends least. Such occasions are not designed for discussion, conversation, or display of sentiment. Each person must say only a word in passing, and then move aside so as to yield the stage to others. Everyone is uneasy lest he say something indiscreet and thus reveal his ignorance of good form. In short, this is a perpetual vicious comedy that goes by the name of social necessity, a comedy without meaning and above all without interest.⁷⁴

⁷³ Goffman 66.

⁷⁴ Cited in Stites 17.

CHAPTER III: SATIRE, PERFORMANCE AND ADAPTATION IN THE THEATER

On the societal stage, people select and observe models, imitate their appearance and behaviors, and in so doing may undergo transformation and become something different. In some cases, the model selected may actually be an actor representing a character in a play. On the theatrical stage, actors take on roles in which they imitate appearance and behaviors, an exercise that gives the illusion of transformation and difference. When the play involves satire, an added dimension comes with actors not simply representing (or imitating), but also ridiculing what they are representing. This type of representation is not straightforward, as through the means of satire it transforms to something else, namely, a critique. The critique may be overt or subtle, but it is present nonetheless. As will be demonstrated, in Molière's *The Bourgeois Gentleman* and *The Misanthrope*, Fonvizin's *The Brigadier* and *The Minor*, and Griboedov's *Woe from Wit*, the critique that comes through satire is aimed, whether directly or indirectly, at the problem of imitation. These works represent well how in society as well as theater, the behaviors that are copied and ultimately critiqued are both linguistic and gestural.

Thus, both societal actors and stage actors enable or become something else through performing roles based in actions and words. Their displayed behavior and appearance bring about the kind of compulsory mimesis discussed by Schuler. And whether the context of the compulsory mimesis is that of the theater or the court, the continuum of reactions from aspiration to the complete rejection is clearly present, as excerpts from texts cited in the previous chapter demonstrate. Once again, between the endpoints of aspiration and rejection runs the reflexive process of self-criticism that is integral to the process of cultural transfer.

The textual analysis that follows will take as its point of departure two well-known Molière characters who navigate the problem of imitation in drastically different fashion. First there is Monsieur Jourdain, the *bourgeois gentilhomme* who uses his money to try to purchase the trappings of nobility so that nobles such as Dorante and Dorimène will accept him as an equal. Jourdain embodies the idea of aspirational imitation. At the other end of the continuum resides Alceste, Molière's misanthrope who values sincerity at the expense of all the behaviors expected of someone at the French court. He rejects compulsory mimesis, especially in the process of pursuing of Celimène's affections. The analysis will then take Fonvizin's characters, especially Ivan in *The Brigadier*, as the basis for comparison with *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, and Griboedov's *Woe from Wit* for comparison with Molière's *Misanthrope*. As will be shown, Fonvizin and Griboedov's characters, like Molière's, must navigate the problem of imitation, albeit with the added facet of specific criticism of the chosen Russian model for imitation: France.

Molière has proven to be a flexible and durable influence on Russian theater, and both Fonvizin and Griboedov were familiar with his oeuvre. Fonvizin wrote with enthusiasm to multiple correspondents of seeing a production of Molière's *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac* on his trip to France, where "comedy has been elevated to the highest possible degree of perfection."⁷⁵ In an 1825 letter to fellow dramatist P. A. Katenin, Griboedov cites Molière's talent in creating

⁷⁵ "La comédie a été élevée ici au plus haut degré possible de perfection." Interestingly, Fonvizin continues here by commenting on how well the French performances imitate nature: "It is impossible in seeing [a performance] to not become lulled to the point of considering it a true story currently unfolding. I had never imagined that I would see such a perfect imitation of nature." ("*Impossible en la regardant, de ne pas se laisser entraîner au point de la considérer comme une histoire vraie qui se déroule actuellement. Je ne m'étais jamais imaginé que je verrais une imitation si parfaite de la nature*"; *Lettres de France* 139).

character types (*portrety*; “portraits”) that resonated with audiences: “And I, if I don’t possess the talent of Molière, then I am at least than more frank than he.”⁷⁶ Molière's cultural presence in Russia will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

While there is not an established critical tradition of comparing Fonvizin’s characters with those of Molière, it should be noted that there is an extensive critical tradition, dating back to the nineteenth century, of comparing *Alceste* with Griboedov’s *Chatsky*. Adrian Wanner gives an interesting overview of this tradition “as a phenomenon of reader response.” In his view, “the strongest link between *Chatsky* and *Alceste* exists less on a textual level, which has been the focus of previous criticism, than in the parallel pattern of (mis)readings generated by the two plays.”⁷⁷ He traces how both Soviet and French scholars used this comparison to pursue nationalistic agendas, the Soviets by dismissing French influence and the French by emphasizing their cultural impact on other nations. N. K. Pksanov was the first scholar to decisively dismiss intentional textual correspondences between the two plays in his 1922 *Griboedov i Mol’er: Pereostenka traditsii*, but as Wanner points out, extricating the problem of influence (or answering the question “What should be included in our concept of the originative history of comedy?” as Pksanov puts it) so often rest on speculations.⁷⁸ Interestingly, following the example of Pksanov’s refutation of A. N. Veselovskii’s 1881 article “*Al’tsest i Chatskii*” which first solidified the comparison with a close reading of the two texts, Wanner shows how the Russian translations of *The Misanthrope* that appeared after the publication of *Woe from Wit*

⁷⁶ “И я, коли не имею таланта Мольера, то по крайней мере чистосердечнее его” *Sochineniia* 557.

⁷⁷ Wanner 177-78.

⁷⁸ “Что следует включить в понятие творческой истории комедии?” Pksanov 3; Wanner 180.

rendered Alceste's famous final words⁷⁹ closer to the (similar) final words of Chatsky than they were in pre-Chatsky translations. This "artificially reinforced" the link between the two characters and shows the role translators can play in affecting the perception of imitation.⁸⁰

Thus, given the multifariously mimetic nature of theater, Russian theater is inevitably tied up in the concepts of imitation and theatricality as both a literary and a performance genre. As a literary genre, the connections between French and Russian works are numerous and complex, as both ideas about, and the subsequent practice of, literary adaptation or textual mimesis changed over time.

As has been shown, the question of imitation, in a broad sense, has played a significant role in the evolution of Russian intellectual life, and it has provided the context for many historians who have traced the contours of the important intellectual debates among the different camps of Slavophiles and the Westernizers over the course of the nineteenth century. Indeed, many scholars of modern Russia emphasize that the question of Russia's relationship with the West is far from resolved, and point to Russia's foreign policy as evidence.⁸¹ In considering the importance of imitation and theatricality in the development of Russian theater, it is helpful to draw from this body of scholarship on intellectual history to distinguish two types of literary practitioners: on the one side, there were the "archaists," those who sought to capture their model

⁷⁹ "Meanwhile, betrayed and wronged in everything,/ I'll flee this bitter world where vice is king,/ And seek some spot unpeopled and apart/ Where I'll be free to have an honest heart" (*The Misanthrope* 140).

⁸⁰ Wanner 181-82.

⁸¹ For example, see Stent, Angela. "Reluctant Europeans: Three Centuries of Russian Ambivalence Toward the West." *Russian Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century and the Shadow of the Past*. Ed. Robert Legvold. New York: Columbia UP, 2007. 393-441. Print.

through literal translation, close simulation, or copying; on the other side, there were the “innovators” who engaged in a less derivative process, as the selected model was ultimately transformed into something reminiscent, yet fundamentally new and different.⁸² This distinction was also significant in debates over the development of the Russian language and the role literature was to play in its development.⁸³

Previous mid-eighteenth-century satires of Gallomania “were quite sharply drawn” but failed to ask about “the sources or meaning of these phenomena”; to satirize manners in this fashion was a safe way to present a critique without questioning the social structure that promoted certain types of behavior over others. In his preface to his play *Constancy Rewarded* the playwright Vladimir Lukin (1737-1794) critiques “thinly disguised translations” without relation to “Russian reality.” In Rogger’s view, his methods did not “create a truly native or national comedy, but [they] brought home more closely vices and follies which earlier could have been shrugged off as nothing more than inventions of a foreign author’s fantasy.”⁸⁴ This notion may be tied, for the purposes of this study, to that of “adaptations to our customs,” an idea popularized by playwrights such as Ivan Elagin (1725-1794) and especially Lukin. That

⁸² The labels “archaists” and “innovators” originated with the early twentieth-century Formalist critic Yuri Tynianov. For a good summary of the complexity of the literary debates between these groups, see ch. 4 of Reyfman, Irina. *Vasilii Trediakovsky: The Fool of the New Russian Literature*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990. Print.

⁸³ Karamzin and Alexander Shishkov (1754-1841) represented the two polar extremes of this linguistic debate at the turn of the century. Karamzin introduced European-style sentimentalism to Russian literature and believed that “selective borrowing from Western literature was crucial to further development of Russian literary and linguistic practice,” which led him to frequent use of Russianized French words in his writing. On the other hand, Shishkov criticized Karamzin’s promotion of foreign words and instead advanced Church Slavonic as the best source for enhancing modern Russian. For Shishkov, linguistic purity was an issue of morality and Western models were thus dangerous (Schuler 82-85).

⁸⁴ Rogger 56-57.

approach to the practice of literary adaptation, described in more detail below, certainly applies to Russian adaptations and translations of Molière, though at least one scholar notes that, in contrast to other foreign playwrights of equal stature, such as Shakespeare whose popularity waxed and waned,⁸⁵ “the glory of Molière in Russia was stable and constant” in the eighteenth century, in large part because both the “archaists” and the “innovators” respected (and translated) his oeuvre.⁸⁶

An essential aspect of contextual background for this study is that of the institutional development of theater in Russia, which included in its system imperial, public and private theaters. Like the rest of Europe, Russia had a long-standing tradition of popular theatrical entertainment. Wandering minstrels called *skomorokhi* performed throughout Kievan Rus from the eleventh century onwards but were often condemned by the Orthodox Church until Tsar Alexei outlawed the practice in 1648.⁸⁷ Theater based on written texts can be traced back to amateur productions spearheaded by the Church in the seventeenth century and performed by students in schools for the purpose of religious instruction.⁸⁸ Theater formed part of Peter the Great’s modernization project, but as Schuler mordantly puts it, “with regard to the development of Russian theater, Peter’s achievement was to erect a building and fill it with German actors; he left it to others to give the Russian theater life,”⁸⁹ and it wasn’t until 1756 that Elizabeth “decreed the foundation of a Russian theater, to be located in the Vasilevsky Ostrov district of St.

⁸⁵ For an interesting and thorough overview of Russian adaptations of Shakespeare, starting with Sumarokov’s *Gamlet* and continuing through post-Soviet productions, see Stříbrný, Zdeněk. *Shakespeare and Eastern Europe*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000. Print.

⁸⁶ “...слава Мольера в России была устойчивой и постоянной.” Geller 5-6.

⁸⁷ Frame 20-21.

⁸⁸ Wirtschafter 4-5.

⁸⁹ Schuler 13.

Petersburg...and managed by Sumarokov.” The state took over management of this theater in 1759 when it was found necessary to increase the theater’s budget. However, it was not until the reign of Catherine the Great that the system of imperial theaters and state patronage thereof was developed in earnest. Non-state theaters were permitted and were more accessible to those outside of courtly circles, although in this period, most non-state theaters were still organized by foreigners.⁹⁰

In looking at what the typical theatergoer in this period thought of Russian theater, Schuler cites the extensive memoir of Filipp Filippovich Vigel to illustrate the typical attitudes of the educated and noble classes regarding theater. Vigel, who was a self-professed theater lover, writes that he never saw any theater at all until he came to St. Petersburg in 1800:

In St. Petersburg, nothing gratified me as much as theater, which I saw for the first time in my life; for there was none in Kiev, and I wasn't allowed to go in Moscow. A few words about that would be appropriate here. I never saw the Russian troupe, or, more accurately, I never even heard about it, and I didn't know that name of a single actor; compared with the present, not even one-tenth [of the nobility] could speak French, and it would have embarrassed those of us who were fluent in the language to be seen in the Russian theater: it was left to the swarm of landowners, merchants, and *raznochintsy* who were passing through. Our scraggy repertoire seemed inexhaustible to this pack; it listened without boredom or weariness to incessantly repeated tragedies by Sumarokov and Kniazhnin.⁹¹

The views of Vigel were fairly representative of his milieu, although the national theaters continued to control the theatrical scene in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Stites notes that, “St. Petersburg's three imperial theaters, together with the two in Moscow, constituted a state theater monopoly in the capitals; no other public theater could function in these two cities until the

⁹⁰ Frame 21-22.

⁹¹ Vigel 31-32. Translation in Schuler 27.

1880s,” however, non-state public theaters had more success in the provinces.⁹² Private estate theaters where serfs gave the performances also flourished in this time period. In the period stretching from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century, 173 estates had serf theaters and 300 had serf orchestras.⁹³ The quality could vary wildly, and disastrously amateurish productions were the target of popular theatrical satires such as Alexander Shakhovskoi’s *Semi-Lordly Amusements* and Mikhail Zagoskin’s *Noble Theater*.⁹⁴ But theaters on larger estates, such as the Sheremetev estate outside Moscow, could stage productions on par with the imperial theaters in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Stites, citing the research of Tatiana Dynnik, notes the extensive and diverse repertoire of the serf theater system, including French works like Molière’s. (Dynnik lists 11 Molière plays, more than by any other playwright.)⁹⁵ The repertoire was overwhelmingly comedic: only about 6 percent of the 297 listed works are tragedies or dramas.⁹⁶

The first known contact between Molière and Russia occurred during Molière’s lifetime — 1668 — and Molière himself acted in the production of *Amphitryon* that a Russian delegation from the court of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich saw at the court of Louis XIV. Although the production did not make enough of an impression to warrant mention in the Russian ambassador’s account of the visit, by 1709 there were three plays — *Amphitryon*, *The Ridiculous Précieuses* and *The Doctor in Spite of Himself* — in an official inventory of the comedies in the repertoire of Peter’s court. This document is the first official mention of productions of Molière

⁹² Stites 15.

⁹³ Figes 39.

⁹⁴ Stites 236.

⁹⁵ Dynnik 306-311.

⁹⁶ Stites 234-35.

in Russia itself, though it is likely by the end of the seventeenth century Molière was known in Russia, if not performed. For example, a frequently cited story, perhaps first reported by Karamzin, has Tsarevna Sofia (the older sister and regent of Ivan V and Peter the Great) producing the first Russian translation of a Molière play, possibly *Amphitryon*, *The Miser* or *The Doctor in Spite of Himself*.⁹⁷

As the role of theater as a social entity grew and changed over the course of the eighteenth century, so too did the role of works by foreign playwrights. By Catherine's reign, a significant shift took place that took Russian theater away from literal, direct imitation of foreign models, to an approach that was referred to as "adaptations to our customs." Coined by Lukin, the term refers to a theory of drama that was promulgated in the time of Catherine by her literary colleague and loyal friend Elagin. Elagin was a well-educated, cultivated man of letters who was well known for his translations, and whose connection to the sovereign led him to the directorship to the Imperial Theaters. During his tenure in this post, Elagin oversaw the work of a group of secretaries and translators that included Lukin, Bogdan Elchaninov (1744-1770) and Fonvizin, all of whom subsequently became playwrights. In the 1760s, Elagin engaged in an effort to build the Russian theatrical repertoire, which was deemed to be insufficient, limited as it was to the works of Sumarokov and to those of a small number of new playwrights who were beginning to emerge. In order to build the repertoire, Elagin turned his attention to foreign material, particularly comedies. He and his colleagues sought plays that would be worthy of a type of adaptation that would go beyond mere translation. In the plays they selected, a kind of transposition occurred that resulted in a shift to Russian settings, characters, customs, and

⁹⁷ Geller, 4; Patouillet, 274-75.

dramatic situations. A prominent example of this type of Russification, which did not alter basic plot structure, is seen in a play that Elagin adapted in 1764: *Jean de France*, a Danish satire on Gallomania. There was precedent for this type of adaptive work, going back at least as far as the seventeenth century, so, as such, Elagin's approach was not innovative. However, in his hands it had an impact that was significant in its timing, as it provided strong impetus, even in the face of resistance expressed in certain literary circles, for the move in Russian theater away from the directly imitative style of Sumarokov. This practice was employed across all manner of theatrical genres, including high tragedy, but it was most successful when applied to comedic genres, which makes it particularly relevant to an analysis of Molière's durability in Russia.⁹⁸

T. A. Geller uses an analysis of character names in an 1811 translation of *The Misanthrope* by F. F. Kokoshin, who served for part of his career as director of the Moscow imperial theaters, to illustrate one aspect of this process of adaptation that is representative of the idea of "adaptation to our customs" as a whole. Geller prints side-by-side a list of the characters in Molière's *Misanthrope* with the names of those in Kokoshin's. Kokoshin's misanthrope is named Kruton (*krutoi*, severe), Celimène becomes Prelestina (*prelestnyi*, charming), and Arsinoé is Kniazhnia Smirenina (*smirenie*, humility). As can be seen in these two lists of characters, As can be seen in these two lists of characters, "in [Russian] translations the stereotypically theatrical names of the heroes in Molière's original are turned into no less conventional characteristic-names, which honored the classicist rules and traditions of eighteenth-century

⁹⁸ Karlinsky 92-93.

Russian theater.”⁹⁹ The standard theatrical names of Molière were thus adapted to the equally standard Russian practice of naming characters after their characteristics.

While Simon Karlinsky writes that Elagin, Lukin and the other writers in their circle advanced the idea of “adaptation to our customs” in order “to facilitate the advent of an authentic and contemporary Russian drama,” other scholars have framed the promotion of this style of adaptation in simpler terms of making foreign material more relatable to Russian audiences.

Imitation of language and gesture

In looking at evolving Russian theater as a performance genre, the idea that imitation on stage is fundamentally different from other types of mimesis dates back at least as far as Aristotle’s *Poetics*, in which he writes that, “in the arts...taken as a whole, the imitation is produced by rhythm, language, or 'harmony,' either singly or combined.”¹⁰⁰ Thus, because “the actor represents a character by using not only language but gesture and appearance,” dramatic imitation is distinctive in its alternation of different types of mimesis.¹⁰¹ But what did contemporary Russian audiences actually see when they attended a theatrical production? How “true to life” were the depictions of people on stage? This is a difficult question to answer, because there are few accessible descriptive eyewitness accounts that convey a sense of what constituted theatrical verisimilitude in this time. One resource, however, provides some clues as to what audiences might have expected of actors: the aspirational standards by which actors prepared and judged their own performances.

⁹⁹ “...условно-театральные имена героев мольеровского оригинала в переводах превратились в не менее условные имена-характеристики, освященные и классицистскими правилами и традициями русского театра XVIII века.” Geller 47-48.

¹⁰⁰ Aristotle.

¹⁰¹ Knight 32.

The extant actors' manuals from this era reveal what the actor's craft was to be. It is important to note, however, that the standard of the day did not go toward what modern theatergoers would consider natural. In her essay on *la gestuelle théâtrale* in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Russia, Olga Kupzova applies the aforementioned idea of *les relations triangulaires* to illustrate how many ideas about classical acting came to Russia from France via German actors' manuals, including those by Francis Lang (1727), Johann Jacob Engel (1788) and Goethe (1803). Lang's treaty, written in Latin, "was based on the defined oppositions of the baroque system: the high and the low, the right and the left, the mobile and the immobile, standing and sitting."¹⁰² This style of acting drew on the heritage of classical painting and sculpture, about which more later. Lang pinpointed ten emotions and assigned each a specific gesture. For example, fear was to be expressed by pressing the right hand against the chest with four fingers held up and then gradually sliding those four fingers down while turning the palm outward.¹⁰³ If Lang's rules were followed, the actor's every gesture had a very specific semiotic meaning. Stites illustrates how specific these instructions could be, and the unintentional comedy that could result when they were botched:

The section 'On Fear' in a Polish acting manual *Mimica* (1812) by Wojtech Boguslawski mandated four or five stages of revulsion and terror as an actor sees a friend being beaten to death, with speech and gestures attending each phase. Stage exits were signaled twice: by moving feet and by an outstretched right hand. [The famous actor] Mikhail Shchepkin, who later mocked the style, was fond of recounting the story of an actor who forgot the hand gesture when exiting, returned to center stage, and then properly followed his pointing hand into the wings.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² "...se basait sur les oppositions tranchées du système baroque : le haut et le bas, la droite et la gauche, le mobile et l'immobile, debout et assis." Kupzova 155.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 159.

¹⁰⁴ Stites 176.

This static, gestural style went hand-in-hand with declamation, the preferred style of speaking on stage.¹⁰⁵ Although Stites notes that Russian actors developed their own styles of voice modulation and drew on various sources for instruction, including directors, playwrights, teachers, foreigners and each other, “pedagogues and audiences both deemed declamation the only correct way to interpret dramatic material, certainly that of a high level. Greatness on stage mimicked ‘greatness’ in social life.”¹⁰⁶ Thus because theatrical gesture and declamation were defined in a particular way, audiences experiencing the comedy of Molière, either in original version, in translation, or in adaptation, would have experienced performance in accordance with the established norms of the craft.

By the first decade of the nineteenth century, acting style and national identity were becoming intertwined. However, because theater (and audiences’ tastes) still relied so heavily on imported French aesthetics, Russian performers with “Russian” qualities were viewed through this frame. With regard to this contradiction, both Stites and Schuler give the example of the 1811 “duel” in Moscow between the Russian actress Ekaterina Semenova and the French Mlle. Georges (Marguerite-Joséphine Weimer). Both famous actresses were performing the same role in Voltaire’s *Tancredè* at the same time in their respective native languages, and Semenova’s “victory” in the eyes of the public became symbolic on the eve of Napoleon’s invasion. As Schuler puts it, “If Semenova’s greater naturalness and intuitive embodiment of *rusaskaia dusha* made her victory possible, a French frame of reference made these presumably Russian qualities

¹⁰⁵ It is important to note here that though true declamation applies mainly to the performance of tragedies, the example is still relevant to our discussion of comedies because its influence was such that all acting styles were more “declamatory” than a modern audience would recognize. Declamation was also used ironically to comedic effect in satires.

¹⁰⁶ Stites 176.

palatable for audience consumption.”¹⁰⁷ But even before national identity became a part of an actor’s physical performance, it was an important aspect of the theatrical text itself, particularly in satirical texts.

Imitation within the work: satire

Satire is a well-established method for criticizing society. In the theatrical genre, especially, the reflexive or self-critical aspect of a satirical performance can be a powerful means of initiating a process of transformation. For audiences so confronted, the self-criticism that is implicit in satire can provoke changes of thought, feeling, and, ultimately, behavior. Such criticism is not aimed at an outside sector of society, or at “other,” but is aimed, rather, at itself for trying to act like and eventually become “other.”

In the cases of Molière, Fonvizin and Griboedov, what is being criticized first and foremost is human behavior. As Auerbach points out, “Molière does not hesitate to employ farcical elements in his comedies of society, but he consistently avoids any realistic concretizing, or even any penetrating criticism, of the political and economic aspects of the milieu in which his characters move. [...] His realism, insofar as it has a serious and problematic side, is limited to the psychological and moral realm.”¹⁰⁸ This is also true of Fonvizin and, to a much lesser extent (as we will later see) Griboedov, though, as Karlinsky and other scholars have noted, Soviet scholars had a tendency to reframe these works as early critiques of serfdom or of absolute monarchy. Karlinsky notes that this confusion as to whether Fonvizin was a subversive already existed as far back as the 1830s, when friend-of-Pushkin and fellow writer Pyotr Viazemsky

¹⁰⁷ Schuler 53-55; Stites 187.

¹⁰⁸ Auerbach 370.

wrote a biography of Fonvizin and was puzzled as to how his depiction of jaded former seminarian Kuteikin made it past censors. What Russians like Viazemsky forgot was “the relative liberality of Russian censorship that had existed before the French Revolution. [...] Against the background of the further tightening of the reins that followed the Decembrist uprising, many of Fonvizin’s satirical passages begin to look quite daring.” When paired with the Marxist-Leninist imperatives of Soviet scholarship, this then helped to support a Soviet interpretation of Fonvizin as an “enemy of serfdom” that had “no historical or biographical basis.”¹⁰⁹

The cruel, serf-owning Prostakovs are portrayed by Fonvizin as the exception rather than the rule, and because of that, they get their comeuppance at the end of the play when their estate is put under the wardship of the state by Pravdin. It is not the institution of serfdom that is morally reprehensible; it is the Prostakovs themselves, because they have broken the rules of the institution. In fact, according to Pravdin and Starodum, it is the institution of the monarchy that must act as the guardian of morality. “The reason for man’s misfortune is his own corruption; but the means to make men good...”, Pravdin says before he reads the decree of wardship to the Prostakovs, and Starodum completes his thought: “They are in the hands of the sovereign.”¹¹⁰ As Wirschafter underlines in her comprehensive overview of the themes of Russian Enlightenment theater, it is people with poor morals, rather than institutions, that are being critiqued by these playwrights. Although one can say that by critiquing any aspect of society, Russian playwrights implicitly “justified social and political resistance,” their critiques did not necessarily lead to a

¹⁰⁹ Karlinsky 166-68.

¹¹⁰ *The Minor* 128.

desire for institutional change. Russian playwrights of this period “assumed that the individual — the individual constructed on a moral rather than a legal or political basis — held the key to social progress.”¹¹¹ Again, it is important to emphasize that the extent of the ideological engagement of playwrights in this era is still disputed, though in comparison to Fonvizin, it is harder to argue that there are no critiques of serfdom as an institution in Griboedov, for example. However, even in the much-analyzed monologue near the end of Act II where Chatsky condemns a “Nestor of the no-good nobility” who exchanged loyal serfs for “three coursing hounds” and another so obsessed with “his Zephyrs and Cupids” that he illegally sold off individual serfs to pay for his theatrical productions he immediately follows his condemnation by lamenting, “These are the men whom, for lack of others, we must admire!” — again placing the emphasis on individuals.¹¹² The differences here between Fonvizin and Griboedov’s critiques also illustrate how the climate of ideological engagement in Russia changed between the 1770s and the 1820s and *Woe from Wit*’s proximity to the 1825 Decembrist revolt.

As can be seen, there is process beyond the comedy and commentary present in satire. Unpacking all the differentiating characteristics of satire as a genre is difficult, as by its very nature it is a literary mode full of contradictions. The Russian Formalists of the early twentieth century were perhaps the first group of literary critics to recognize and thoroughly explore the contradictions that are the building blocks of satire and parody. Building off of the idea of the “metalinguistic character” of parody one scholar of French literature makes the case that the self-

¹¹¹ Wirschafter 176.

¹¹² *The Trouble with Reason* 68-69. In his footnotes, Gibian indicates that this monologue likely references multiple real landowners known for abusing serfs (L. D. Izmailov) and squandering their fortunes on elaborate serf theater (Prince A. N. Golitsyn).

criticism is a crucial and often unacknowledged feature of parody and is necessary to a “thorough understanding of the genre, both in itself and as an agent in the evolution of literary forms as described by the Formalists. Moreover, it redeems parody from some largely unjustified charges, such as its destructive effect upon literary traditions, its poverty as a creative form, and its lack of self-consciousness.”¹¹³ With regard to satire, Charles Knight twists Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of a “speech genre” to note that satire is an “ironic speech genre” because it depends on the imitation of speech genres to make its critical points.¹¹⁴

Knight advances an interesting overview of the paradoxical qualities of satiric representation, and his is a viewpoint that is especially relevant to this project, as it emphasizes satire’s many mimetic qualities. “The essential force of satiric plays, especially in Old Comedy [plays of the Restoration and eighteenth century],” Knight writes, “lies in the audience’s recognition that the play’s real subject is not the action it imitates. The satiric theater transforms this recognition and subsumes it within the play itself, so that both the text and the rhetoric of production point to the real subject outside the action. . . . In an ultimate sense dramatic satire replaces the mimesis of action through discourse with the imitation of discourse through action.”¹¹⁵ This is directly related to the role that language plays in a work of satire, which is of particular importance for this study because much of the imitation that is being critiqued by the playwrights and their characters alike relates to linguistic behaviors. “Since satire characteristically imitates discourse, its subject is likely to be the disruptions of language itself.” Knight gives George Orwell’s “Newspeak” as an easily understood example of linguistic

¹¹³ Hannoosh 114.

¹¹⁴ Knight 3.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 35.

disruption as satirical subject. But as the narrative of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* advances, Orwell introduces a “series of metalinguistic comments” that “telescopes a level of increasing complexity” in order to prove this point to the reader. Winston Smith’s awareness of Newspeak is transformed by his reading of anti-party leader Emmanuel Goldstein’s “Theory and Practice of Oligarchic Collectivism,” which is in turn altered again when O’Brien admits that he was one of the authors of the work.¹¹⁶

This idea about the importance of linguistic “disruptions” is especially interesting in the context of satires such as the plays selected for this study, which specifically critique certain characters’ inability to use language according to a certain set of norms, whether it be Ivan and the Councilor’s wife mangling French or Monsieur Jourdain’s inability to tell the difference between prose and poetry. As for the misanthrope, while less obvious on the surface, he is also deeply concerned with language use. In her study of the misanthrope as a theatrical type with roots that reach back to the ancient Greek comedies of Menander, Elisabeth Rallo notes that one of the cornerstone qualities of Alceste’s misanthropy is a refusal to adhere to the rules of communication. In fact, he is unable to hold a conversation at all, “because he would be forced to take up all of the presuppositions of the others. He tries to do so, but it is exhausting and ineffective.”¹¹⁷ Alceste wants to refute what he perceives as hypocrisies of others, but to do so constantly would be not only exhausting and ineffective, but also against the social norms of conversation. Numerous examples of this will be cited later in this study.

¹¹⁶ Knight 44-45.

¹¹⁷ “*Alceste ne peut pas converser, parce qu’il serait dans l’obligation de reprendre tous les pré-supposés des autres. Il tente de le faire, mais c’est épuisant et inefficace.*” Rallo 31.

In Goffman's work, linguistic disruption is equally pertinent as an element of the performances we give in everyday life. "During sudden disruptions of a performance," he writes, "and especially at times when a misidentification is discovered, a portrayed character can momentarily crumble while the performer behind the character 'forgets himself' and blurts out a relatively underperformed exclamation."¹¹⁸ These disruptions are often sources of comedy, whether the ribbing is intended to be friendly or mean-spirited. The misanthrope's lot is one of constant underperformed exclamations, or what Rallo calls "dialogic ruptures." In theater, but also, as Goffman observes, in everyday life, "the comic is insured by the ruptures, by the communicational extravagances" of the performers.¹¹⁹ In the Russian context, this calls to mind what Princess Dashkova writes about courtly life in her memoirs. Although she is almost certainly exaggerating, because she was clearly adept at navigating the ins-and-outs of court intrigue, she writes that "personally, I attached no importance to it, for in my ignorance of the world in general and of Court life in particular, I did not know how dangerous it was, especially at Court, to do what I thought was the duty of every honest soul: always speak the truth."¹²⁰

An analysis of the misanthrope's underperformed exclamations sets up a contrast between the bourgeois gentleman and the misanthrope. The satire of both types involves an examination of linguistic disruptions, but the disruption of Monsieur Jourdain and his kind are humorous because they are over-performed, in contrast to the underperformed exclamations of the misanthrope. In the misanthrope's underperformed moments, he can't seem to perform the

¹¹⁸ Goffman 168.

¹¹⁹ "Le comique est assuré par les ruptures, les extravagances communicationnelles." Rallo 21-22.

¹²⁰ Dashkova 48.

necessary social conventions, as Rallo describes, and instead reveals his misanthropic nature.

Perhaps the most famous example of this from Molière's play is the scene (Act I, Scene ii) where Alceste critiques Oronte's sonnet. In Monsieur Jourdain's case, he is so eager to be thought a gentleman that he makes himself ridiculous by performing social conventions to a degree that no gentleman would. His disruptions do not always involve his own generated use of language, but are, rather, triggered by others' use of language. When his tailor comes to fit him for a new suit of clothes (Act II, Scene v), one of the tailor's assistants addresses Monsieur Jourdain as "mon gentilhomme" ("kind gentleman"), which sparks the following exchange:

MR. JOURDAIN: What did you call me?

TAILOR BOY: "Kind gentleman."

MR. JOURDAIN: "Kind gentleman." What it is to be got up as one of the quality! Go on dressing as an ordinary [*bourgeois*] person and nobody will ever call you a gentleman. Here — that's for your "kind gentleman." (*Gives money.*)¹²¹

From there, the tailor's other assistants also use inflated forms of address by calling Jourdain "monseigneur" ("my lord") and "votre grandeur" ("Your Grace"), both titles normally reserved for members of the nobility. Given Jourdain's tendency toward over-performance, it is fitting, then, that his family and servants ultimately retaliate with a performance — the "Turkish" ceremony that concludes Act IV and after which Monsieur Jourdain thinks he has become a noble — that works because Monsieur Jourdain does not understand any of its linguistic content. For both Monsieur Jourdain and the audience, the fake ceremony is one long linguistic disruption because its content is pure nonsense.

Thus, theatrical comedy of this type, as represented in the plays under discussion, is a genre that permits, simultaneously, direct representation of imitative behavior and commentary

¹²¹*The Would-be Gentleman* 21.

on it. In these satires, the criticism is inherent, in as much as the play criticizes the behaviors, both linguistic and gestural, that it is representing through the mere act of representing them. In these plays, the actors take on roles in which they imitate certain appearances and behaviors, with the overall objective of ridiculing them. In the next section of the study, specific examples cited from the selected plays will illustrate the dynamic of satirical self-criticism, in the context of imitation.

CHAPTER IV: THE BOURGEOIS GENTLEMAN'S ASPIRATION

Affectation and nonsense

Linguistically, the most salient characteristic of the bourgeois gentleman is his affected speech. As previously described, his tendency toward over-performance can manifest itself as a ridiculous reaction to others' use of language, but this tendency is primarily present in his own speech. These affectations — nonsensical, error-ridden and foreign speech — are all a result of imitation incorrectly (i.e., overly) performed. As will be discussed later also in relation to gestural behaviors, the bourgeois gentleman's over-performance renders him theatrical in a way that the other characters on stage are not. This kind of theatricality mirrors the real-life theatricality described and discussed by the memoirists cited earlier in this study.

Of the Russian satires, *The Brigadier* in particular treats the issue of language choice as an affectation. For Ivan especially, French is a more prestigious language than Russian. The play opens with a confession from Ivan that "I myself would also like to have a wife with whom I could speak no other language but French. Our life would be much happier."¹²² Thus the choice of French is immediately tied to happiness because it is prestigious. However, it quickly becomes clear that this choice was not arrived at by any sort of measured reflection; it is superficial, and suggests that Ivan either does not or cannot differentiate between desirable and undesirable qualities when it comes to imitating the French. "I confess that I'm prone to *etourderie*," — Russianized *étourderie*, or absent-mindedness — "but otherwise I would imitate the French badly," Ivan says to the Councilor's wife, who shares his propensity for sprinkling his speech

¹²² *The Brigadier* 50.

with French and Russianized French words.¹²³ This one sentence nicely illustrates the complexity of using satire to treat the issue of linguistic imitation. The character of Ivan mimics a certain type of behavior that was observable in real life — using Russianized French to sound more sophisticated, but he then unintentionally delivers a backhanded compliment by saying that if he were not absent-minded (typically not considered a desirable quality), he would not be imitating the French well. He means that sincerely, but of course for the audience it serves as a satirical commentary on Gallomania.

At first glance, the issue of language choice is not a point of contention for Monsieur Jourdain in *The Bourgeois Gentleman*. The supremacy of French is never contested, and Monsieur Jourdain even takes pains to learn proper “spelling” from his philosophy master. However, when Covielle appears in disguise as a Turkish traveler, Monsieur Jourdain is tricked and finds himself attracted to what he thinks is a foreign language for the prestige it will supposedly confer upon him. An interesting satirical dimension is added to this situation because although Monsieur Jourdain thinks he is hearing Turkish, the language being generated is nothing more than gibberish. By contrast, in *The Brigadier*, even though Ivan and the Councilor’s wife Russify their French, they are still drawing from an actual language. Of course Monsieur Jourdain thinks he is doing the same, but he is not. The effect or ultimate outcome may be similar, but from the audience’s perspective there is an extra level of nonsense in *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, even as Molière’s fake language is based in Latin and therefore not totally unfamiliar. In this initial exchange with Jourdain in the middle of Act IV, Covielle reports that the son of the Grand Turk has told him he is in love with Lucile and wants to marry her: ““He said to

¹²³ *The Brigadier* 63.

me, ‘*Marababa Sahem*,’ which means, ‘Ah, how I love her!’” Interestingly, what Monsieur Jourdain picks up on is not the sentiment itself, but rather how the Grand Turk supposedly expressed it. “‘*Marababa Sahem*’ means ‘Ah, how I love her?’” he asks. Covielle confirms this, and then Monsieur Jourdain begins to rhapsodize:

MR. JOURDAIN: My goodness, I am glad you told me. I should never have thought that have “*Marababa Sahem*” meant “Ah, how I love her!” What a wonderful language Turkish is!

COVIELLE: You’d be surprised. Do you know what *cacaracamouchen* means?

MR. JOURDAIN: *Cacaracamouchen*? No.

COVIELLE: It means, “Dear Heart!”

MR. JOURDAIN: *Cacaracamouchen* means “Dear Heart?”

COVIELLE: Yes.

MR. JOURDAIN: Well, isn’t that wonderful! *Cacaracamouchen*, Dear Heart. Who would ever have thought? It’s amazing.¹²⁴

This scene echoes the earlier scene in Act II between Monsieur Jourdain and the philosophy master, in the way that Monsieur Jourdain is delighted by the acquisition of linguistic knowledge that will allow him to better imitate a gentleman. While they are speaking French and not a foreign tongue when the philosophy master is teaching him the vowels, the result is just as nonsensical and comical as the above exchange with Covielle:

PHILOSOPHY MASTER: To pronounce the vowel O you must open the mouth again and round the lips so: O.

MR. JOURDAIN: O, O. You are right again. A, E, I O... Splendid. I, O, I, O.¹²⁵

Affected language choice can also affect the character’s ability to level insults. “*Je m’en moque*,” Ivan says to his father, to which the Brigadier replies, “What’s this manmok?”¹²⁶ By having the Brigadier in effect add another layer of nonsense to Ivan’s use of French by repeating

¹²⁴ *The Would-be Gentleman* 51.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹²⁶ *The Brigadier* 66.

it back to him in a more fractured form, Fonvizin draws more conspicuous attention to the absurdity of the form of the original statement, and thus, Ivan's use of French in general. Certainly there are reasons to insult someone in a format he or she cannot understand (cowardice, for one), but, by definition, it defeats the purpose of an insult. This confusion — the words in question exist as signs but their meaning is lost — is a hallmark of nonsense, and in these cases there is additional humor beyond the fact that nonsense simply sounds funny when spoken aloud because the characters producing the nonsense think they are speaking an understood, albeit foreign, language.

Monsieur Jourdain, for his part, thinks that having become a Mamamouchi during the ceremony with the disguised Cléonte and Covielle, he can now speak “Turkish” perfectly. In Act V He tells Madame Jourdain (who is not yet in on the ruse) that he has become a Mamamouchi and then chides her for her ignorance when she does not understand what he is talking about. She asks what the name of the ceremony was, to which he replies, “Mahometan-Jourdina.”

MRS. JOURDAIN: And what does that mean?

MR. JOURDAIN: Jourdina means Jourdain.

MRS. JOURDAIN: And what about Jourdain?

MR. JOURDAIN [sings]: Going to make a Paladina of Jourdina.

MRS. JOURDAIN: Eh?

MR. JOURDAIN [sings]: Give him galley, brigantina!

MRS. JOURDAIN: I don't understand a word of it!¹²⁷

Monsieur Jourdain refuses to clarify in French at any point during the scene, causing his wife to conclude that her husband has gone mad (about which more will be said later). It is clear from the first half of the play that Monsieur Jourdain associates education with the nobility, as he has employed numerous tutors. But now that he has been made a noble, he assumes that his

¹²⁷ *The Would-be Gentleman* 56.

knowledge is complete, in this case, of the “Turkish” language. This reversal of cause and effect illustrates the question of the connections that were made between language, education and nobility. These are numerous and worthy of comment.

Many theater scholars have underscored the importance of education as a theme in Fonvizin’s works, and Fonvizin takes on the theme with particular tenacity in *The Minor* via the title character. As Karlinsky notes, “The romantic era bequeathed to later generations the Rousseauist image of the child as the natural sage, the repository of all human virtues, who may later in life be corrupted by false civilization. It is difficult for most of us to grasp the opposite idea of childhood,” that was widely held prior to Rousseauism, in which children were repositories of vices such as anger and impatience that needed to be corrected in their upbringing.¹²⁸ Mitrofan is the embodiment of an inadequate upbringing; although they have hired three tutors for him, his indulgent parents do not force him to do anything he does not want to do and they themselves are morally bankrupt characters, as the play’s denouement makes clear. In relation to language, *The Minor* presents ironic critiques of the idea of learning grammar. In Act IV, Scene viii the Prostakovs prod Mitrofan into showing off his “knowledge” to Starodum and Pravdin, who shows him a Grammar and asks him what he knows in it.

MITROFAN: Lots. Substantivals and adjectivals...

PRAVDIN: Door, for instance: is it a substantive or an adjective?

MITROFAN: Door, what door?

PRAVDIN: What door! That one.

MITROFAN: That one? It’s adjectival.

PRAVDIN: Why?

MITROFAN: Because it’s adjected to its place. But over there by the larder, that door’s still substantival because it’s been there for five weeks and it’s not been hung yet.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Karlinsky 163-64.

¹²⁹ *The Minor* 124.

The absurdity in this exchange is present both in Mitrofan's complete lack of understanding of what grammar is and in the fact that his parents consider his state of learning an accomplishment. His parents want him to learn, to be, in effect, an aspirational imitator, but he is incapable of it. Mitrofan's head tutor Vralman, who speaks with a phonetically transcribed German accent that renders most of what he says unintelligible, is also to blame. "Chust tink, my tear laty," he says to Mrs. Prostakova, "he ofershtufft hes pelly. It's bat. But you zee hes leetle headt iss much veekr dan hes pelly; Got helf us if ve ofershtufft it!"¹³⁰ Vralman is exposed at the end of the play as Starodum's former coachman, who turned to tutoring when he couldn't find work in his previous profession.

Fonvizin ironically critiqued the idea of learning grammar elsewhere, for example in the short satirical piece "Universal Courtier's Grammar," written after both of his great comedies, around 1783. This "Grammar" takes the form of question-and-answer that purports to teach a courtier how to speak at court — "the Art, or Science, of flattering cunningly, with tongue and pen." In satirizing the superficiality and standardization of speech, Fonvizin points out how nonsensical such speech sounds. For example: "*Question*: What Division of Words is to be noted at Court? *Answer*: The Words ordinarily occurring are: Monosyllabic, bisyllabic, trisyllabic and polysyllabic. — Monosyllabic: *yea, Prince, slave*; bisyllabic: *potent, event, fallen*; trisyllabic: *gracious, humoring, favoring*; and, lastly, polysyllabic: Yourmostexaltedexcellency."¹³¹ The words seem to lose their actual meaning and instead act as signs signifying the speaker's status, that he is someone who knows the correct things to say.

¹³⁰ *The Minor* 113.

¹³¹ "Universal Courtier's Grammar" 25.

The characters in *The Brigadier* all agree on the uselessness of learning grammar. “I’ve lived without it for almost sixty years and further raised children,” the Brigadier notes. Ivan exclaims, “What do we need a Grammar for! I myself have written a thousand billetdoux [Russianized French *billets-doux*] and it seems to me you can say ‘my everything,’ ‘my soul,’ ‘*adieu, ma reine,*’ without ever looking into a Grammar.”¹³² Ivan’s take on this issue is slightly different than his father’s: the idea that a certain set of standard, trite phrases can communicate enough in high society to replace an education is a critique of a social milieu that rewards superficiality — specifically, superficial mimesis — over a true education that forms moral character. This can be seen more subtly in the word choice of certain characters, for example, the repetition of the adjective *galant* (“gallant,” “gentlemanly”) to describe just about everything in *The Bourgeois Gentleman*.

This superficiality is also present in Monsieur Jourdain’s enthusiasm for learning, which contrasts with Mitrofan’s unwillingness to learn. “O. How wonderful to know such things!” he exclaims in Act II, when presented with the most absurdly obvious facts. (“The opening of the mouth is exactly the shape of the letter — O,” his philosophy master has just told him.)¹³³ He does not want to tackle difficult subjects like logic or ethics that require thoughtful reflection; he likes the mere idea of possessing knowledge (and feels that a gentleman must possess knowledge) rather than actually possessing its content. Linguistically, this superficiality again leads in the direction of nonsense. In Act III, Scene iii, as Monsieur Jourdain incoherently tries to explain the difference between prose and poetry to Madame Jourdain and Nicole, he is trying to

¹³² *The Brigadier* 53.

¹³³ *The Would-be Gentleman* 17.

prove their ignorance because “It exasperates me to see how ignorant women can be!” but the vocabulary that Madame Jourdain uses underscores Molière’s intent by explicitly referencing nonsense: “What on earth is all this rigamarole?... Oh, get off with you! You ought to send all these fellows packing with their ridiculous tomfoolery.”¹³⁴

Ultimately, Fonvizin makes the connection between education and character explicit in both *The Brigadier* and *The Minor*. Interestingly, whereas Mitrofan remains oblivious to the shortcomings of his upbringing, at the end of *The Brigadier* it is Ivan himself who voices the connection between education and character, though he is glad a French coachman taught him to love the French over the Russians. “A young man is like wax,” he tells the Councilor’s wife. “If, *malheureusement*, I had fallen into the hands of a Russian who loved his people, perhaps I wouldn’t be like I am.”¹³⁵

It is worth noting that these examples also add a dimension to the connection between the importance of education as a theme on stage, and theater as a means of educating the audience. For example, Enlightenment-era playwrights such as Sumarokov and Lukin agreed that “theater represented a tool of moral instruction and that audience behavior indicated whether spectators were being properly instructed.” However, other contemporary observers noted that this goal was not because spectators were not always interested in imitating what was taking place on stage, but rather, because the behavior of their fellow audience-members was of greater interest to them. “The periodical *Evenings* concurred, noting that spectators failed to learn anything sensible

¹³⁴ *The Would-be Gentleman* 26.

¹³⁵ *The Brigadier* 82.

from tragedy or comedy because instead of listening, they attended the theater ‘to show themselves and look at others.’”¹³⁶

Monsieur Jourdain attempts to use language not only to climb the social ladder, but also as a tool of seduction, for he desires Dorimène as a mistress. Here, Molière satirizes both the idea of a certain kind of discourse reserved for high-minded seduction and Monsieur Jourdain’s inability to imitate that style of speech, both of which result in the production of nonsense. During their lesson, Monsieur Jourdain asks his philosophy master how best to express to Dorimène that “Fair Countess, I am dying for love of your beautiful eyes.” The philosopher thinks the sentiment “must be elaborated a little,” but Monsieur Jourdain insists that he only wants to say the words that he has just said, and only in the most stylish, best-arranged. “Well, you can put them as you have done: ‘Fair Countess, I am dying for love of your beautiful eyes,’” the philosophy master replies. “Or perhaps: ‘For love, fair Countess, of your beautiful eyes I am dying.’ Or again: ‘For love of your beautiful eyes, fair Countess, dying I am.’ Or yet again: ‘Your beautiful eyes, fair Countess, for love of, dying am I.’ Or even: ‘Dying, fair Countess, for love of your beautiful eyes, I am.’”¹³⁷ Even the philosophy master admits that this exercise has produced nonsense; when Monsieur Jourdain asks which arrangement is best, he insists on the original.

In contrast, the actual nobles, Dorante and Dorimène, do not place the importance on linguistic form that the bourgeois gentleman does. When Dorante gives advice to Monsieur Jourdain about his attempts to woo Dorimène, he notes that “Women love nothing so much as

¹³⁶ Wirtschafter 23-24.

¹³⁷ *The Would-be Gentleman* 19.

having money spent on them. Your serenades and repeated presents of flowers, the superb fireworks display on the lake, the diamond you sent her, and the entertainment you are now preparing for her, are bound to influence her in your favor more than anything you could say for yourself.”¹³⁸ This proves true when Dorimène finally appears on stage in Act III, Scene xix.

Monsieur Jourdain is completely tongue-tied in her presence and can only produce nonsense:

Madam, I am greatly honored in having the good fortune to have the happiness of your condescension in being so good as to accord me the favor— of your presence and if I should also have the merit to merit a merit such as yours and had heaven— envying my good fortune accorded me the advantage of being worthy—

In this example, the desire to perform correctly backfires into over-performance, which does not go unnoticed by those for whom the performance is intended. (Dorante: [aside to Dorimène]

“He’s a worthy merchant, but, as you see, rather foolish in his ways.” Dorimène: “It is not difficult to see that.”¹³⁹)

Animal invective

On the subject of linguistic behaviors, Molière scholar Quentin Hope makes two important complementary points; first, that the most frequent references to animals in Molière’s comedies are in invective and second, that, “the insult in Molière is usually two-edged, characterizing the person who delivers it as well as its victim.”¹⁴⁰ One of the many examples Hope uses to illustrate this point is two scenes from *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, in which Monsieur Jourdain’s various tutors argue, and eventually come to blows, over whose subject (dance, music, fencing, philosophy) is the most crucial for a gentleman to master. When the

¹³⁸ *The Would-be Gentleman* 32.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁴⁰ Hope 411.

dancing master answers the fencing master's sneer of "*Comment? petit impertinent!*" ("You little impertinent person!") with "*Comment? grand cheval de carrosse!*" ("You big cart horse!") the escalation to animal invective concretizes the characters of both masters. As Hope notes, "any insult delivered with such rhythmic élan would have a quickening effect on the argument; but it is the animal names which the dancing master, an epitome of twirling graces and stylishness, calls his heavy-footed opponent that underscore the pleasing contrast between the two figures and neatly convey to the fencing master the message that he is brutal, clumsy, and out of place, a cart horse in a drawing-room."¹⁴¹

Hope's formulation also applies to *The Brigadier*, with an interesting variation on the process of cultural transfer. For example, midway through the play (Act III, Scene i) Ivan and his father begin to argue about whether Ivan should marry Sofia. Ivan feels that marrying a Russian girl is beneath him, and tells his father that he will not submit to his authority when it comes to the matter of marriage. This exchange becomes an argument where they both reference animals in their invective against each other, beginning with Ivan comparing the Brigadier to a bear:

IVAN: I understand but do you understand me? Every galantom [*galant homme*], and especially one who has been in France, cannot deny that he never in his life had anything to do with a person like you; consequently he cannot also deny that he was never beaten. But you, if you go into the woods and happen to run into a bear, he'll deal with you, like you want to treat me.

BRIGADIER: What a monster! He's compared his father to a bear: am I really like one?

IVAN: You don't need "really" here. I told you what I think: *voilà mon caractère*.

¹⁴¹ In translation, the exact animal reference is lost: Fencing master: "Oh, get out! You dog of a philosopher!/" Dancing master: "Get out! You beggarly usher!" *The Would-be Gentleman* 14; Hope 411.

The comparison to a bear serves a completely semiotic function here; Ivan feels that he doesn't need to elaborate any further to describe his father's character. Saying the word "bear" is enough. However, Ivan implicates himself as the argument continues:

BRIGADIER: Nitwit! I'm your father.

IVAN: Tell me, sire, aren't all animals, *les animaux*, the same?

BRIGADIER: What's the point? Certainly they are. From man to beast. And what kind of nonsense are you jabbering to me now?

Ivan: Listen, if all animals are the same, then, you know, I can also include myself, right?

BRIGADIER: Why not? I told you: from man to beast; so why shouldn't you put yourself there as well?

IVAN: Very well; but if a puppy isn't bound to respect [Russianized *respecter*] the dog which was his father, then do I owe you even the slightest respect [Russianized *respecter*]?

BRIGADIER: That you're a puppy, no one has any doubts, but I, Ivan, as a sworn man, swear to you that if you'll compare me to a dog again, then your mug soon won't look anything like a human being's. I'll teach you how you should speak to a father and a man of merit. It's a pity I don't have a stick with me, what a brazen-faced fellow he's turned out to be!¹⁴²

By calling himself a puppy, Ivan inadvertently doubles the severity of the invective; he is an animal, and an immature animal at that. In his final line, the Brigadier emphasizes Ivan's immaturity. Ivan is uneducated because he doesn't know how one "should speak to a father and a man of merit" and has compared his father to a dog. In a neat turn, he then threatens to make sure Ivan's face becomes that of an animal by beating him senseless — an act that would thus render them both barbaric through violence, though, in a bit of a contradiction, the Brigadier prefaces his threat by saying he will undertake the act "as a sworn man." Apart from the invective, both characters also employ animal language in a more subtle register by the use of words such as "sire" (Ivan) and "jabbering" (the Brigadier).

¹⁴² *The Brigadier* 66-67.

Discussion of this exchange brings up the important question of how the imitative behaviors are criticized and denigrated in these Russian plays; in this case, it is delivered through a particular type of insult. To employ animal invective renders the insulted "beastly" and uncivilized, and implies that he has failed to undergo even the most basic mimetic transformation toward social improvement. Thus, he is not fully human because he fails to imitate his human peers in some way. The act of insulting forces the object of the insult to undergo a different kind of compulsory mimesis, the idea being to criticize someone by calling him a beast, which then means he is a beast. For Ivan, who is so obsessed with France, this means that the person is not merely uncivilized; worse, he is not Frenchified. Hope's formulation about the nature of animal invective in Molière holds true here as well, because for other characters who do not subscribe to the superiority of France (like the Brigadier), Ivan is the one who is animal-like, because he doesn't value the things his father does and behaves in a way that is literally foreign to him. He calls his father a beast, but to his father, he is the beastly one.

As has been previously discussed, these two points of view can be seen as representing the two ends of the imitation spectrum. On one end is Ivan's aspirational viewpoint: to be Frenchified is to be transformed through imitation, and to end up changed in a positive way. Not to be transformed is to remain crude, uncultured, uncivilized — animalistic. This transformation is the desirable end and a positive social objective. On the other end, there is the misanthropic viewpoint. Although the Brigadier is not a misanthrope in the way that Alceste or Chatsky are, because a misanthrope values his own conception of authenticity and honesty at the expense of any other social objective, in this view, the attempt to be Frenchified through imitation is to be reviled as inauthentic and dishonest — in its own way, it is less than human (animalistic).

For the aspirational imitator, the ideas of the French Enlightenment are key to becoming civilized, i.e., less like an animal. As Ivan says of his father, to the Councilor's wife, "It's never too late to become enlightened; and I'll guarantee that, having been to Paris, he'll at least become a little bit more like a human being."¹⁴³ Ivan seems to believe that one can become enlightened by simply being in the right place — Paris — at the right time. This is mimesis by osmosis, as it requires nothing more than being around the right sort of people.

Monsieur Jourdain employs this same type of thinking by hiring all of his assorted *maîtres* to educate him in the ways of being a *gentilhomme* and convincing the noblewoman Dorimène to call on him. In *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, the appearance of animal language also creates an incongruity that serves to illustrate that despite these efforts, Monsieur Jourdain is still unrefined; he aspires but also remains worthy of scorn. In an early scene (Act I, Scene ii) between Monsieur Jourdain and his music master, Monsieur Jourdain attempts to recall the words to a song:

MR. JOURDAIN: ...wait a minute— la – la la – how does it go?

MUSIC MASTER: I've not the remotest idea.

MR. JOURDAIN: It had something about sheep in it.

MUSIC MASTER: Sheep?

Monsieur Jourdain then remembers the song and begins to sing: "*I thought my Janey dear/ As sweet as she was pretty, oh!/ I thought my Janey dear as gentle as a baa-lamb, oh!*"¹⁴⁴ The positive comparison of Janey to a sheep is humorous on two counts, not only because it is so unlike an actual song of this genre that it underscores how completely Monsieur Jourdain is unable to imitate sophistication, but also because comparing a woman to a sheep as a means of

¹⁴³ *The Brigadier* 64.

¹⁴⁴ *The Would-be Gentleman* 6.

praising — rather than insulting — her seems ridiculous to an audience familiar with the tropes of these types of songs.

Fonvizin also subverts the trope of animal invective by taking the opposite tack — animal praise — and by doing so, points out the absurdity of comparing people to animals at all. In a scene (Act VI, Scene vi) where the two couples, Ivan and Dobroliubov are arguing about which husband treats his spouse worse, the Councilor becomes angry that the Brigadier does not appreciate his own wife's merits:

COUNCILOR: Eh! You don't fear the Lord-God, dear in-law; why are you cursing your spouse who can be called a repository of human virtues?

BRIGADIER: Of what sort?

COUNCILOR: She is meek, as a lamb, industrious, as a bee, beautiful as a bird of paradise (*sighing*) and faithful, as a turtledove.

BRIGADIER: Maybe clever as a cow, beautiful, as I don't know...as an owl.

COUNCILOR: How do you have the audacity to compare your spouse to a nocturnal bird?

BRIGADIER: A diurnal fool, it seems to me, can be compared to a nocturnal bird.¹⁴⁵

Although the Councilor says the Brigadier's wife is a paragon of **human** virtues, when asked to elaborate, he can only compare her to a litany of animals: meek as a lamb, faithful as a turtledove and so on. The Brigadier's rejoinder, that his wife is clever as a cow and beautiful as an owl, only makes the Councilor angrier, as the Brigadier seems to be insulting his wife, though the insult imitates the exact form of the Councilor's praise. This illustrates the essential arbitrariness of the assignment of certain virtues to certain animals, and the Councilor's offense at the Brigadier's proffered comparisons underlines the absurdity of generally accepted animal symbolism. This exchange perhaps also serves to underscore Fonvizin's ultimate point, which is that neither of the couples in *The Brigadier* is above ridicule. Thus, while the Councilor's list is

¹⁴⁵ *The Brigadier* 78.

meant as a compliment rather a string of insults, the effect is just the opposite, as both the animal content of the list and the repetition inherent in the act of listing serve to convey a different aspect of “two-edged nature” of the insult that Hope writes about: how easily an insult can imitate praise, and vice-versa.

Titles and rank

As has been discussed in the previous section, the aspirational imitator’s tendency toward over-performance can also manifest itself as an obsession with titles and rank. In contrast to some of the other characteristics seen in this character type, the obsession plays differently in Molière than it does in Fonvizin and Griboedov, which is in large part due to the previously discussed differences in social structures in France and Russia. It is clear that during this time period a “bourgeois gentleman” exactly like Monsieur Jourdain could not have existed in Russia; all of the aspiring-type characters whom Fonvizin and Griboedov satirize are already members of the nobility. In this sense, aspiration to the nobility has been replaced by aspiration to emulate the ways of the West in general and France in particular. However, just because the characters in question are already nobles does not mean they are not obsessed by rank.

Although in the other linguistic aspects discussed above that are not part of the language of rank, it is Ivan who most mirrors Monsieur Jourdain, when it comes to an obsession with rank and titles, it is the other characters that embody its importance. To Ivan, someone who is Frenchified is better than someone who is not, regardless of his rank, because the French way is more prestigious. Sophia’s mother would seem to agree; Sophia is fortunate to be marrying someone who has been to Paris, she says. In Act I, Scene i, as the two families discuss Ivan and Sophia’s engagement, the Councilor’s wife notes that the match is a good one because, “We’re

all nobles. We're all equal." Although it sounds as if she is implying that all nobles are equal because they are nobles, the Councilor's reply makes the meaning clear: "She speaks the truth. We're equal in almost everything. You, dear friend and in-law, have the precise rank in the military service as I do in the civil."¹⁴⁶ Rank is addressed in a matter-of-fact way, and though Fonvizin satirizes the Russian obsession with rank ("How can you think that God, Who knows all, isn't somehow familiar with our Table of Rank?" the Brigadier asks his wife in astonishment), it is not tied to over-performance.¹⁴⁷ Here, it is the imitation of French manners that produces theatricality, not the over-performance of Russian social conventions. In *Woe from Wit*, on the other hand, there are characters who do over-perform Russian social conventions, particularly Skalozub who is eager to bring up his embellished and wholly imagined military exploits whenever he gets the opportunity, in hopes that it will make him a more attractive marriage prospect in Famusov's eyes.

In *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, Monsieur Jourdain can be induced into over-performance by those of a lower social class who address him with a title, as in the previously discussed scene with the tailor and his assistants ("my lord," "Your Grace"). Conversely, a lack of pretense on the part of someone of a higher rank seems to confuse Monsieur Jourdain, and rather than over-perform when the conventions of *politesse* are eschewed, he seems unable to perform at all. Monsieur Jourdain is tricked multiple times over the course of the play, not only during the denouement set in place by Covielle but also by Dorante and Dorimène, the nobles who seek to take advantage of Monsieur Jourdain's desire to associate with real nobility in order to swindle

¹⁴⁶ *The Brigadier* 51.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

him out of his money. When Dorante first arrives at the Jourdain residence (Act III, Scene iv) he affects a lack of pretense to try to win Monsieur Jourdain over so he can then take advantage of him. Monsieur Jourdain removes his hat, as would be expected in the presence of someone of a higher rank. Dorante asks him to put it back on (“Come on, put on your hat...”), but Monsieur Jourdain shows that he has enough social knowledge to know this is not how things are done:

“Sir, I know the respect I owe to you.” But Dorante is insistent:

DORANTE: Please, put on your hat. No ceremony between us, I beg you.

MR. JOURDAIN: Sir...

DORANTE: Do put on your hat, Mr. Jourdain. You are my friend.

Monsieur Jourdain finally agrees to replace his hat, but only because, as he says, “I would forgo my manner rather than be a nuisance.”¹⁴⁸ Later on he reveals, “...you overwhelm me with kindness, sir. I’m only concerned that a gentleman of your rank should demean himself so on my account.”¹⁴⁹ Although Monsieur Jourdain is confused by Dorante’s behavior, he is eager enough to attain a higher status that he doesn’t examine his discomfort any more closely. The same strategy works for Covielle in Act IV, Scene v. He tells Monsieur Jourdain that he is a “great friend of the late gentleman, your father,” using the title of “gentleman” to get Monsieur Jourdain to trust him and believe that fantastic story he is about to tell. Again, as in the scene with Dorante, Monsieur Jourdain expresses his confusion (“Did you know him well?... And you knew him to be a gentleman?”) but ultimately dismisses it.¹⁵⁰ The point of the satire here is clear. An obsession with status blinds one to the true nature of others’ motives; Madame Jourdain and Nicole do not share Monsieur Jourdain’s obsession with status, and therefore neither is fooled by

¹⁴⁸ *The Would-be Gentleman* 28.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

Dorante for even a minute. The failure to perceive the disconnection between outward appearance and inner nature is at play here and represents a discrepancy at the heart of the problem of the imitation. This will be discussed in greater detail in a later section of this study.

In *The Minor* it is Starodum who describes the danger of being obsessed by titles and rank. When discussing marriage with Sophia, he says he believes that the reason so many households are completely devoid of morals is because

the heart is rarely consulted in present-day matrimony. The main thing is: is the suitor eminent, is he wealthy? Is the bride pretty, is she wealthy? Not a question about morality. It never even enters anyone's mind that in the eyes of thinking people an honorable man without high rank is a very eminent person; that virtue takes the place of everything, but nothing can take the place of virtue.¹⁵¹

This speech neatly summarizes the most problematic aspect of an obsession with titles for characters like Starodum and Cléonte: it is immediately suspect as an indication of a lack of morals. When Cléonte asks Monsieur Jourdain for his daughter Lucile's hand in marriage, Monsieur Jourdain says that before he can answer, he needs to know if Cléonte is a gentleman. Cléonte's reply immediately acknowledges the danger in injudicious language use, including that of titles: "Most men would have little hesitation, sir, in answering that question. Such a matter is quickly decided. The title is easy enough to assume, and custom today appears to sanction the appropriation." Cléonte, in contrast to Jourdain, is wary of the title of gentleman because, as he says, he has "I make no pretence to a title which others in my place might very well consider themselves entitled to assume."¹⁵² He recognizes that this discrepancy is a problem and wishes to avoid it, even though he is entitled to the title. In this way he represents a mirror image of

¹⁵¹ *The Minor* 119.

¹⁵² *The Would-be Gentleman* 40.

Monsieur Jourdain, who would readily and gratefully assume a title to which he has no real claim.

CHAPTER V: THE MISANTHROPE'S REFUSAL

Starodum represents a good starting point for the discussion of the linguistics behaviors of the misanthrope, because he is something of a misanthrope himself. As Pravdin describes him, “That which they call his gloominess, his roughness, is only a result of his straightforwardness. Never in his life did his tongue say *yes* when his heart felt *no*.”¹⁵³ This unwillingness to say *yes* when the heart feels *no* represents denial or rejection at the end of the continuum of reaction to the urge to imitate, whereas the bourgeois gentleman’s aspirational imitation represents the opposite endpoint. The misanthrope refuses to aspire in this way, because he considers aspirational imitation to be both a superficial and a dishonest pursuit. Since he values expression of truth over following the prescribed rules of his social milieu, in his linguistic behavior he is prone to communicational ruptures and under-performance, as previously discussed. This part of the study will elaborate three connected characteristics of the linguistic aspect of misanthropes’ performances: the rupturing effect of rhetorical excess, the feeling that words are ultimately useless, and the problem of sincerity, especially in matters of the heart.

The rupturing effect of rhetorical excess

In *The Minor*, Starodum tells Pravdin, “I speak without formalities. Where formalities begin, sincerity ends.”¹⁵⁴ The misanthrope’s self-stated preference for plain speech belies the linguistic complexity in the misanthrope’s actual speech production, which is prone to rhetorical flourishes such as cursing, ironic understatement and adopting the tone of high tragedy. It is important to note here that though these flourishes are exaggerated, they are still a form of under-

¹⁵³ *The Minor* 99.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

performance because they do not conform to expected social norms. By contrast, the over-performance of the bourgeois gentleman is also exaggerated, but it is exaggerated in its commitment to conforming to perceived social norms.

Famusov sums up Chatsky's style of speech in Act II: "The things he says! Talks like it's being written down!"¹⁵⁵ Interestingly, Famusov expresses this thought after he and Chatsky have each given a monologue expressing the idea that the past was better than the present, even though each gives different reasons for drawing this conclusion. In Act I, Liza and Sofya discuss the merits of Chatsky as a suitor versus those of Molchalin and Skalozub. The contrasts they draw have a lot to do with speech. The obsequious Molchalin (whose name recalls words such as *molchat*, to keep silent, or *molchalivyi*, taciturn) who "hates vulgarity" lives up his name: "He presses my hand against his heart," Sofya tells Liza, "and sighs from the depths of his soul/ without a word too free—and thus the night goes by/ hand in hand, me always in his eye." Molchalin, in Sofya's description, is apparently wooing her without using any words at all (at which Liza laughs heartily). Skalozub, on the other hand, is full of empty bluster. "I'm just beside myself/ hearing tales of battles and of armies of relief./ He hasn't said a smart thing all his life," and Sofya concludes she would rather die than marry him. Chatsky is also capable of idle chatter. "He chatted, joked; I found him entertaining./ Laughter fits in any place," Sofya says.¹⁵⁶ This is a notable difference between the two misanthropic protagonists. While both are prone to bluntness and rhetorical excess, Chatsky can be witty; Alceste is all spleen. However, after Chatsky stopped calling on Sofya and her family for a period of time, "he came back, pretending

¹⁵⁵ *The Trouble with Reason* 60.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

to be lovelorn, so demanding and trouble-laden!/
Witty, quick, with a ready phrase,/ among
friends spending his happiest days/
and getting an exaggerated opinion of who he was.” Here it
becomes apparent that in Sofya’s interpretation Chatsky too is not above giving the sorts of
performances he says he dislikes. Additionally, Chatsky is susceptible to flattery even as he
condemns empty praise. Alceste also admits to a similar sort of hypocrisy as far as Célimène’s
words are concerned. “I’m weak; for all her falsity,/ That woman knows the art of pleasing
me.”¹⁵⁷

When describing his love for Célimène, Alceste uses angry language, the tone of which
seemingly contradicts the feelings he is trying to express. His language causes a rupture between
how he feels and what he says, leading to under-performance. In Act II, Scene v he tries to
articulate why he finds it necessary to criticize the woman he loves to her face:

The more one loves, the more one should object
To every blemish, every least defect.
Were I this lady, I would soon get rid
Of lovers who approved of all I did,
And by their slack indulgence and applause
Endorsed my follies and excused my flaws.¹⁵⁸

For Alceste, pure love requires total honesty and is incompatible with flattery. As Célimène
subsequently observes, “If all hearts beat according to your measure,/ The dawn of love would
be the end of pleasure;/ And love would find its perfect consummation/ In ecstasies of rage and
reprobation.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ *The Misanthrope* 16.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

This tendency of Alceste ties into another of his tendencies, which is to adopt the dramatic tone of high tragedy when he is particularly upset, and this is a quality shared by Chatsky. It is a style that heightens the theatricality, and by extension, the mimetic qualities, of his speech. For example, in Act II, Scene i, Alceste laments to Célimène, “Why, why am I doomed to love you?/ I swear that I shall bless the blissful hour/ When this poor heart's no longer in your power!/ I make no secret of it: I've done my best/ To exorcise this passion from my breast;/ But thus far all in vain; it will not go;/ It's for my sins that I must love you so.”¹⁶⁰ Later on he accuses her of “sins which cause the blood to freeze/ Look innocent beside your treacheries;/ That nothing Hell's or Heaven's wrath could do/ Ever produced so bad a thing as you.” Such high-toned speech would not sound out of place in one of Racine’s tragedies (which heightens the humor when Célimène replies, simply, “Your compliments were always sweet and pretty.”)¹⁶¹ Chatsky, too, adopts this tone when he first returns in Act I and describes his journey to Famusov’s estate to Sofya and Liza: “I dashed heedless on, out of breath,/ some five and forty hours without a wink,/ across five hundred miles through wind and storm,/ often lost completely, falling countless times—/ heroic deeds get some reward!” He even goes so far as to imply he is a hero (“heroic deeds get some reward”) for having made it back.¹⁶² Alceste and Chatsky are prone to this type of rhetorical excess perhaps because the disconnection between their heart and their words renders it necessary; perhaps adopting the pose of high tragedy makes it possible to convey the intensity of the misanthrope’s feelings in a way that the expected forms of conventional conversation cannot.

¹⁶⁰ *The Misanthrope* 41.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁶² *The Trouble with Reason* 49.

These incongruities are at the heart of the complexity of the misanthrope's proclivity for rhetorical excess. Both Alceste and Chatsky realize that there is something hypocritical about their behavior. When Oronte is trying to convince him to critique his sonnet (Act I, Scene ii) Alceste tries to decline: "I am, I fear,/ Inclined to be unfashionably sincere."¹⁶³ This acknowledgement of his tendency to under-performance is expressed through a bit of rhetorical excess, in this case, on the side of understatement. Chatsky adopts an ironic tone of *politesse* with Sofya, when he asks her to tell him whom she loves: "Would you, perhaps, inform me—/ though, if inconvenient, don't feel pressed—/who do you love?" But immediately afterwards, he recognizes his own incongruities when Sofya says she will tell him "the truth in just two words" about whom she loves:

If anyone behaves the least bit strange
 your merriment finds the range
 and you have a witticism to hurl,
 while you yourself—
 CHATSKY:
 Myself? Ridiculous, am I not?
 SOFYA:
 Yes! Your cutting voice, your quick hot
 look—your idiosyncrasies are endless,
 though bringing thunder on oneself is far from useless.¹⁶⁴

The ineffectuality of language

One of the most important aspects of the misanthrope's relationship with language is his feeling that words are ultimately an imperfect, ineffective means of communicating one's thoughts and feelings. Having to use words feels futile to the misanthrope and as a consequence, he becomes exhausted from having to perform. This exhaustion is thus responsible, in part, for

¹⁶³ *The Misanthrope* 21.

¹⁶⁴ *The Trouble with Reason* 78.

the misanthrope's tendency toward under-performance: he is disgusted by having to perform at all and thus is prone to outbursts of candor that do not conform to social expectations. As mentioned above, this is different from Chatsky, who does seem to be able to perform, though he might not like to. Célimène, describing a mutual acquaintance of all the characters, defines the kind of "noise" that Alceste abhors and cannot perform himself: "Oh, he's a wondrous talker, and has the power/ To tell you nothing hour after hour:/ If, by mistake, he ever came to the point,/ The shock would put his jawbone out of joint."¹⁶⁵

The distrust of words as ineffectual is a root cause of Alceste's distrust of people. The first time he asks Célimène to tell him that she favors him over her other admirers (Act II, Scene i), Célimène answers, "You know you have my love. Will that not do?" Alceste presses her for "proof" that what she says is true. "I would expect, Sir, that my having said it/ Might give the statement a sufficient credit," she says. But for Alceste, words as a vow are not effective; he cannot believe Célimène is sincere, based on her words alone. In this constant questioning of whether other people can be taken at their word, the misanthrope often places emphasis on whether the person in question has said the same thing to someone else. "But how can I be sure that you don't tell/ The selfsame thing to other men as well?" Alceste asks Célimène after she tells him to take her at her word.¹⁶⁶ Repetition of the same thought to someone else is taken as definitive evidence that the person is lying, as if it were not possible for someone like Célimène or Sofya to be unsure in her own mind of the answer. Quite simply, the misanthrope seeks peace of mind in the decisive answer.

¹⁶⁵ *The Misanthrope* 49.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

Therefore, one way to look at the denouement of *The Misanthrope* is as Alceste's gradual exhaustion with words increasing and culminating in his real inability to process language. Beginning in Act IV, Alceste repeats the idea that he "can say no more" or can't find the words many times.¹⁶⁷ At the beginning of Act V, Alceste has decided he needs to leave everything behind and start over somewhere else, but Philinte tries to convince him that he should stay because "things aren't as dreadful as you make them, surely."¹⁶⁸ Alceste has made up his mind, and when Philinte asks him to listen, he refuses because words are useless:

Why? What can you possibly say?
[...]
Sir, you're a matchless reasoner, to be sure;
Your words are fine and full of cogency;
But don't waste time and eloquence on me.
My reason bids me go, for my own good.
My tongue won't lie and flatter as it should;
God knows what frankness it might next commit,
And what I'd suffer on account of it.
Pray let me wait for Célimène's return
In peace and quiet.¹⁶⁹

Here Alceste illustrates the contrast between words and silence: silence offers a respite from the fatigue caused by the ineffectuality of words ("pray let me wait...in peace and quiet"). Also notable is the way "my tongue won't lie and flatter as it should" is phrased, as if Alceste's problem is a physical defect, rather than something internal, in his character. He thus blurs the line between words and physical processes.

There are parallels here with Chatsky's words and behavior in the final acts of *Woe from Wit*. When Chatsky re-enters at the end of the ball after a brief absence, Famusov, who, along

¹⁶⁷ *The Misanthrope* 95.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

with all of the other ball guests, has been convinced of Chatsky's madness, tells him he's unwell and needs to rest. "True, I'm worn out," Chatsky replies, "a million crampings/ in my breast from friends' embraces,/ in my feet from shuffling, in my ears from ooh-and-aahing,/ but worst, in my head from all the empty commonplaces."¹⁷⁰ After everyone's deceptions have been unveiled in Act IV, Chatsky begins his final monologue by describing a physical reaction to words similar to that of Alceste, though his is passive rather than active: "It makes no sense— My fault, if you will—/ I hear the words but don't understand—"¹⁷¹ Although it might thus seem that silence would be the answer to the fatigue caused by words, the aforementioned differences between Chatsky and Molchalin show that in Griboedov, silence can be just as much the type of performance worthy of the misanthrope's disdain as can too many words.

Interestingly, in *The Misanthrope* it is also speech that has the power to end the fatigue caused by speech. When Alceste and Oronte ask Célimène to choose between them, they place emphasis on speech as a the medium that will provide a definitive answer:

ORONTE:

Now, Madam, tell us what we've come to hear.

ALCESTE:

Madam, speak openly and have no fear.

ORONTE:

Just say which one is to remain your lover.

ALCESTE:

Just name one name, and it will all be over.¹⁷²

Incongruously, silence can do the job if words will not, as Alceste concedes a few lines later in the same scene, saying that if Célimène does not speak, "I'll know what to think if you refuse;/

¹⁷⁰ *The Trouble with Reason* 106.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁷² *The Misanthrope* 124.

I'll take your silence for a clear admission/ That I'm entitled to my worst suspicion.” Alceste sets this silence up in contrast to Célimène’s “days of coquetry” during which she “made an art of pleasing everyone,” with her words.¹⁷³ The intersection between the ineffectuality of words and the problem of sincerity for the misanthrope becomes clear here.

Gossip and the problem of sincerity

In the very first scene of *The Misanthrope*, Alceste gives Philinte a definition of sincerity that favors language over action. “How else are people to behave?” other than to treat every man as a friend, Philinte asks in defense of his own behavior. Alceste responds: “I'd have them be sincere, and never part/ With any word that isn't from the heart.”¹⁷⁴ Thus from the beginning, Alceste’s problem with sincerity rests on sincerity’s dependence on words.

Interestingly, one aspect of the problem of sincerity that is prominent in both *The Misanthrope* and *Woe from Wit* is the power and danger of words in the medium of gossip. The practice of gossip is inextricably tied to observing and enforcing behavioral norms. For example, Célimène recognizes that one cannot “antagonize...the chartered gossips of the court” because they “have a say in things of every sort./ One must receive them, and be full of charm;/ They're no great help, but they can do you harm,/ And though your influence be ever so great,/ They're hardly the best people to alienate.”¹⁷⁵ She understands how talk can harm her and the necessary social role of gossip, “the elementary understanding that language has power, and that the power inherent in the language of gossip derives from its content — those issues that most fascinate human beings — the behavior of other human beings...As gossip stores and conveys the

¹⁷³ *The Misanthrope* 125.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

unwritten conventions of a circle of people, it is far from idle talk. It is an expression of the rules and values governing behavior in a particular time and place.”¹⁷⁶

Alceste refuses to engage either in the flattery of these chartered gossips or in the production of gossip itself. In the scene (Act II, Scene v) where Célimène paints verbal portraits (“le portrait mondain”) of various people in the court; Alceste is only present because he has refused to leave until Célimène tells him whom she loves. He listens in silence for most of the scene, but is not without harsh words for Célimène and especially for her audience: “Oh, she would stoop to malice far, far less/ If no such claque approved her cleverness./ It's flatterers like you whose foolish praise/ Nourishes all the vices of these days.”¹⁷⁷ Alceste does not engage in such a game because it involves conversation for the pleasure of it and not so much because he disagrees with what is being critiqued about the people in question; as Philinte points out, he agrees that they are all ridiculous. The ability to take any sort of pleasure in conversation is a difference between him and Chatsky, who is capable of at least appearing to take pleasure in conversation. An example is his conversation with Natalya Dmitriyevna at the beginning of the ball during which he engages in the kind of banter (flattery, etc.) that he supposedly dislikes. As discussed above, in general, Chatsky seems to be more aware of the incongruities inherent in his behavior than is Alceste of his own behavioral inconsistencies.

Sofya, like Célimène, understands the power of gossip and goes as far as to use this power against Chatsky, albeit somewhat ambivalently. At the ball, she tells Mr. N that Chatsky is “not in his right mind,” meaning that he is changed since he returned from abroad, and Mr. N

¹⁷⁶ Gelles 667-68.

¹⁷⁷ *The Misanthrope* 54.

misinterprets what she has said to mean that Chatsky has gone mad. When she realizes the misunderstanding, she decides not to correct it: “He’s ready to accept it!/ Ah, Chatsky, you like to line them up as fools in rows?/ Now try it on yourself—see how it goes.” The story of Chatsky’s madness quickly spreads among the guests and becomes more outrageous and throughout the process of gossiping the other characters try to distance themselves from their own agency in spreading false information; “I’m just repeating what others say,” Mr. N says to another guest in his own defense.¹⁷⁸ While Alceste criticizes gossip, Chatsky sometimes seems bewildered by it. When Chatsky and Molchalin catch up on what each has been doing, Molchalin repeats news he heard about Chatsky from “Tatyana Yurevna,” whom Chatsky says he doesn’t know. Molchalin is shocked that he doesn’t know who she is (he uses copious exclamation points to express this in the text) and says Chatsky should call on her because “she’s famous—and besides,/ every man of rank and power/ is her friend or related to her,” to which Chatsky replies, simply, “What for?” One of the subtle differences between Alceste and Chatsky rests in this exchange; Chatsky doesn’t know, or perhaps more accurately pretends not to know, the accepted social practices of his milieu, whereas Alceste never adopts such a tone or posture of bafflement.¹⁷⁹ Tellingly, the final lines of the play have Famusov asking, “Ah, my Lord, my Lord, what will Princess/ Mary Alekseevna say?” about what has taken place, though the audience presumably has no idea who the princess is, as she has never appeared on stage or been previously invoked.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ *The Trouble with Reason* 98-99.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

¹⁸⁰ *The Trouble with Reason* 128.

Philinte and Alceste articulate the connection between gossip and sincerity in the first scene of *The Misanthrope*. When Philinte notes that “in polite society, custom decrees/ That we show certain outward courtesies...” Alceste is quick to counter with the idea that one should speak only from the heart: “Ah, no! we should condemn with all our force / Such false and artificial intercourse./ Let men behave like men; let them display/ Their inmost hearts in everything they say;/ Let the heart speak, and let our sentiments/ Not mask themselves in silly compliments.”¹⁸¹ Philinte’s attitude is practical because it advocates for an adherence to customs, but Alceste finds that practicality unnatural — he wants men to “behave like men.” Alceste’s critique of Oronte’s sonnet (Act I, Scene ii) further illustrates how he finds this kind of over-performed artifice unnatural. “It’s nothing but a sort of wordy play,/ And nature never spoke in such a way.”¹⁸² Although Alceste disparages affected language, his disparagement is an incongruous trait in a way similar to Chatsky’s dandyism, because Alceste engages in behaviors such as adopting the tone of high tragedy when he is upset.

Chatsky echoes Alceste and contrasts his sensibilities with that of the other characters in the play when he finally asks Sofya about Molchalin’s supposed love for her: “Is the beating of his heart/ quickened by his love of you? [...] Myself I feel it, although I can’t express it,/ and I wouldn’t wish on my worst enemy what now roils and rages in me and drives me wild./ But he? He never speaks and hangs his heard./ Sure he’s quiet; nobody like that is frisky;/ God knows, maybe there’s some secret there./ God knows what you’ve decided to attribute to him,/ things

¹⁸¹ *The Misanthrope* 6-7.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 27.

that have never even crossed his mind.”¹⁸³ Here he also pinpoints the difficulty of desiring to speak from the heart, because he feels deeply but “can’t express it” in words. This sets up a dichotomy in which sincere feeling and the expression in words of that sincere feeling are mutually exclusive, which is both complicated and supported by the fact that Molchalin is silent in order not to give away his true feelings, i.e., that he does not love Sofya. Ultimately this dilemma finds Chatsky asking Sofya, “Who can guess what goes on inside you?”¹⁸⁴ This question forms the backdrop of the physical or gestural (as opposed to the linguistic) aspect of the problem of imitation, as it is experienced in these plays. It is inextricably linked to the challenge experienced by the misanthropic characters as they attempt to confront incongruities between outward appearance and inner nature.

Famusov confuses the two when he and Skalozub are declaiming the reasons for Moscow’s superiority as a city. When “his Majesty the Prussian king” visited the city, “he marveled not at the young ladies’ aims or faces/ but at their demeanor and their moral graces./ And he was right—could anyone be more well brought up?” But in the lines that immediately follow his proclamation that it is not the “faces” but the “moral graces” that make the young ladies of Moscow exceptional, Famusov contradicts himself:

How skillfully they doll themselves in taffetas
and velvet thats and thises and little veils;
never say a word directly but with a dimple,
and sing you French love songs, in which
they bring out all the upper notes, and simply
faint at the sight of an officer’s tunic
merely because they’re so patriotic.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ *The Trouble with Reason* 79.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁸⁵ *The Trouble with Reason* 67.

The first quality he mentions is the ladies' ability to dress well and the qualities described afterward the audience can clearly see are affectations of a certain type of upper class woman: not speaking directly, speaking French and being overcome in the presence of a military officer. Even the construction of the phrase "simply faint[ing] at the sight of an officer's tunic merely because they're so patriotic" privileges outward appearance; it is the sight of the tunic — the sign — that makes these women faint. Whether that sign signifies anything of substance is unknown (and Skalozub himself serves as an example of that). Famusov presents a picture of a performed theatricality that, again, privileges outward appearance (compulsory mimesis) over inner nature, although he seems to think these outward traits are signs of "moral graces" and no one disagrees with him. It is also noteworthy that this confusion is presented through the viewpoint of a Westerner; it was the King of Prussia who marveled at these ladies and made these observations, and more weight is accorded to his approval because he is European.

This confusion between sign and signified is also a recurring theme in *The Brigadier*, particularly for Ivan and the Councilor's wife, the two characters that most embody the Gallomaniacs whom Fonvizin is satirizing. During their first private conversation (Act 1, Scene III), the Councilor's wife complains about how unsatisfying her life with her "monster" of a husband is. The one activity standing preventing the Councilor's wife from "dying of boredom" is her daily toilet. "If I couldn't sit at my toilet for some three hours in the morning," she tells Ivan, "then I can tell you, I wouldn't care if I died; I live only for the headdresses, sent me from Moscow, which I wear all the time." Ivan responds sympathetically: "In my opinion lace and blond lace make the best adornment for the head. Pedants think this is foolishness, and that it's

necessary to adorn the head from the inside and not from the outside. What nonsense! Who the devil can see what's hidden? But everyone sees what's on the outside.”¹⁸⁶ The Councilor's wife quickly agrees with Ivan. Her headdresses are meant to signify something — her social status; her refined, Frenchified taste — but do not actually respond to an inner quality. Like Famusov's young ladies, her visible “thises and thats” are simulacra for something which does not exist. They have come to stand in for “moral graces,” but one need not actually possess said graces, and the Councilor's wife does not, as Fonvizin makes clear throughout the rest of the play. This is, again, the result of engagement in imitation, in copying and conforming; in other words, the result of compulsory mimesis.

Immediately after this exchange, the Councilor's wife offers to tell Ivan's fortune with cards, her second favorite pastime. When the Councilor's wife foresees marriage in the cards for Ivan, he is despondent, as he does not want to marry Sophia. The scene escalates into a highly sentimental mutual declaration of love between the two:

IVAN: (*standing up*) Yes, *madame*, yes. I want this, and if I'm not the most fortunate king of clubs, then my flame for you has been poorly rewarded.

COUNCILOR'S WIFE: What! And you are burning for me?

IVAN: (*throwing himself on his knees*) You are the queen of hearts!

COUNCILOR'S WIFE: (*raising him*) You are the king of clubs!

IVAN: (*in ecstasy*) Oh happiness! Oh *bonheur*!

This scene's theatricality is echoed a few scenes later (Act 2, Scenes III and IV) when Ivan catches the Councilor professing his love to Ivan's mother, the Brigadier's wife. After Ivan spies them, the stage directions call for Ivan to burst out laughing and applaud. “*Bravissimo!*”

Bravissimo!” he shouts.

¹⁸⁶ *The Brigadier* 55.

It might seem curious to argue that some characters in *The Brigadier* are more theatrical than the others, especially in this time period, as nothing about the acting would seem “realistic” to a modern audience. The foundations of the “method” styles of acting most familiar to modern theatergoers (and moviegoers) were not pioneered by Constantin Stanislavski (1863-1938) until the late nineteenth century. Stites notes of contemporary classical acting that “declamation employed a stringent code of gestures and body language, one of many visual elements that theater borrowed consciously from graphic art.”¹⁸⁷ Lotman also underscores the connection between this style of acting and visual art when he discusses the popularity of theatrical *tableaux vivants* in Russia at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Again, it may seem counterintuitive to a modern theatergoer, but, as Lotman writes, “Discreteness and stasis were the rule for the stage modeling of uninterrupted dynamic reality.” The stage took on formal qualities of painting:

As in painting, movement was portrayed by the dynamic poses of motionless figures... The recommendations [of those like Goethe in his *Rules for Actors* (1803) who wrote about proper theatrical conventions] were to minimize the three-dimensional quality of the stage action; and the motionless actor was identified not with a statue, which would appear more “lifelike” but with a figure in a painting.¹⁸⁸

In his view, this superimposition of formal aspects of painting onto the medium of theater had a concrete effect on cultural behavior. Thus, the effect Fonvizin is attempting in this scene between Ivan and the Councilor’s wife, and with Ivan’s behavior in general, becomes clear when one remembers that “the behavioral style of high society became theatricalized; actors and aristocrats in effect imitated one another” during the heyday of classical theater in Russia, as

¹⁸⁷ Stites 176.

¹⁸⁸ Lotman 166-67.

Schuler, Stites, Lotman and others have emphasized.¹⁸⁹ Thus a character like Ivan, who is a Russian aristocrat attempting to imitate French aristocrats, would be much more “theatrical” than a character not attempting this level of replication. “How did actors from the lowest classes manage to emulate great lords and ladies on stage?” Stites asks. One answer was to engage in the same sort of observation that a real-life Ivan might well have undertaken: “[The writer Faddey] Bulgarin in 1825 advised actors to attend the French theater in order to observe the proper behavior of the upper classes — by which he meant not the French actors on stage but Russian society in the boxes.”¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Stites 171.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 174.

CONCLUSION

Imitation has proved to be a powerful and durable problem in Russian cultural history. Beyond Russia's borders, it is a question that has been debated by philosophers, artists and social scientists alike. The theatrical medium's mimetic properties are complex and many-layered, and this complexity makes theater an interesting frame for addressing the problem of imitation in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth- century Russia when the Russian appreciation of French aesthetics and their influence were at their zeniths. Including travel texts and other works of memoir in this analysis provides social and cultural context for this discussion as all are texts that address the problem of imitation from different perspectives and are media through which to view the process of cultural transfer at work.

As linguistic and gestural behaviors of the misanthropes and bourgeois gentlemen analyzed in this study illustrate, there was a spectrum of reactions to the problem of imitation, from aspirational to outright rejection. The line from Molière's *Misanthrope* and *Bourgeois Gentleman* to Fonvizin's *Brigadier* and *Minor* and Griboedov's *Woe from Wit* is by no means a direct one, but Molière's influence on Russian theater has remained both flexible and durable throughout different prevailing philosophies on adaptation, such as Elagin's "adaptation to our customs." It is important to remember that the importation of foreign cultural models was never solely aspirational in Russia, and the truth is much more complex. The self-critical aspects of the process of cultural transfer and the medium of satire directly contributed to the eventual transformation of foreign models and development of undeniably Russian cultural idioms.

NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

This study relies heavily on French and Russian source material, both primary and secondary. However, I wanted the final product to be accessible to the widest variety of readers. Thus, I have chosen to give all citations from French and Russian sources in English translation. When available, I have used a reputable existing English translation, including for all five of the plays analyzed. These translations are all listed in the works cited section. In the case of two of the plays, *The Bourgeois Gentleman* and *Woe from Wit*, the translations I have used give them slightly different titles than those under which they are most commonly known — *The Would-be Gentleman* and *The Trouble with Reason*, respectively. I have used their most commonly known titles in the text of the study but have used the translators' chosen titles in the footnotes. Source material that was not already available in English, I have translated myself. In these cases, I give the original French- or Russian-language citation in the applicable footnote in order to promote transparent scholarship.

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