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Publication Date

2008-08-01

**The Nineteenth-Century Russian Gypsy Choir
and the Performance of Otherness**

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Summer 2008

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Professor Victoria Frede and my fellow graduate students in her seminar on Imperial Russian History. Their careful reading and constructive comments were foremost in my mind as I conceptualized and wrote this paper, first for our seminar in spring 2006, now as a revised work for publication.

Abstract: As Russia's nineteenth-century Gypsy craze swept through Moscow and St. Petersburg, Gypsy musicians entertained, dined with, and in some cases married Russian noblemen, bureaucrats, poets, and artists. Because the Gypsies' extraordinary musical abilities supposedly stemmed from their unique Gypsy nature, the effectiveness of their performance rested on the definition of their ethnic identity as separate and distinct from that of the Russian audience. Although it drew on themes deeply embedded in Russian—and European—culture, the Orientalist allure of Gypsy performance was in no small part self-created and self-perpetuated by members of Russia's renowned Gypsy choirs. For it was only by performing their otherness that Gypsies were able to seize upon their specialized role as entertainers, which gave this group of outsiders temporary control over their elite Russian audiences even as the songs, dances, costumes, and gestures of their performance were shaped perhaps more by audience expectations than by Gypsy musical traditions. The very popularity of the Gypsy musical idiom and the way it intimately reflected the Russian host society would later bring about a crisis of authenticity that by the end of the nineteenth century threatened the magical potential of Gypsy song and dance by suggesting it was something less than the genuine article.

In late nineteenth-century Moscow, one did not need to venture far to be transported in both space and time to an enchanting and exotic setting. One could simply hail a coach and tell the driver either “Iar” or “Strel’na” in order to be whisked away to one of these glittering establishments, which provided both extravagant dining and endless musical entertainment. Some might prefer the sumptuous Iar, with its edifice evoking an old Moscow fortress and the inside walls of its main hall lined with glass mirrors, so that patrons might see and be seen amidst the gathering. Others might instead choose the Strel’na, where sturgeons swam in a central tank, awaiting their selection by choosy clients, and patrons dined in the tropical winter garden seated among palm trees.¹ The well-heeled guests would be treated to a variety of entertainments to accompany the glittering culinary arrangements carried by teams of impeccable waiters to their tables. Romanian and Hungarian orchestras would perform for the assembly, as might a Hungarian women’s choir or a Russian folk choir. The evening’s entertainment, however, would undoubtedly climax with the appearance of the restaurant’s Gypsy choir. The men and women of the choir would descend on the restaurant dressed in bright silk clothing, the women with their long, black hair held up and fully adorned with gold jewelry and pearls, the men following behind wearing darker colors, and finally the group’s mustachioed director, dressed in a black suit with a ruffled cravat around his neck, his gaze focused as he would begin to strum the seven-stringed Gypsy guitar and almost telepathically direct the Gypsy singers to commence their performance.

Starting softly, the choir would gradually sing louder and louder, reaching a rapid crescendo. The audience, won over, would clap upon recognizing one of their favorite songs, its lyrics mixing Romany words with poetic references to a wandering life that had

so inspired the Romantic works of Pushkin and other Russian writers on the “Gypsy theme.” A lead part might now be taken up by a young female soloist, well-known to many and perhaps even amorously admired by a few in the crowd. Singing and dancing, she would perform in effortless synchronicity with the choir, revealing both passion and virtuosity in her mastery of the music. The choir would cease singing at exactly the right moment, leaving the audience desiring more, which could indeed be had in a *kabinet* (private room) performance. Devotees of the Gypsies might later follow them to their homes, located nearby the restaurants along Petrovskii Park, an area just outside Moscow’s Garden Ring. The performative idiom of the Russian Gypsy choir was created in these restaurants, *kabinety*, and Gypsy homes, spaces of mutual interaction where members of the host society would temporarily become guests of the Gypsies. These spaces were both physically removed and atmospherically distinct from other parts of the late Imperial city. To utter the phrase “to the Gypsies” (*k tsyganam*) entailed leaving the everyday world and its cares behind, and being transported to an exotic place free of the rules which distinguished settled society, with its tame and structured liberty (*svoboda*) from the world of wild Gypsy freedom (*volia*). During the nineteenth century’s Gypsy craze known as *tsyganshchina*, performances in these spaces of mutual interaction offered an opening to a Gypsy world that promised the possibility of excitement and escape to many segments of Russian elite society including noblemen, officers, bureaucrats, poets, and artists.

Seeming to have the power to control both space and time through their performance, imbued with erotic potential so irresistible it smelled of danger, and frequently imitated and evoked by writers and poets, the Gypsy entertainer was a kind of

magician of late Imperial Russia, whose access to the supernatural seemed no less than that of the Gypsy fortune teller. As entertainers, Gypsies were perhaps best known for their singing and dancing as part of Moscow and St. Petersburg's numerous Gypsy choirs. Because the Gypsies' extraordinary musical abilities supposedly stemmed from their unique Gypsy nature, the effectiveness of their performance rested on the definition of their ethnic identity as separate and distinct from that of the Russian audience.

Although it drew on themes deeply embedded in Russian—and European—culture, the Orientalist allure of Gypsy performance was in no small part self-created and self-perpetuated, an “auto-Orientalism” which brought many Gypsy performers great success in the nineteenth century.ⁱⁱ For it was only by performing their otherness that Gypsies were able seize upon their specialized role as entertainers, one which gave them temporary control over their audiences even as the songs, dances, costumes, and gestures of their performance—all part of the idiom of the Russian Gypsy choir—were shaped perhaps more by audience expectations than by Gypsy musical traditions. The magical power of Gypsy song, however, rested on the illusion that it stemmed from ancient musical traditions as exotic and distinct as the Gypsy choirs that performed it. The very popularity of the Gypsy musical idiom and the way it intimately reflected the Russian host society would later bring about a crisis of authenticity that by the end of the nineteenth century threatened the magical potential of Gypsy song and dance by suggesting it was something less than the genuine article.

Outsiders and Insiders: The Gypsies as Familiar Strangers

The Gypsies were not the first outsider group in Russia with allegedly innate and potentially supernatural musical abilities. Although no genealogical line can be drawn to connect the two groups, their specialized role calls to mind the *Skomorokhi*, a socioeconomic class of traveling performers who provided instrumental music for a variety of occasions in early modern Russia. Like the Gypsies, the *Skomorokhi* were a liminal group with supposed access to magical powers both sacred and heretical. A tight-knit and cohesive caste, with descent passing from father to son, the *Skomorokhi* performed an especially important role in wedding ceremonies and memorial rites, where they would play dressed in flamboyant costumes.ⁱⁱⁱ At that time, music was generally viewed with suspicion in Russia, officially sanctioned only in the form of sacred choral singing. Instrumental music, believed to represent a dangerous perversion with occult powers over those who performed and listened to it, was officially banned until the early eighteenth century.^{iv} It thus made sense that the practice of such a stigmatized craft might only be taken up by a group of outcasts like the *Skomorokhi* and, later, by the Gypsies.

Some tasks may indeed be best performed by familiar strangers. Gypsies were similar to *Skomorokhi* in their “internal cohesion and external strangeness,” two criteria mentioned by Yuri Slezkine in *The Jewish Century* as characteristic of those small minority groups which provide specialized services to their host communities.^v Like the Jews, the Gypsies combined a distinct way of life and unique occupational patterns with ethnic difference. And like the Jews, their relationship with the host society was shaped by their status as outsiders. Although it carried a cost in terms of discrimination, for both groups otherness had its advantages. Anthropologists and sociologists have described the

opportunities pursued by such groups as “marginal,” existing at the fringes of the economic and social system.^{vi} Many of the traditional Gypsy trades indeed exploited such opportunities, including their work as traveling craftsmen who repaired iron or copper utensils and other metal goods owned by peasants.^{vii} Others trades involved participation in stigmatized professions such as horse-trading, doubly dubious because it involved buying and selling and also exposed the horse-trader to frequent accusations of theft or dealing in defective animals. Centuries after the demise of the *Skomorokhi*, secular musical entertainment, especially when performed by the Gypsies, continued to bear the mark of taboo and was frequently linked to sorcery in the accounts of Russian audiences, not surprising given the association of Gypsy musicians with Gypsy fortune tellers at Russian camps and fairs. To be effective in the “marginal” role of touring entertainer also required organizational flexibility and the use of wage-free household labor, which allowed the Gypsies to mobilize their talent and resources more effectively than other groups. While these two traits were not unique to the Gypsies, two others, in combination with them, were: the employment of role-playing and the use of impression management techniques in dealing with clients.^{viii} Russian Gypsy choirs, although settled in Moscow and St. Petersburg, toured frequently, lived separately, dressed distinctively, and were often organized along family lines in a way that drew a demonstrative line between Gypsy members and the non-Gypsy host society.

While other Gypsy roles remained marginal to Russian Imperial society, their music would become central, embraced as something uniquely Russian even as it was still considered best when performed by Gypsies. For a foreign visitor traveling to Russia in the nineteenth century, taking in a Gypsy concert was a must. According to one

contemporary commentator, who referred to the Moscow restaurant where a Gypsy choir provided an integral part of the evening's entertainment, "it would be more sinful to visit Moscow and not dine at the Iar than to go to Rome and not see the pope."^{ix} The Gypsies were a quintessential part of the Russian scenery and, for some travelers from points west, a visible symbol of the purportedly lyrical, Eastern nature of the Russians themselves, whose culture seemed occasionally to border on wildness. An 1864 account of a British traveler, published in Charles Dickens' periodical *All the Year Round*, commented that the performance of a Gypsy choir transformed a Russian high-society crowd into a "well-dressed mob that shouted and jostled with delight."^x According to this description, an elemental passion was shared by performers and spectators alike, and a Russian elite audience might turn into a "well-dressed mob" in a matter of moments when provoked by Gypsy song.

Members of Russia's more successful Gypsy choirs were more closely integrated into their host society than their exotic performances suggested. The memoirs of Ivan Rom-Lebedev offer a fascinating and rare glimpse into the social position of the Gypsy choir. Rom-Lebedev, who was born in 1903 to a musical director of a Gypsy choir and a female Gypsy singer, learned Russian as his first language and recalled his parents' wish to become members of respectable society. Although many of Rom-Lebedev's descriptions of the history of the Russian Gypsy choir before his birth are based on stories handed down to him as well as his own research, his is one of the only memoirs of a Russian Gypsy singer which covers the Imperial period. And while his remembrances were likely colored by his later position as an important writer and actor for the Soviet Union's state-sanctioned Gypsy theater *Romen*, he gives us a highly-textured view of the

past which on the whole avoids unfair criticism and undue nostalgia. His account reveals a group of Gypsies closely intertwined with the culture of their host society. According to Rom-Lebedev, the members of Gypsy choirs, having first learned Russian folk songs from peasants upon their group's arrival in Russia in the early eighteenth century, quickly learned Russian and by the century's end were wearing Russian clothing and drinking tea from a samovar. By this time, a Gypsy song had even been included in the collection *Sbornik russkikh prostikh pesen s notami (Compilation of Russian Simple Songs with Musical Notes)*.^{xi} Thus, those who ignited *tsyganshchina* were a unique group of fairly acculturated ethnic Gypsies from Moscow and St. Petersburg's Gypsy choirs.

The exceptional status of Moscow and St. Petersburg's Gypsy musicians is better understood by turning briefly to their peculiar history. The earliest report of Gypsies in Russia dates back to the seventeenth century, when accounts noted the arrival of "a people in Poland coming from Germany, crafty for making theft and all kinds of cunning tricks."^{xii} Seen as a nuisance, the Gypsies were barred from entry into St. Petersburg by the Empress Elizabeth in a 1759 decree.^{xiii} Until the end of the Imperial period, Gypsy movement into Russia's cities would be heavily restricted. The history of the members of Russia's Gypsy choirs, however, seems almost a case apart from their "cunning" and widely feared brethren. Many in the Gypsy choir traced their ancestry to a particular group of Gypsies camped on the estate of Count Aleksei Orlov, officially registered to him as serfs. In 1774, Count Orlov asked the chief (*vozhak*) of this camp, Ivan Sokolov, a collector of Russian folk songs, to create a Gypsy choir in order to entertain his guests.^{xiv} It seems that the Gypsy members of this first choir had Russian names and patronymics, hinting at an already close relationship to Russian society. They were likely part of a

distinct subgroup of Gypsies, the *Russka* or *Xeladytka*, a group more “settled” than other Gypsies and traditionally more closely intertwined with their host state and society.^{xv} The choir members were liberated from serfdom in 1807, and soon gained the right to settle in Moscow proper. During the War of 1812, many of the group’s men enlisted in the military while others, unable to serve, contributed money to the war effort. Their rise to popularity during the war was linked to the anti-French sentiment pervading Russia at the time, with Gypsy music replacing French music at officers’ gatherings as something distinctly Russian, even if it was performed by Gypsies. After the war, Gypsy performances left the noble estate and the officers’ gathering for the *traktir* (tavern), where Gypsy choirs performed with increasing frequency.^{xvi} The choral musicians’ case was notable not only because of their relative acculturation, but also because of their exemption from the laws restricting Gypsy movement and settlement. Like Jewish merchants, whose occasional presence in St. Petersburg was permitted because of the services they were expected to provide as financiers and industrialists in Russia’s massive railroad construction project, Gypsies were also allowed access to the empire’s center as specialists in ethnically distinct forms of urban entertainment.^{xvii}

Literary Spaces of Interaction

Among members of Russian urban society, the Gypsies had a special relationship with Russian writers and poets. The works of Russian authors not only reflected this relationship, but also shaped audience expectations and were likely present in the mind of a nineteenth-century gentleman who “went to the Gypsies.” These writers elaborated the concept of Gypsy *volia*, a supposed Gypsy trait that for many writers was a source of

inspiration. In a way perhaps unique to Russia, in comparison to other European countries where Gypsies played the role of exotic entertainers, literature affected the self-presentation and identity of Gypsies themselves, who were avid readers and frequent performers of works like Pushkin's "The Gypsies" (*Tsygany*). Yet the Gypsies were not only the subjects of Russian literature, but also its interpreters. Performance opened up a space for Gypsies to take the image of themselves created by Russian literature and tailor it to their own needs and desires. This mutual—if asymmetrical— interaction between the impulses of the Russian Romantic imagination and the aspirations of Gypsy performers gave rise to a distinctive Russian Gypsy performative idiom.

Looking back on the century-long craze of Gypsy music in 1911, the author Aleksandr Kuprin could not help but connect it to the two literary giants who were associated with its debut and its decline. In Kuprin's words: "the devotion [*uvlechenie*] to Gypsy music has been with us for almost a hundred years." He explained this craze as a result of "the genuine and impassioned tribute [*iskrenniuiu i strastnuiu dan'*] by two of the greatest Russian figures of the nineteenth century," referring to Aleksandr Pushkin and Lev Tolstoi.^{xviii} Although he was not the first author to be captivated by them, having been preceded by the venerable Gavril Derzhavin, it was Pushkin who established the lasting Russian literary model for the Gypsies.^{xix} His long poem "The Gypsies," first published in 1824 and among his earliest works, drew a sharp contrast between the values and attitudes of settled life and the unrestrained *volia* of a group of wandering Gypsies in Bessarabia. The protagonist in "The Gypsies" is the Russian Aleko, a man in voluntary exile (*dobrovol'noe izgan'e*) from an idle, monotonous life in the city.^{xx} Aleko desires not only to live among the Gypsies, but to become one of them, joining them in their

wanderings. As a group which has “spurned the shackles of enlightenment” (*prezrev okovy prosveshchen’ia*), the Gypsies are unburdened by civilization and have access to unbridled emotions incomprehensible to settled society.^{xxi} Aleko takes a Gypsy lover, Zemfira, and is entranced by the wild Gypsy songs which seem to offer him the promise of escape from his mundane life. Pushkin complicates this romanticized image of the Gypsies, however, by revealing the distance that remains between Aleko and the “true” Gypsies. As Zemfira taunts him with stories of a young lover she has taken up with, Aleko begins to tire of the Gypsies’ wild songs. Zemfira’s capricious passions are unrestrained and cannot be tamed by Aleko. Ultimately, Aleko is unable to live according to absolute *volia*. Because of this fundamental difference of spirit, Aleko can never become a true Gypsy. Barred from access to *volia*, he can only hope for the more tame liberty (*svoboda*) of settled society, or perhaps, as Zemfira tells him, he craves *volia* only for himself. Although Pushkin’s poem, set in Bessarabia, is supposedly based on the time he spent with a “happy tribe” (*schastlivoe plemia*) of Gypsies outside of Kishinev, the author had much more intimate exposure to the Gypsies in Moscow. Like other writers and audience members after him, he comfortably collapsed the nomadic camp Gypsies with the more settled Gypsies of Moscow into a single category. While he only spent several days with the Bessarabian Gypsies, his contacts with Moscow’s musical Gypsies were sustained over the course of several years and were the subject of much comment, particularly regarding his relationship with the Gypsy choral singer Tatiana Dem’ianova. According to her account, she met the author when he went “to the Gypsies” (*k tsyganam*) one evening with his friend, Pavel Nashchokin.^{xxii}

“Going to the Gypsies” at this time entailed prolonging an evening out with a visit to the homes of one of the groups of Gypsy entertainers, located outside the Garden Ring near Petrovskii Park. Doing so meant that one would likely not return until the early hours of the day, and held the promise of wild singing, carousing, and possibly romance. The latter does indeed seem to have been found by Pushkin, who began a relationship with his “Tania” that would end only with his marriage to Natalia Goncharova in 1831. According to several accounts, he last met Tatiana Dem’ianova two days before his wedding and was so touched by her song at this final meeting that he was moved to tears.^{xxiii} Pushkin’s good friend, Nashchokin, continued to visit the Gypsies and moved in with a Gypsy woman, Ol’ga Soldatova, by whom he had a son and a daughter, the latter Pushkin’s godchild.^{xxiv} After Pushkin’s death, when audience members heard the Gypsies perform, they saw them through his eyes, reliving his imagined experiences and writings. A well-received 1838 choral performance featured both Tatiana Dem’ianova and Ol’ga Soldatova. The former had a lengthy career which spanned several decades, driven in part by the fame she had gained from her relationship with the Russian author. As late as 1875 she was still asked to recall her time with Pushkin by the occasional writer.^{xxv} The template of Gypsy performance and romance created by Pushkin continued to inform concert goers for the remainder of the nineteenth century and beyond. An author writing in the journal *Stolitsa i usad’ba* in 1915 used Pushkin’s language in order to describe his own recollections of Gypsy choir concerts.^{xxvi} After Pushkin, every audience member sought *volia* in the Gypsies’ performance and could dream of having his own “Tania.”

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Gypsies continued to appeal to the Russian literary imagination. The influence of Pushkin’s *Zemfira* is evident in Mikhail

Lermontov's poetic fragment "The Gypsy Girl" (*Tsyganka*), written in 1829 and among his first dramatic efforts.^{xxvii} The figure of the passionate female Gypsy with her erotic allure reappears in Evgenii Baratynskii's long poem written in 1831, also called "The Gypsy Girl" (*Tsyganka*). In Baratynskii's poem, the seductive Gypsy girl Sara, who lives with the protagonist Eletskoï as his concubine, is contrasted with the pure Russian beauty, Vera. Fearing that he will leave her for Vera, Sara obtains what she believes is a love potion from an old Gypsy woman. The potion, it turns out, is poison, and Eletskoï instantly dies upon drinking it, driving Sara to madness.^{xxviii} The Gypsy woman as a literary type was associated with violent passion and its destructive consequences, though the possibility of danger was likely part of her appeal. Although sometimes residing among settled society, the Gypsy woman could not be captured and preserved intact by her lover. Nikolai Leskov's Grushenka in *The Enchanted Wanderer* (*Ocharovannyi strannik*), published in 1873, is like Zemfira in that she can only live in freedom. Purchased from her family by a nobleman and forced to live on his estate and entertain him again and again with her song, her spirit perishes, and she seeks escape, which she ultimately finds through death.^{xxix} The literary image of the Gypsy recurs frequently in Russian works, ranging from cameo appearances in Tolstoi's *War and Peace* and Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* to the poetic ruminations of Apollon Grigoriev and Aleksandr Blok.^{xxx}

In many ways, Russian literary portrayals were linked to pan-European Romantic depictions of Gypsies. Unlike other noble savages, the Gypsies were unique in that they lived not across the sea but on the outskirts of many European cities. Believed to have traveled long ago from lands as distant as India and Egypt, the Gypsies' proximity made

them all the more intriguing to authors with Romantic sensibilities who admired their creative passion and wild spirit. The character of the Gypsy appears in the works of Pushkin's contemporaries in France (Charles Nodier and Victor Hugo), England (George Borrow), and Germany (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Ludwig Achim von Arnim). These authors frequently portrayed the Gypsies as lawless, tempestuous, and musically gifted.^{xxxii} Pushkin's *Zemfira* was certainly not unique in her untamable passion. The eponymous heroine in Prosper Mérimée's 1845 novella *Carmen*, which may well have been influenced by Pushkin's "The Gypsies," seems of the same type, leading Alaina Lemon, an anthropologist who studies Russian Gypsy performance, to argue that "the passionate, dark Gypsy woman is a trans-European motif."^{xxxiii} In other ways, however, Pushkin's poem and the paradigm it created may have been distinct. The literary scholar Susan Layton contrasts "The Gypsies" with another "southern" poem written by Pushkin around the same time, "The Prisoner of the Caucasus" (*Kavkazskii plennik*). Layton argues that unlike the "The Prisoner of the Caucasus," "The Gypsies" displayed "genuine anthropological insight" by producing "distinctive voices for the gypsies" and suggesting that a "civilized outsider's intrusion into a primitive society merely sows discord and destruction."^{xxxiiii} It is unlikely, however, that Pushkin's "anthropological insight" translated into his work being a reliable ethnographic guide to Gypsy life, as was claimed by many nineteenth-century writers. Nevertheless, Pushkin's genius, according to Fedor Dostoevskii, lay in his universality and his ability to "perfectly reincarnate" the "genius of alien nations."^{xxxv} Making his comments as part of a speech given at the June 1880 unveiling of the Pushkin monument in Moscow, Dostoevskii claimed that it was this "all-comprehensive" universality which set Pushkin apart from European geniuses like

Cervantes and Shakespeare. He went on to add that the ability to capture the “genius of alien nations” was a “Russian national faculty which Pushkin merely shares with our whole people.”^{xxxv} Russians, then, might believe they could claim an entree into Gypsy culture that was denied other Europeans, and thus the peculiarities of the Russia-Europe relationship translated into a unique Russia-Gypsy relationship. Although they reflected an encounter with a distinct Gypsy culture, Russian literary imaginings of the Gypsy reveal much about Russian identity. It is notable that Pushkin’s protagonist Aleko was described by Dostoevskii as characteristically Russian in his being an “unhappy wanderer in his native land,” detached from the people and disenchanted with modern urban life.^{xxxvi} Although his nomadic existence is not an elemental condition, as it is for the transient Gypsies, Aleko resembles his Gypsy hosts in his restless wandering. The Russian character might be said to approximate that of the Gypsies; at the very least, the Gypsy character was held to be comprehensible to the Russian in a way it was not to other Europeans.

Dostoevskii was not alone in believing that the Gypsy soul could be grasped and imitated by Russian poetic genius. Writing in his diary, Aleksandr Blok stated: “I need to live and speak so that the resulting life will be truly Gypsy-like [*istovaia tsyganskaia*], uniting harmony and tumult [*buistva*], order and disorder.” He added: “my soul mimics that of the Gypsy [*dusha moia podrazhaet tsyganskoi*], containing both tumult [*buistva*] and harmony, and I sing in some kind of choir, which I will not leave.”^{xxxvii} The Gypsy ability to merge the opposite forces of tumultuous excitement and harmony was part of the magic of their music and a source of inspiration for the Russian poet. Other artists might seek to emulate the Gypsies in more than spirit, engaging in Gypsy role-playing.

Such was the case with the non-Gypsy performers of Gypsy songs, who grew in number as the nineteenth century went on. Gypsy songs were not only written down by the mid-nineteenth century but would often themselves incorporate literary sources, and were thus performative texts on multiple levels. The repertoire of the Gypsy choir included musical arrangements of poetic works by the major literary figures of the era, including Ivan Kozlov, Vasilii Zhukovskii, Anton Del'vig, Fedor Tiutchev, Afanasii Fet, and Nikolai Nekrasov.^{xxxviii} By the middle of the nineteenth century, Gypsy musicians began to collaborate openly with Russian poets like Apollon Grigoriev in composing the newly-established genre of Gypsy romances. Some of the most well-known performers of Gypsy romances were non-ethnic Gypsies, who achieved fame by performing these poetic works. While the end of the nineteenth century brought a growing longing for more “authentic” Gypsy performances, non-Gypsies, dressed in Gypsy garb and performing Russian-authored Gypsy romances, could often disguise their ethnicity from the audience. The fantasy of passing as a Gypsy, sought so dearly by Pushkin’s Aleko, continued to fascinate Russian artists. The violinist Iakov Rubinshtein, the son of the founder of the St. Petersburg conservatory, once persuaded the director of a Gypsy choir that he and his friend could pass as “real” (*nastoiashchie*) Gypsies by donning Gypsy costume. Dressed in this colorful garb, Rubinshtein and his friend performed with the choir for a high-society audience at the home of Count A. A. Bobrinskii and were evidently ecstatic that they could do so without being detected.^{xxxix}

The slippage between literary and artistic depictions of the Gypsies and actual Gypsies likely impacted the latter’s self-identity. While Gypsies may have chosen to set Russian literary works to music based on audience reception, their choices may have also

reflected their own preferences as musicians who were at least partially acculturated to Russian society. From Pushkin onwards, Moscow and St. Petersburg's Gypsy musicians had a relationship of mutual inspiration with Russian literary figures, whose work, based on a particular interpretation of Gypsy life and culture, provided a set of literary references that could be incorporated in the performances of the Gypsy choirs.

Interestingly, it seems that these Gypsies may have privately embraced the image of themselves that Pushkin and other Russian authors had created. In his memoirs, Ivan Rom-Lebedev recalls that the members of his choir had all memorized Pushkin's "The Gypsies" and would recite it fondly.^{xl} Moscow's choral Gypsies had a longstanding relationship to that work, since as early as 1832, when the great poet was still alive, they had participated in a performance based on the long poem.^{xli} Rom-Lebedev praised Pushkin's portrayal of Gypsies repeatedly in his memoirs, perhaps partially the result of the subsequent canonization of Pushkin under the Soviets, but also out of a feeling of appreciation for Pushkin's discernment of the Gypsy spirit. According to Alaina Lemon, Gypsies in Russia have long appropriated the image of themselves created by Pushkin, incorporating it in their everyday self-presentation as well as their performance.^{xlii}

Literary imaginings of the Gypsy help fueled the craze of *tsyganshchina*, which by the beginning of the twentieth century was on the wane. There was, however, one last revival, spawned by another literary event—the Moscow Art Theater's staging of Lev Tolstoi's play, *The Living Corpse* (*Zhivoi trup*) in 1911, the year following the author's death. Tolstoi's play presented a somewhat updated Gypsy image by focusing explicitly on urban Gypsy performers and not the "wild Gypsies of the steppe." In doing so, it offered an incisive critique of the oppressive conditions of Gypsy life and the depravity

of their Russian audience. In the play, Fedya, the protagonist, leaves his wife for Masha, a young Gypsy singer. Her song makes the “heavens open for him” (*mne otkrivaet nebo*), and he willingly parts with his job and all of his money to be with her.^{xliii} As his wife herself admits, he is under the almost supernatural influence of a Gypsy woman (*ch’e nibud’ vlianie*) and is not in control of his actions (*on razdumaet i sdelaet ne to, chto khochet*).^{xliiv} But Fedya’s propensity for drink is clearly a part of his captivity, one which leads him to throw away even Masha, who loved him despite the belief of her parents that he was useless once his money was gone. Masha’s sincere emotions contrast with Fedya’s lack of clarity and ambivalence. Born into an elite social circle, he sees as choices heroism, philistinism, or succumbing to music and drink. Picking the third, he loses himself, despite the love of Masha, who in a role reversal, is grounded in her emotional sensibility, while he floats along, a vagrant and a “Godless person” (*bezbozhnik*), as she calls him.^{xliv} Tolstoi himself had a unique perspective on the lives of Gypsy performers. Perhaps typically for a man of his background, he was enamored of a Gypsy soloist in a choir before his marriage. Less typically, his sister-in-law, the wife of his brother, Sergei, was a former Gypsy singer. His brother reportedly knew Romany and taught the author the language, words of which they exchanged in letters. Sergei Tolstoi was not the first in the family to marry a Gypsy singer. His relative, the adventurer and world-traveler Fedor Tolstoi, nicknamed the “American” and the “Aleut,” had also done so.^{xlvi} By the end of the nineteenth century, Lev Tolstoi could look back and recall that “there was a time when no music was as beloved in Russia as that of the Gypsies.”^{xlvii} Yet despite Tolstoi’s effort to revise the literary image of the Gypsy, it ironically seems that it was the music that accompanied the staging of his play, and not the play’s contents,

which accounted for much of its popularity when staged.^{xlviii} The revival of interest in Gypsy music caused by the play was to be brief in Russia. The era of Gypsy revelry effectively ended with the First World War and was then outlawed by the Bolsheviks, who associated Gypsy music with all of the depravity and vices pointed out by Tolstoi. They saw the Romantic literary Gypsy as a degenerate creation of the writers of the *ancien regime*.^{xlix}

Nevertheless, the literary Gypsy proved to be an enduring trope. It was perhaps unique to Russia that the Gypsies' expectations of their role and their understandings of their own identity were shaped in a shared cultural space so deeply influenced by literature. Pushkin described the Gypsies, and Gypsy performers not only read his descriptions back to a Russian audience—they memorized them and performed them in a way that suggests at least a small degree of internalization. Literary works helped establish an iconic image of a wild Gypsy imbued with *volia*, an image that urban Gypsies could appropriate and use to transport their audiences to a space and time apart from the ordinary.

Guests and Hosts: Space and the Gypsy Performance

The world of the Gypsy choir was an exotic though recognizable part of the urban space of the Imperial city. A late nineteenth-century traveler walking in the streets of Moscow might in passing overhear a weary gentleman explain to his friend: “Last night I was at the Gypsy camp on Gruzinskaia Street” (*byl vchera v tabore v Gruzinakh*).¹ Usually located near the city's outskirts, the Gypsy choir's space was one which evoked primal scenes of the Gypsy camp and offered an escape from urban conventions. When

one “went to the Gypsies,” one found a different world with a separate sense of space that was closely linked to Gypsy musical performance. Entering the Gypsies’ domain, one could not help but succumb to their entertainments. According to one account, “going to the Gypsies” might transpire as follows:

After dinner at a club with some friends one says ‘Let’s go to the Gypsies,’ and the whole party drives to certain restaurants in the vicinity of the Gypsy quarter, a ‘chief’ is called, who produces a choir of some thirty to forty men and girls...If you so desire, one of the Gypsy girls will come and sit with you and entertain you for several hours with conversation, occasionally humming your favourite tunes, while you feast your eyes on her and drink unceasingly.^{li}

In late Imperial Russia, Russian Gypsy choirs performed endlessly in these opulent restaurants. The restaurants’ setting, which was designed to make clients feel free from worldly restraints, relied on exotic and extravagant decoration. Large halls glittered with chandeliers and with mirrors, as in the case of the Iar, or were arrayed with lush vegetation, as at the Strel’na. The *kabinet* offered a greater degree of intimacy with the performers than the main hall, and the Gypsies allegedly reserved their most impassioned performances and their most cherished songs for these private chambers, where more money could be earned from a wealthier clientele.^{lii} One patron described such a room as arrayed in sumptuous splendor, with red velvet sofas loosely arranged around a large round table overly laden with food.^{liii} Dining was part of the evening’s entertainment, and abundant amounts of food and drink, expertly presented, were certainly part of the spectacle. Gypsy performances were closely associated with heavy drinking, usually of champagne, which was offered liberally to the performers sent to entertain the group. An extreme example of indulgence in drink was the “mermaid theme,” which typically involved placing an unclothed or scantily costumed young woman in a large tub of champagne and watching her float in the liquid while dining around and drinking from

the tub. Such revelry could quickly turn to sorrow in the case of the “mermaid’s funeral,” in which the young “mermaid” would be forced to lie down in a coffin and would be carried into a candlelit room, while a Gypsy choir sang a funeral dirge, in some cases moving the assembled crowd of merchants and other bon vivants to tears.^{liv} While most were not privy to such outrageous and exorbitantly expensive ceremonies, the Gypsy performance, often referred to as a *pir* (banquet), was expected to be an exuberant occasion for feasting.^{lv} A state of inebriation was considered necessary for audience members to match the spirit of the Gypsies, so that they could, like the Gypsies, “live in the moment” (*takzhe pod vliianiem momenta*) and sing like “birds in the field.”^{lvi}

Gypsies themselves were thought to be prone to drink and idleness, and to take up deeply emotive song spontaneously while under the influence of alcohol. According to one popular ethnographic encyclopedia from 1888: “when the Gypsy drinks a large amount of alcohol, he begins to shout for joy [*ot radosti krichat*’], sing, dance, and even cry, showing with shameful tears [*obidnymi slezami*] how good it is for him [*kak emu khorosho*]. He then snatches up a guitar, eliciting from its strings some furious sounds [*beshenye zvuki*], and dances there in the field until he passes out.”^{lvii} Gypsy exuberance was a performance not necessarily fueled by alcohol, however. Rom-Lebedev recalled that in his family drinking was rare, with most consuming tea or sweet wine on holidays. Only the eldest woman in their community dared to share a glass of vodka with his father, the choir’s director.^{lviii} According to Rom-Lebedev, the consumption of alcohol during performance was actually prohibited by the rules of the choir.^{lix} While such a strict prohibition may not have applied to all choirs, it is a notable example from a well-known group of Gypsy performers who played at establishments like the Strel’na. Gypsy

displays of wild emotions might have reflected different social norms, or could have been an act custom-produced for expectant audiences. A functionalist dimension of extreme emotional displays has been suggested by some who study outsider groups like the Gypsies. They claim that purposefully “disreputable behavior” is used to mark the boundaries of such groups from the surrounding society.^{lx}

Regardless of the emotional bases of Gypsy performance, their songs achieved the goal of transporting listeners to a different place. The ability of these songs to do so was connected to their allegedly foreign and ancient origin. Kuprin, pondering the history of Gypsy songs, wrote: “God knows from which past millennia, from which southern countries they were gathered by this enigmatic [*zagadochnyi*], mysterious [*tainstvennyi*] people.”^{lxi} For other listeners, songs evoked that primal space of the Gypsies, the camp. According to one audience member who heard two Russian Gypsy singers perform: “The voices were utterly untutored, at times almost coarse, savouring strongly of the camp...I saw before me tethered horses, and straw, and camp-fire smoke, and old women upbraiding naked children, and carts arriving and departing.”^{lxii} Thus, the use of the term “camps” (*tabory*) to refer to urban Gypsy residences gave them a wild and exotic coloring. The names of some restaurants, like the Samarkand in St. Petersburg, suggested exoticism, and the restaurants’ physical location reinforced a sense of secrecy and discretion. According to one patron, the Samarkand “was beloved for the fact that it was located out of sight and was hidden, thanks to its out of the way location [*blagodaria glukhomu mestu*], from prying eyes.”^{lxiii} The space of the restaurant was further exoticized by popular Gypsy romances, which mentioned them by name in their lyrics. One of the most popular Gypsy songs of the nineteenth century glorified the choir that

sang at the Iar. Aptly titled “What was that choir singing at the Iar” (*Chto za khor peval u Iara*), the song evoked the images of Gypsy dancers and guitarists whose music continued to resonate in the ears of listeners long after they had left the restaurant.^{lxiv}

Yet it was possible to enter an even more intimate Gypsy space than the restaurant—the Gypsies’ homes and apartments were also opened to guests. One aficionado of Gypsy music describes attending performances at the apartment of the Shishkins, a well-known Gypsy choral family. It was possible to visit the Gypsy choir at home because so many choir members were related to each other, and even when they were not relatives, choir members typically lived clustered together. Thus, when one went to the Gypsies, one was typically visiting a family of sorts, evidence not only of ethnic concentration in the late Imperial city, but of an occupation based around the household unit.

Family networks seem to have figured prominently in Moscow and St. Petersburg’s Gypsy choirs. In particular, family dynasties were often founded on the position of choral director, which was passed down from one male relative to the next. Ivan Sokolov, the director of Count Orlov’s eighteenth century Gypsy choir, for example, was succeeded by his relative Il’ia Sokolov. As director, Il’ia Sokolov supervised his cousin, Maria Sokolova, while his wife Argafena Sokolova sang first soprano.^{lxv} Family networks could also link different Gypsy choirs in Moscow and St. Petersburg. For example, Nikolai Sokolov, of Moscow’s Sokolov family dynasty, sang in Aleksandr Shishkin’s choir in St. Petersburg while his brother, Grigorii Sokolov, performed in Moscow.^{lxvi} The Shishkins themselves were a dynasty with representatives in both St. Petersburg and Moscow, producing from their ranks several choir directors, including not

only Aleksandr Shishkin, but also Nikolai Shishkin and Aleksei Shishkin, as well as the prominent Gypsy singer Ol'ga Shishkina. Sergei Tolstoi's wife, Maria Shishkina, may very well have been a relative of this choral family. We see the presence of family networks in the account of Rom-Lebedev, who would perform in concerts along with his sisters and brother under the direction of his parents.^{lxvii} Based on Rom-Lebedev's description, it seems that many in the Gypsy troupe were related, and that children would often join their parents in performances. Family organization likely reflected Gypsy social structure and helped this marginal group effectively meet the demands of their Russian audience. Gypsies could count on family networks for support, and family connections could sometimes be relied upon by Gypsies in the provinces seeking to find employment in the city.^{lxviii} The Gypsies' role in providing entertainment to Russian audiences likely reinforced family ties.

In St. Petersburg, Gypsy homes were located along the shores of Chernaia Rechka near the city's outskirts, while in Moscow they were clustered in the neighborhoods beyond the Garden Ring in the northwest of the city, bordering Petrovskii Park—an area they shared with other entertainers who performed in and around the park. Moscow's Gypsies were particularly concentrated along Zykovskii Lane (*Pereulok*), on Bolshaia and Malen'kaia Gruzinskaia Streets, and on the aptly named Tsyganskii (Gypsy) Corner.^{lxix} Rom-Lebedev recalls his family's home near Petrovskii Park, where other Gypsies in the troupe lived in tiny cottages in his family's courtyard.^{lxx} The Lebedevs rented this space from a Russian landlord whose interactions with the Gypsies were characterized by a combination of suspicion, fear, and curiosity. When the Lebedevs were able to move out, they did so, to a two-story house on Zykovskii Lane which they

themselves had constructed, a testament to their financial success. Other members of the choir moved with them, and all would gather together in the main dining room during holidays. Because their familial and professional group often coincided, the Gypsy home was not necessarily a private space but a professional space designed for hosting. There were likely areas of the house off-limits to guests, especially if the choral Gypsies maintained the standards of ritual cleanliness used by some Gypsy groups to differentiate between Gypsy purity and *gazhe* (non-Gypsy) contamination.^{lxxi} The norms of most Gypsy groups outside Russia generally discouraged prolonged contact with non-Gypsies, except for the purpose of earning money, so it may have been the case that guests were contained to a tightly-bounded space in the apartment, more performance stage than living space. Large rooms, where tables could be laid and chairs arranged, likely provided the setting where outside guests were received. One Russian visitor, writing in the newspaper *Novoe Vremia* in 1886, described the Gypsy home as temporary in appearance, constructed out of wood and lacking proper furniture. The visitor ascribed the home's condition to the Gypsies' nomadic nature, its transient appearance apparently a vestige of their wandering past.^{lxxii} It is possible—though we have no way of knowing—that a journey into the off-limits areas of the Gypsy home would have revealed quarters of a more settled nature. It is clear, though, that the performance of otherness by the Gypsies was a full-time occupation that transformed normally private parts of the home into spaces for public display.

Regrettably, we have few clues as to what Gypsy space was like without Russians. Much as Russian ethnographers might claim the authority to describe the Gypsy in his “natural” setting—the camp—and the spontaneous performance that might

take place there, not directed toward any audience, aficionados of Gypsy music sought to capture the Gypsy when he or she was not performing. Some believed that the Gypsies when alone would perform their own songs (the greater the intimacy, the more authentic the songs became), while others suggested that after a night's performance the Gypsy might "lie on the bed strumming the guitar" until he fell asleep.^{lxxiii} Certainly the image of the wild Gypsy camp aflame with song stands in sharp contrast to Rom-Lebedev's depiction of his family dinners. Although his family shared a love of music, no one sang at the table, even at holidays, since to do so was considered "uncultured" (*neintelligentno*).^{lxxiv} At least among the most successful Gypsy choirs, social space could be regulated according to the rules of educated, bourgeois society. Such was the society to which these Gypsies aspired, considering themselves professional musicians and poets, and not wild drunkards of the camp. Although Rom-Lebedev may have tailored his memoirs to combat stereotypes of the wild Gypsy, his depiction reveals a group that existed in a state of greater sobriety than the true representatives of Russia's bourgeoisie who visited the Gypsies in their remote part of town.

Rhythmic Frenzy: Time and the Gypsy Performance

Upon going "to the Gypsies," the sense of spatially entering a different world was reinforced by alterations in the temporal dimension. A socially marginal group by day, an effective performance of otherness could make Gypsies lords of the night, a time when rational social conventions could be subverted or abandoned altogether. Their power over their audiences might even grant them temporary control of time. The rhythms of the outside world would be forgotten as listeners sat enraptured by the *accelerando* and

ritardando of Gypsy song. In a modern age when time was increasingly measured and commodified, listeners did not seem to notice the passage of outside time. Alternately, they might be transported back to a nostalgic past. With the collapse of time, money seemed to lose its value and was heaped in generous amounts on the collection plates of the Gypsy performers.

For many listeners, the night was a time ruled by emotions rather than the rational concerns of the day. One nineteenth-century visitor of the Gypsies, likely writing under a pseudonym, at first had trouble finding the proper atmosphere at a restaurant where Gypsies performed until he realized he was there at six o'clock in the evening, far too early for the Gypsies. Several drinks (and presumably hours) later, time was no longer measured by the clock, but in terms of the swelling emotions that the Gypsies' song stirred in him and in the group. The group was moved to tears, and "they were not ashamed" because these tears were brought on by "pure artistry," the mark of a truly authentic performance.^{lxxv} Only at the end of his account did the visitor note that "for three days we did not leave the Gypsies," such were the heights of their revelry there. The frenzied rhythm of Gypsy music had the ability to muffle the mundane rhythms of the outside world, to make one so completely forget about time that it was possible to spend three days as if it were one long night. Russian connoisseurs of Gypsy music were fond of recalling that the great pianist and composer Franz Liszt, who arrived in Moscow in 1843 to perform several concerts, was so enchanted with their music that he nearly failed to show up for his concert. When he appeared, significantly later than scheduled, he opened with an improvised rendition of a Gypsy melody that the crowd instantly recognized and greeted with wild applause.^{lxxvi}

Part of the reason why the music of the Gypsies was so emotionally captivating was its use of rhythms and timing, which featured abrupt changes in tempo and accelerando-crescendo phrasing.^{lxxvii} Changes in tempo brought changes in emotion, and if performed well, the music flawlessly sped up and slowed down under the almost imperceptible direction of the choral leader, who marked out time on his seven-stringed guitar. Through a series of rapid arpeggios called *perebory*, Gypsies could reach dizzying speeds that brought their audience to their feet. Although some scholars would dispute the existence of a common Gypsy music across national borders, many agree that this use of timing is characteristic of most Gypsy songs in other countries as well.^{lxxviii}

Gypsy music could not only expand and collapse time—making instances seem like eternities and days pass like minutes—it could open a window to the past and evoke feelings of both nostalgia and longing (*toska*). A poem by Golokhvastov on the Gypsy theme, published in 1915, contained the lines: “But later—again longing [*toska*]...the memory of past love.../ The hand of the enchantress [*charodeika*]/ Makes your songs torment.”^{lxxix} For the poet, the Gypsy song was used to inflict the sweet torture of the memories of love lost. Longing, unrequited love, and nostalgia defined much of the repertoire of the Gypsy romance. Songs were often billed as “ancient Gypsy romances” (*starinnye tsyganskije romansy*), though they were usually of late nineteenth-century origin. They bore titles such as “Long has my soul been in longing” (*Davno v toске dusha moia*), “The fleeting past comes back to me” (*Mne vspomnilos’ vremia minuvshee*), “All my life was given to you” (*Vsia zhizn’ moia byla v tebe*), and “Forget the entire world” (*Zabud’ ves’ mir*).^{lxxx} After 1917, these romances would be imbued with another layer of nostalgia, as they would become associated with the lost grandeur of pre-revolutionary

Russia. Some performers continued their careers after the revolution, playing these songs for crowds of émigrés in Paris.^{lxxxix}

With time running forwards and backwards at the Gypsies' command, money seemed of little consequence. One observer remembered the sons of wealthy traders throwing valuable coins at the Gypsy singers, writing: "when such a customer began feeling mellow, he would lose all regard for the value of money. Digging deep into his pockets, he would throw fistfuls of gold and silver into the midst of the Gypsy singers."^{lxxxix} Merchants at play seemed to part willingly with their money, and one patron recalled a Petersburg merchant who encouraged his party to drink by placing gold coins at the bottoms of their glasses.^{lxxxiii} The singers, and especially the female solo dancers who took center stage during certain numbers, were themselves frequently adorned with coins, which caught the eye and almost magnetically encouraged the audience to shower them with still more coins. By most accounts, Moscow and St. Petersburg's Gypsy choirs were well rewarded for their performances. At the height of *tsyganshchina*, clients would pay between five and ten rubles per song, and as much as two hundred rubles for an hour of music and entertainment.^{lxxxiv} The greatest profits could be made in the *kabinety*, where patrons would pay extra for private concerts or personal requests. For such services, there were customary prices, but as artists, the Gypsies could not appear overly concerned with material rewards, so they expected customers to pay them as they deserved often without citing any price.^{lxxxv} Such a strategy, if it can be described as such, reaped them enormous benefits. According to the choir leader Nikolai Shishkin, a small choir could make as much as six hundred rubles in the course of an evening, good earnings for a group which lived together in close quarters and had few expenses.^{lxxxvi} In

his memoirs, the Austrian violinist Leopold Auer links the almost magical alteration of time by Gypsy performers to their ability to attract enormous sums of money:

The present simply ceased to exist. You were back in the enchanted gardens of the Alhambra in the days of the Moor. The audience, their heads warmed by the music, the dancing, and the champagne everybody drank in profusion, would break forth into frenetic applause; the conductor, seeing that the psychological moment had arrived, would send one of the prettiest of his dancing girls to take up the collection in a dish covered with a napkin; and soon a heap of gold pieces and bank notes of ten, twenty-five, and a hundred roubles would pile the dish.^{lxxxvii}

As a foreign visitor to St. Petersburg, Auer seems particularly surprised at the amount of money a skilled Gypsy choir could extract from its audience. In order to be successful, however, the fact that Gypsy songs and dances were performed for money needed to be concealed as much as possible. In the nineteenth century, Gypsies were popularly depicted as unconcerned with the drudgery of wage labor and free from mundane concerns.^{lxxxviii} In order for the Gypsy spell to work and the Gypsy world to be one in which the rules of the outside world were suspended, the appearance—or illusion—of song and dance as heartfelt and not as profit-motivated needed to be maintained. The Gypsy choir preserved this illusion not only by not explicitly mentioning their prices, but also by drawing out the emotions of the audience. One visitor felt that the Gypsies did not sing upon command for money alone but required the emotional investment of the audience to truly “bear their souls.”^{lxxxix} The involvement of the audience may have helped the performance to meet its mark, creating an atmosphere in which both champagne and money flowed freely. The Gypsy choirs of the nineteenth century clearly enriched themselves through these performances of otherness, earning enough to construct houses, dress in the latest fashion, and send their children to prestigious schools.^{xc} And the restaurants which employed them certainly gained a large profit off

the business they generated. Yet the magic of the performance necessitated that the commodification of the Gypsies' time be hidden. An evening with them, under the influence of their allegedly eternal musical craft, needed to be rooted in true emotion in order to transcend time's boundaries.

The Erotic Dimension of "Going to the Gypsies"

Gypsy choral performances usually reserved the lead singing parts for women, and the emotions stirred by these performances had an undeniably erotic dimension. Much as the Gypsy idiom reversed the relationship between host society and Gypsy guests, Gypsy concerts reversed social convention and placed women not only at the heart of the male-dominated restaurant, but at the fore of the Gypsy performance. This welcomed transgression of Gypsy women in male-dominated space created an atmosphere of permissiveness, which seemed to make much else possible. According to accounts from Pushkin onwards, Gypsy women had passionate and volatile temperaments. Their presence in predominantly male settings and their presumed availability—linked to *volia*, their alleged freedom from the norms of settled society—were certainly part of their appeal. There was undoubtedly an association of “going to the Gypsies” with prostitution, and the exotic/erotic appeal of the Gypsy choral singer made them fashionable, albeit controversial, wives for members of the Russian elite.

Like the objects of other European Orientalist fantasies, the Gypsy was often feminized. Nineteenth-century descriptions of the Russian Gypsy choir show women playing a starring role. The choir members would arrange themselves with the women in front, often seated, and the men standing behind. As has been discussed, the role of the

choir leader would be barely noticeable, as most attention would be focused on the foregrounded women and the various female soloists who sang the lead parts in numerous songs.^{xci} Performing their songs and dances, the women would bare their emotions and arouse passion among the members of the audience. Many lyrics sung by a female lead were directed to her imaginary lover in seductive tones of intimacy. For example, the song “I am a Gypsy girl, daughter of the steppe” (*Ia tsyganka, doch’ steppei*) written by a composer from the Shishkin family dynasty and billed as a “nomadic [*kochevaia*] Gypsy song,” implored: “Kiss me more bravely [*smelee*]/ All in passion [*strasti*] am I burning/ Kiss me!”^{xcii}

In ethnographic depictions as well as in literature, it was common to connect the Gypsy woman’s disposition with an innate passionate temperament. Such representations were common not only in Russia but elsewhere in Europe as well.^{xciii} As with other such exoticisms, representations of the Gypsy fused wild beauty with revulsion. Many claimed that the beauty of the Gypsies burned bright but quickly faded. According to one observer: “The Gypsies are one of the handsomest races on earth, and among the children particularly one sees faces of striking loveliness. But in old age they often become as ugly as they were beautiful in youth.”^{xciv} Thus, Gypsy beauty, like Gypsy song, was a thing of otherworldly charm, which had to be savored in its brief moment of flowering before it perished in the ephemeral world.

The ascribed nature of the Gypsy woman was tied not only to innate characteristics, but also to her alleged freedom from social norms. She possessed *volia* because she was not constrained, according to one source, by religious faith: “Unfamiliar with religion, they [the Gypsies] are also not familiar with marital unions: they do not

have the legal ceremony of marriage” (*u nikh net zakonnago obriada svadby*).^{xcv}

Characterizations of both innate nature and the allegedly wild and godless ways of nomadic existence lent themselves toward such exotic representations of the Gypsy woman.

Gypsy women were distinguished by their appearance, both in terms of dress and physiognomy, the social space they occupied, and the way they were addressed. As performers, Gypsy women dressed in brighter colors than Russian women and often adorned themselves with sparkling shawls and glittering coins.^{xcvi} Photographs taken of nineteenth-century Gypsy performers reveal extravagant jewelry and dresses textured with lace which occasionally might be lowered slightly to bare a shoulder.^{xcvii} Physically, Gypsy women were held to be a distinct type, with dark hair, swarthy complexion, and dark eyes which supposedly held the power of enchantment. Fedya, the protagonist in Tolstoi’s *The Living Corpse*, claimed he was bewitched by his Masha’s voice and her “tender black eyes.”^{xcviii} Gypsy women were also well known as fortune tellers, and their gaze allegedly had magical properties. No pale, tender beauties, the Gypsy women were considered dark and dangerous, with voices typically low and throaty. A. R. Kugel’, when describing the voice of Vara Panina, one of the most prominent Gypsy singers of the early twentieth century, wrote that it was “deep, deep-seated as night” (*glubokuiu, zataennuiu kak noch*).^{xcix} Gypsy voices were also held to be untrained and natural, like that of Pushkin’s Tania, whose voice was often compared to that of a nightingale.^c Like Tania, Gypsy women were referred to by their first names, “as Gypsies do,” typically in the diminutive, names like Stesha, Mania, Katia, and Nastia.^{ci} They shared this dubious

distinction with Russian prostitutes, who were also called by diminutive names both generic and exotic sounding.^{cii}

The lack of formal address was indicative of the social position of the Russian Gypsy woman while performing. She was an available object for the gaze and attention of the audience, and might even be commanded by her director to sit with and entertain customers. Ruth Kedzie Wood, a foreign visitor who spent her honeymoon in Russia in the early twentieth century, commented on the “quaint custom of ‘paying for conversations’”:

His inamorata of the moment sits with him [the customer] at tea or over the supper table, and entertains with trifling chatter, or, perhaps, a song. In return he gives gold to the siren, or, possibly, the jewel from his cravat, if she has pleased him uncommon much. As compensation for an hour of glitter and banter these birds of passage sometimes receive a palmful of gems to deck their plumage, or a cheque of staggering proportions.”^{ciii}

There was likely a thin line between such women, who were paid for their conversation and company, and prostitutes. Given the socially vulnerable position of these women and the vast disparity in terms of wealth between some of the performers and their audience, the line was undoubtedly blurred. While it is difficult to find precise references to the practice of prostitution among nineteenth-century documents, some evidence suggests its existence. The choir director Nikolai Shishkin, in an 1883 interview, stated that Gypsy women could not be purchased, although he admitted: “there was a time when he who fell in love with a Gypsy girl, and decided to abduct [*pokhitit*] her, bought her from the camp” (*vykupal ee iz tabora*).^{civ} Those gypsies who were “abducted,” often girls as young as fifteen or sixteen years old, would likely be taken up as mistresses. One commentator, writing in 1915, expressed concern at the continuing vulnerability of young Gypsy singers to the advances of men and described several cases of abduction by noblemen.^{cv}

The author suggested that these girls might in some cases be willing captives who wished to escape from the stern gaze of their directors and leave an exhausting life of endless nighttime entertainment. While such may have occasionally been the case, it is likely that the declining profits which accompanied the waning of *tsyganshchina* and the influx of poorer Gypsies from Moldova and Latvia into Russian cities in the early twentieth century created new pressures for female Gypsy performers.^{cvi} Even if Gypsy performers themselves did not serve as prostitutes, other women who did would certainly have been present at many restaurants and *traktiry*.

Despite these pressures, however, there is some evidence to suggest that the presumed availability of the Gypsy woman might have been a maintained illusion, or even a misunderstanding. One researcher who studies Gypsy history and social structure notes that despite popular claims, there were strict prohibitions on prostitution in Gypsy culture, and that while Gypsy women may have been able to choose mates more freely than other groups, once they were married, they were carefully restricted in their social interactions.^{cvii} This would seem to be confirmed by Rom-Lebedev, who went to great lengths to emphasize the rules governing Gypsy performance. According to him, the Gypsies were not only forbidden from drinking, but were closely watched by the choral leader (*regent*) and by their relatives in the choir. A young Gypsy girl who was invited into a *kabinet* would bring her mother, sister, or the guitarist along with her and would not be allowed to sit alone with guests. Anyone who broke the rules was expelled from the choir.^{cviii} While Rom-Lebedev again may have been writing to dismiss popular stereotypes—and there is the added possibility that his own experience may not have been typical—it is likely that the Gypsy woman was more carefully guarded than her

performance suggested. Misunderstanding may also have been a factor. Scholars who study the Gypsies note that women represent an important source of income for the group and interact frequently with the surrounding population in their work.^{cxix} Their entire life did not consist of such work, but it was only while performing that female Gypsy singers would have been visible to most Russians. Gypsy women were in some cases the main earners for their families, and they made their money in highly observable roles. By the end of the nineteenth century, several Gypsy women had even left their choirs to gain fame on their own. The singer Katia Khlebnikova was so well known that her face adorned the side of candy boxes sold in Moscow.^{cx} Vara Panina, another singer, gained fame as a strong woman of passion who had survived hardship and was considered somewhat masculine in her body language and eccentric garb.^{cxii} The public role of the female Gypsy performer and the unique role of women in Gypsy culture may have led audience members to confuse visibility with availability.

As in so much else, however, the members of Moscow and St. Petersburg's Gypsy choirs seemed to be culturally different from other Gypsies. Certainly one traditional Gypsy taboo, intermarriage, occurred among them with some frequency.^{cxiii} Rom-Lebedev commented on the prestige among Russia's elite of taking a famous Gypsy singer as a wife in the nineteenth century, and even if he did so with a degree of pride, there are numerous examples which illustrate this trend.^{cxiiii} As mentioned above, the Tolstoi family alone offers several cases. Lev Tolstoi's relative, Fedor Tolstoi, met his bride-to-be while she was performing and shortly whisked her away, bringing her immediately to church in order to marry her. He then moved her to an estate far from Moscow, and, according to one account, with the help of governesses and tutors was able

to pass her off as a countess, though her “Gypsy nature” occasionally “showed through” (*skvozila tsyganskaia natura*).^{cxiv} Such marriages, while perhaps seen as evidence of an adventuresome and poetic spirit on the part of the husband, could also provoke social scandal. According to Lev Tolstoi’s daughter, Alexandra, Sergei Tolstoi “gave up his worldly career” in Russian society in order to be with Maria Shishkina.^{cxv} The two were not married until after they lived together for more than a decade and had parented several children, though it is unclear whether the delay was due to objections on the part of the Tolstoi family to the union (which there were), or to Sergei’s apparently philandering ways.^{cxvi} For his part, Lev Tolstoi approved of Maria, describing her as loyal, pure-hearted, and loving in his memoirs.^{cxvii} Despite the risk of stigma among certain segments of society, there were many female Gypsy stars who were taken as wives by high-ranking Russians. Prominent examples include the Gypsy star Ol’ga Shishkina, who married the son of a former Russian Naval Minister, the singer Domasha Danchenko, who married Prince F. P. Masal’skii, and Liza Morozova, who married a certain Prince Vitgenshtein.^{cxviii} Many Gypsy women who married into Russian high-society (and it was only Gypsy *women* who did so) maintained contact with their choral families. After marrying the Naval Minister’s son, Ol’ga Shishkina reportedly continued to financially support her friends and relatives during hard times.^{cxix} Rom-Lebedev’s own older sister, Manita, married an officer by the name of Kokh and left the choir to live the life of a society lady, though she continued to visit her family.^{cxx} One published account stated that as a result of intermarriage, some of “the present day St. Petersburg Gypsies are almost white.”^{cxxi}

While some audience members married their favorite singers, most only hoped to spend evenings in their company. At the performance of a Gypsy choir, they could dream of meeting their Gypsy girl who, like Tolstoi's Masha in *The Living Corpse*, might understand a part of them that their wives did not, and could stir their souls with song and offer them the promise of temporary escape.^{cxxii}

The Search for the Authentic Gypsy Performance

By the early twentieth century, however, there was an increasing chance that a non-Gypsy might play the part of Masha. As part of her preparation to play this role in the 1911 Moscow Art Theater's staging of *The Living Corpse*, Elizaveta Time recalled taking singing lessons from the St. Petersburg Gypsy choir director, Nikolai Dul'kevich. According to Time, who was born in St. Petersburg to a well-to-do German family, Dul'kevich succeeded in teaching her how to sing with "explosive temperament" and "heated feeling" like a true Gypsy.^{cxxiii} The notion that one could convincingly become a Gypsy by reading from a script and taking musical lessons from a Gypsy instructor threatened the foundation of the Gypsy choir's primacy, which was based on their distinctiveness as an impermeable group of outsiders. The ability of non-Gypsies to pass as Gypsies called the very authenticity of urban Gypsy performance into question. The *volia* offered by the Gypsies was a commodity for which money was exchanged, yet its value depended on the authenticity of the product. Authenticity became more of an issue as race and nationalism created a more fixed definition of the "true" Gypsy while the increasing urbanization and embourgeoisement of Moscow and St. Petersburg's Gypsy choirs further distanced them from the nomadic lifestyle they were supposed to embody.

At the same time, their singing style was increasingly appropriated by non-Gypsy urban entertainers.^{cxxiv}

In the minds of audience members, an “authentic” performance needed to evoke idealized images of the Gypsy camp and the Gypsy life of wandering. Reviewers frequently compared the Gypsy choral performance to the commotion and passion of the camp, a place pervaded by screaming, shouting, dancing, fighting, and the sounds of metalwork.^{cxxv} Audience members had long expected the Gypsies to look distinctive, appearing before them as if from another time and place. Rom-Lebedev reported that as early as the 1840s, choral Gypsies moved from wearing “European” dress to clothing which made them more recognizable as Gypsies. Their style of dress became more exaggerated, adorned with jewelry, ribbons, and other accessories to catch the eye.^{cxxvi} Yet by the end of the nineteenth century, changes in clothing were insufficient. In an age of nationalism and, increasingly, race theory, Gypsies needed to be distinct in their very essence. Accordingly, Gypsy nature was often defined as the opposite of Russian nature. According to an ethnographic encyclopedia of the late nineteenth century: “By his character, his appearance, and his way of life [*obraz zhizni*], a Gypsy is the complete opposite of a Russian person” (*po vsemu protivupolozhen russkomu cheloveku*).^{cxxvii}

In 1855, the introduction to a collection of Gypsy songs described how the Gypsies had managed to find a space in many ways resembling the primal camp in Moscow, stating: “the open sky, the luxurious woods lying around Moscow, somehow reminded them of the wandering lives of their ancestors, which are expressed in such a lively way in their songs.”^{cxxviii} By the end of the century, however, the urban environment appeared to pose risks to Gypsy authenticity and seemed increasingly

distant from their “natural” setting. Much as a commentator could suggest that some of St. Petersburg’s Gypsies had become “almost white,” others remarked that Gypsy songs had lost their purity amidst city life. An early twentieth-century author spoke longingly of Pushkin’s lifetime, when Gypsy music was unspoiled: “that was the golden, already irrecoverable [*nevozvratimoe*] time of the flowering [*rastsveta*] of Gypsy song, still unsoiled [*eshche ne zapachkannoi*] by the banality [*poshlost’*] of the cafe and the opera.” Such lost purity was connected to changes in the Gypsy’s everyday life (*byt*), which had been corrupted by the city. According to the same author, in Pushkin’s time, “the very everyday life [*byt*] of the Gypsies was still clean and unspoiled” (*chist i neisporchen*).^{cxxix} Thus, in some cases, authenticity could be measured against the types of Gypsies described by Pushkin. Race became crucial for the audience member’s sense of authenticity, as it endowed the more settled Gypsies with an aura of continuity with their nomadic ancestors. Kuprin singled out the importance of “blood” in a life that Gypsies spent as guests in a larger host society: “Among foreign languages, their words changed and grew muddled, lines and stanzas were lost [*vypadali stroki i strofi*], but what hot blood [*goriachei krov’iu*], passionate longing [*strastnoi toskoi*], and fiery love, what ancient, primal [*pervobytnoi*] beauty can be sensed from the eastern source of these songs...which act like sorcery [*koldovstvo*], like red roses on the snow.”^{cxxx}

The extent to which the choir Gypsies diverged from their co-ethnics in the camp may in reality have been highlighted by the arrival of poorer, nomadic Gypsies in Russian cities in the early twentieth century. However, one source of persistent tension in representations of the Gypsy choir was that while audiences wanted the choir to evoke the spirit of the camp, many were repulsed by actual camp Gypsies, who could be praised

only for their musical abilities. One account spoke derisively of the camp Gypsies who lived a wild and unruly life of lawlessness and theft, and whose children “go about almost naked” until the age of sixteen. The author of this account was quick to point out, however, that these uncultured Gypsies should not be confused with urban choral Gypsies, writing: “the Gypsies, living in Moscow and St. Petersburg, represent a separate, exceptional phenomenon [*otdel’noe iskliuchitel’noe iavlenie*] in the world of Gypsies.”^{cxxxix} Thus, these “exceptional” urban Gypsies needed to balance between seeming too wild on one hand and appearing too settled on the other.

The packaged *volia* that this group presented to audiences accounted for the burgeoning popularity of Gypsy music from the first quarter of the nineteenth century to the 1910s, the long sweep of *tsyganshchina*. The Gypsy craze was disseminated downward, beginning as upper class entertainment at noble estates and then moving to *traktiry* and popular, though expensive, restaurants as a form of urban entertainment. By the century’s end, recordings of the Gypsies could be heard throughout the Empire. While the Gypsy craze moved through cycles, waxing and waning over time, generally speaking its popularity increased to the point where nearly every family with a piano might have had its “Gypsy songbook.”^{cxxxix}

With popularity came the renewed search for “pure” Gypsy music. Yet while some aficionados lamented the loss of authentic melodies and lyrics, “genuine” Gypsy music was mythical in nature. Contemporary Gypsy lorists may have dreamed of capturing “authentic” Gypsy songs that were only sung spontaneously, “when no one has called for a song, when the Gypsy women are resting, drinking, and smoking, when no one is listening.”^{cxxxix} By most scholarly accounts, however, the Gypsy idiom was created

as a sort of *bricolage* by the Gypsy performers and seems to have reflected their place in the host society and their appropriation of Russian song and dominant literary representations. Such was not the case for Russian Gypsy singers alone. According to Angus Fraser, Gypsies everywhere frequently “turned to the music which was characteristic of their environment, as perpetuators and adapters rather than creators, and, with instruments typical of the locality, just like in their folk-tales, they often borrowed motifs from the folklore of different countries which they traversed and gave them a Gypsy colouring.”^{cxxxiv}

While contemporary commentators may have lamented what they saw as a growing lack of authenticity among an increasingly Russified group of Gypsies, it is possible that the opposite process was occurring. Scholars have recently suggested that Russian Gypsies went from singing almost exclusively Russian songs in the early nineteenth century, to exchanging Romany words for Russian ones and composing Romany texts for Russian melodies in the late nineteenth century, to composing original melodies for Romany texts in the twentieth century.^{cxxxv} Rom-Lebedev’s own account of Russian Gypsy music would appear to confirm this, as he wrote that most early nineteenth-century Gypsy performances consisted of Russian folk and peasant songs, along with musical arrangements of Russian poetic verse. In the 1830s, Gypsies seized upon the genre of the romance, popularizing it to the extent that it would be forever associated with them, even though their very association with the sentimental genre would lead to charges that the Gypsies had abandoned the primal wildness of their original song.^{cxxxvi}

As has been shown, Russia's choral Gypsies were indeed a unique case in terms of the degree of their acculturation. While commentators might contrast the banality of the Gypsy romance with the gritty authenticity of Gypsy songs performed only for other Gypsies, and not for the *gazhe*, we have little evidence of such songs.^{cxxxvii} While they may have existed, it is likely that these lovers of Gypsy music were searching for authenticity in the wrong place. Acculturated Gypsies may have long been perfectly comfortable articulating their identity without using the Romany language and more "traditional" Gypsy musical forms. The Gypsy singer Ol'ga Demeter-Charskaia recalled that her mother did not know Romany, having grown up in a family more wealthy and acculturated than that of her father, and remembered her mother singing Ukrainian and Russian songs at family gatherings.^{cxxxviii}

Choir gypsies in the waning years of *tsyganshchina* in the early twentieth century may in a sense have been victims of their own success. As a result of their ability to provide a unique and lucrative service to the Russian host society, they gained wealth, and with it, social habits which made them less and less distinguishable from their audience. As a result, their performance of otherness grew less convincing. Some choral Gypsies, however, may not have seen this as such a loss. Many of the Gypsies themselves, having long since settled in Moscow and St. Petersburg, shared some of the same social aspirations as Russia's bourgeoisie, into which several married. As Rom-Lebedev's description of his family shows, they sought to be *intelligentnye* (educated and cultured people), dressing in the latest fashions, refraining from singing at the table, and seeking to send their children to the finest schools possible. Despite the studied "carelessness" of Gypsy performers, they should also be understood as entrepreneurs in a

lucrative business who were phenomenally successful in their own way. Of course, most Gypsy performers in Moscow and St. Petersburg did not achieve the success of the Lebedev family, and all the urban Gypsies taken together represented only a fraction of the total Gypsy population in the Russian empire.^{cxxxix} But looking only at this small group, we might ask: were these Gypsies truly a group that “didn’t want in?”^{cxli}

Even though the Gypsies’ success as performers depended on their distinctiveness as an outsider group, their identity is ultimately difficult to define outside the context of their Russian host society. The age of nationalism heightened many of the tensions inherent in the choral Gypsies’ peculiar position as a minority group of entertainers who specialized in reflecting the expectations of their audience. A truly separate ethnic identity—which had to be seen as one not performed for others—would have been difficult to establish among a group which trafficked in popular representations of themselves. As auto-Orientalists, they were more accustomed to watching others watch them. According to Alaina Lemon, who described the Gypsy theater *Romen*, which would be founded in the 1930s largely by former choral Gypsies and their children, they were at once charged with “representing folkloric and spectacular images of Gypsiness to outsiders” while needing to maintain “the integrity of their own self-identity as “real Roma.”^{cxli} We can only wonder at how the latter was achieved, hidden as it was from representations and thus from our historical gaze. Perhaps some found their self-identity compatible with new professions, which, on the basis of education, might have become open to them. Others continued to pursue a career in music and the ethnic distinctiveness, which still gave them an advantage as performers, led them to turn increasingly to the Romany language as a means of expressing their Gypsy identity. Even with the end of

tsyganshchina, the appeal of Gypsy song and dance, however altered or updated, still remained. While the twentieth century brought many new non-Gypsy stars who could, through a combination of attitude, appearance, and artistic persona, convincingly sing the Gypsy romance to widespread acclaim, only ethnic Gypsies could claim access to the mysterious past of wandering which gave their music the properties of a magical force brought from beyond the pale of civilization into the center of urban life. As it was for the musician, who in Tolstoi's *The Living Corpse* came to the Gypsies to record their songs, true Gypsy music remained something which could not be written down. As the play's frustrated musician exclaimed, it was different each time it was performed (*vsiakii raz po-novomu*), full of "foreign scales" (*skala inaiia*) and created on the basis of an innate ability in the spontaneity and passion of the moment.^{cxlii} While the repertoire of Gypsy performance was forged through a process of mutual interaction between the Gypsies and their Russian host society, it was still believed that only one born a Gypsy could be truly fluent in the Gypsy idiom. And yet, as performers, Gypsies needed to appeal to a Russian audience in order to be recognized as authentic.

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ⁱ For an excellent description of late Imperial restaurant culture, see Louise McReynolds, *Russia at Play: Leisure Activities at the End of the Tsarist Era* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 196-210.

ⁱⁱ Edward Said's *Orientalism* describes how Europeans imagined "the Orient" as an irrational and timeless place, its inhabitants "Others" believed unfit to rule themselves. Said does not devote much attention to investigating how European Orientalism was received and, in the case of the Gypsies, appropriated by those perceived as "Others." The reception and internalization of European ideas of the "Orient" by people in the Middle East and Asia has been called "auto-Orientalism," by John Lie and others, though the term is typically used to describe a process by which those in the Middle East and Asia subscribe to an image of themselves that reflects and furthers European hegemony. Even as the "othering" of the Gypsies reflected the power dynamics of Imperial Russia, where they were a minority, the performance of otherness gave Gypsies the temporary power to drive their audience to delight or tears, and, in the process, to achieve commercial success. See Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978) and Lie, *Sociology of Japan. A Special Issue of Current Sociology* 44:1 (1996): 5.

ⁱⁱⁱ According to the historian Russell Zguta, the *Skomorokhi* might have been descendants of pre-Christian priests and ritual performers. While their origins lie beyond the scope of the present essay, what is of interest is that in their cohesive and closed group organization, extravagant costume, and status as itinerant wanderers on the fringes of settled society, they closely resembled the Gypsies. See Zguta, *Russian Minstrels: A History of the Skomorokhi* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978). Mistrusted, associated with brigandry, and frequently barred from entering towns, the *Skomorokhi* nonetheless had a place of honor at peasant ceremonies and sometimes even in the tsar's court, being especially favored by Ivan IV.

^{iv} In the middle of the seventeenth century, Tsar Aleksei went so far as to formally outlaw the *Skomorokhi*, and order the confiscation and destruction of all musical instruments in Russia. See Zguta, *Russian Minstrels*, 106.

^v Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004).

- ^{vi} See for example Sharon Bohn Gmelch, "Groups That Don't Want In: Gypsies and Other Artisan, Trader, and Entertainer Minorities" *Annual Review of Anthropology* 15 (1986), 307-330.
- ^{vii} For a discussion of *Rromani butji*, which is what Gypsies call their traditional crafts, see Lev Tcherenkov and Stéphane Laederich, *The Rroma* (Basel: Schwabe, 2004), 531-554.
- ^{viii} These techniques are discussed in Gmelch, "Groups That Don't Want In," 322-323.
- ^{ix} Iks. Luch., "Iar" *Artisticeskii mir* 1 (1912), 10. Cited in McReynolds, *Russia at Play*, 202.
- ^x "A Gipsy Concert in Moscow" *All the Year Round* March 26, 1864, 158.
- ^{xi} Ivan Rom-Lebedev, *Ot tsyganskogo khora k teatru "Romen"* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1990), 46.
- ^{xii} Aleksei Petrovich Barranikov, "On the Study of Gypsies of the USSR" *Roma* 1:2 (1975), 17.
- ^{xiii} Barranikov, "On the Study of the Gypsies of the USSR," 18-20.
- ^{xiv} Efim Druts and Aleksei Gessler, *Tsygane: Ocherki* (Moskva: Sovetskii Pisatel', 1990), 202-204.
- ^{xv} The sometimes controversial distinctions between various Gypsy subgroups are discussed in a skeptical light by Alaina Lemon, *Between Two Fires: Gypsy Performance and Romani Memory from Pushkin to Postsocialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 88-89.
- ^{xvi} For a reliable chronology of Russian Gypsy history, along with information on the importance of the year 1812, see Demeter, Bessonov, and Kutenkov, *Istoriia Tsygan: Novyi vzgliad* (Voronezh, RAN, 2000), 184-213.
- ^{xvii} For an overview of Russian history which takes into consideration the phenomenon of ethnic specialization by Jews and other ethnic minority groups, see Andreas Kappeler. *The Russian Empire: A Multiethnic History*. Alfred Clayton, trans. Harlow: Longman, 2001. Kappeler, however, focuses on economic, military, intellectual, and bureaucratic specialization by ethnic groups, and not on their role as entertainers.
- ^{xviii} A. I. Kuprin, "Faraonovo plemia" in *Sobranie sochinenii v deviati tomakh* (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1973), 9: 130.
- ^{xix} Derzhavin composed the poem "Gypsy Dance" (*Tsyganskaia pliaska*) in 1805 as a response to a fellow writer, Ivan Dmitriev, who found the Gypsy street musicians of Moscow bothersome. See Joel Janicki, "Gypsies" in *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet Literature*, George J. Gutsche, ed. (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1989), 9: 188.
- ^{xx} A. S. Pushkin, "Tsygany" in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1977), 4: 155. Translated in Walter Arndt, *Pushkin Threefold* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1972), 285.
- ^{xxi} Pushkin, "Tsygany" *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 4: 157. Translated in Arndt, *Pushkin Threefold*, 287.
- ^{xxii} Tatiana Dem'ianova's account as quoted in Rom-Lebedev, 51.
- ^{xxiii} See N. Lerner, "Pushkin i Tsygany" *Stolitsa i usad'ba* 48 (1915), 13-14; P. Stolpianskii, "Koe-cto o tsygankakh" *Stolitsa i usad'ba* 34 (1915), 14-17; and Rom-Lebedev, 51.
- ^{xxiv} Stolpianskii, "Koe-cto o tsygankakh" *Stolitsa i usad'ba* 34 (1915), 14-17.
- ^{xxv} In this case, Bogeslav Markevich. See Rom-Lebedev, 50.
- ^{xxvi} The author, who recounts his time with merchants who were likely recognizable to contemporary readers, wrote under the pseudonym Don Zhuir. See his article in "Kak my veselilis' (Iz vospominanii)." *Stolitsa i usad'ba*. 35 (1915), 16-17.
- ^{xxvii} A survey of depictions of the Gypsy in Russian literature from Pushkin and Lermontov onwards is given in Janicki, "Gypsies" in *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet Literature*, 9: 186-189.
- ^{xxviii} E. A. Baratynskii, "Tsyganka" in *Stikhotvorenii, poemy, proza, pis'ma* (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1951), 379-416. For commentary on the poem, see Lewis Bagby, "Tsyganka" in *Reference Guide to Russian Literature*, Neil Cornwell and Nicole Christian, eds. (London and Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1998), 144-145.
- ^{xxix} N. S. Leskov, "Ocharovannyi strannik" in *Sobranie sochinenii* (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1957), 385-513.
- ^{xxx} See Janicki, "Gypsies" in *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet Literature*, 9: 186-189, where additional examples are given.
- ^{xxxi} For an overview of portrayals of the Gypsy in Western European literature, see Jean Paul Clébert, *The Gypsies* Charles Duff, trans. (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1967), 123-128.
- ^{xxxii} Alaina Lemon, *Between Two Fires: Gypsy Performance and Romani Memory from Pushkin to Postsocialism*, 37. Lemon also notes that European writers generally imagined women of other cultures as "excessively lusty," citing the work of Anita Levy, *Other Women: The Writing of Class, Race and Gender, 1832-1898* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

- ^{xxxiii} Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 104.
- ^{xxxiv} F. M. Dostoevskii, *Dnevnik pisatel'ia* in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridtsati tomakh* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1984), 26: 129. Translated in Boris Brasol's English language edition of Dostoevskii's *The Diary of a Writer* (New York: Octagon Books, 1973), 960. The context of Dostoevskii's seminal speech is discussed in Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Mantle of the Prophet, 1871-1881* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), 518-532.
- ^{xxxv} F. M. Dostoevskii, *Dnevnik pisatel'ia* in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 26: 144-145. Translated in Brasol, 977.
- ^{xxxvi} F. M. Dostoevskii, *Dnevnik Pisatel'ia* in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 26: 136-137. Translated in Brasol, 968.
- ^{xxxvii} A. A. Blok, *Dnevniki: 1901-1921 in Sobranie sochinenii* (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1963). Cited in Rom-Lebedev, 61.
- ^{xxxviii} Janicki, "Gypsies" 9: 187-188.
- ^{xxxix} Based on the account of Ol'ga Sol'skaia, a well-known Petersburg singer, quoted in A. A. Pleshcheev, *Pod sen'iu kulis* (Parizh: VAL, 1936), 73-74.
- ^{xl} Rom-Lebedev, 51-52.
- ^{xli} Stolpianskii, P. "Koe-cto o tsygankakh." *Stolitsa i usad'ba* 34 (1915), 14-17.
- ^{xlii} Lemon, *Between Two Fires*, 46-51.
- ^{xliii} L. N. Tolstoi, *Zhivoi Trup* in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1952), 34: 27.
- ^{xliv} L. N. Tolstoi, *Zhivoi Trup* in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 34: 17.
- ^{xlv} L. N. Tolstoi, *Zhivoi Trup* in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 34: 63.
- ^{xlvi} P. Stolpianskii. "Koe-cto o tsygankakh." *Stolitsa i usad'ba* 34 (1915), 14-17.
- ^{xlvii} L. N. Tolstoi, "Sviataia noch" in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*. Cited in Rom-Lebedev, 57.
- ^{xlviii} Many contemporary accounts linked the play's success to its use of popular Gypsy songs and saw it sparking a brief revival of Gypsy music in general. These accounts are discussed in the introduction to Aleksandr German's *Bibliografia o tsyganakh: pokazatel' knig i statei ot 1780-1930* (Moskva: Tsentrizdat, 1930).
- ^{xlix} For more on the Soviet effort to "eradicate" *tsyganshchina*, see Lemon, *Between Two Fires*, 140-150. For an example of Soviet scholarship critical of pre-revolutionary Gypsy musical traditions, see Boris Shteinpress, *K istorii 'tsyganskogo peniia' v Rossii* (Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal'noe Izdatel'stvo, 1934).
- ^l Efim Druts and Aleksei Gessler, *Tsygane: Ocherki*, 209.
- ^{li} Bernard Gilliat-Smith, "Russian Gypsy Singers." *JGLS* 3rd ser. 1 (1922), 59.
- ^{lii} Bernard Gilliat-Smith, "Russian Gypsy Singers." *JGLS* 3rd ser. 1 (1922), 62.
- ^{liii} Don Zhuir, "Kak my veselilis' (Iz vospominanii)" *Stolitsa i usad'ba* 35 (1915), 16.
- ^{liv} Evgenii Ivanov, *Metkoe moskovskoe slovo* (Moskva: Moskovskii rabochii, 1982), cited in Darra Goldstein, "Russian Dining: Theatre of the Gastronomic Absurd" *Performance Research* 4:1 (1999), 61-62.
- ^{lv} For example, in N. N. K. "Tsygane" *Stolitsa i usad'ba* 48 (1915), 6-9, the Gypsy performance is referred to as an "around the world feast" (*pir na ves' mir*).
- ^{lvi} Don Zhuir, "Kak my veselilis' (Iz vospominanii)" *Stolitsa i usad'ba* 35 (1915), 17.
- ^{lvii} "Tsygane," in *Narody Rossii: etnograficheskie ocherki* (Sanktpeterburg, 1878-1880), 468-469.
- ^{lviii} Rom-Lebedev, 15.
- ^{lix} Rom-Lebedev, 41.
- ^{lx} Brian L. Foster suggests that specialized outsiders are freed from the social constraints of the host society, allowing them to conduct otherwise taboo business activity. See Foster's "Ethnicity and Commerce." *American Ethnologist* 1:3 (August 1974), 437-448. Sharon Bohn Gmelch argues that the outsider group's distinction from others is maintained by a sense of social separation and impression management, which can play on stigmas or "disreputable behavior" to maintain difference. See Gmelch, "Groups That Don't Want In: Gypsies and Other Artisan, Trader, and Entertainer Minorities" *Annual Review of Anthropology* 15 (1986), 307-330.
- ^{lxi} A. I. Kuprin, "Faraonovo plemia," *Sobranie sochinenii*, 9: 132.
- ^{lxii} Gilliat-Smith, "Russian Gypsy Singers" *JGLS* 3rd ser. 1 (1922), 59-60.
- ^{lxiii} A. A. Pleshcheev, *Pod sen'iu kulis*, 71.

- ^{lxiv} A. A. Pleshcheev, *Pod sen'iu kulis*, 68.
- ^{lxv} Evgenii Kuznetsov, *Iz proshlogo russkoi estrady: Istoricheskie ocherki* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1958), 66.
- ^{lxvi} Druts and Gessler, *Tsygane: Ocherki*, 244.
- ^{lxvii} Rom-Lebedev, 47-48.
- ^{lxviii} Rom-Lebedev, 14.
- ^{lxix} L. N. Cherenkov, "Tsygane Moskvyy i Podmoskov'ia." Available HTTP: <http://zigane.pp.ru/history26.htm>. Accessed 23 February 2006.
- ^{lxx} Rom-Lebedev, 13.
- ^{lxxi} I have found no evidence that such ritual cleanliness, which can include forbidding Gypsies from eating off a plate a non-Gypsy has eaten off of, existed among the members of Russia's Gypsy choirs. Even if not explicitly present, some sense of social stigma associated with non-Gypsies may have remained. For an enlightening discussion of ritual cleanliness, see Carol Silverman, "Negotiating 'Gypsiness': Strategy in Context" *Journal of American Folklore* 101 (1988), 261-75.
- ^{lxxii} M. N. P. "Tsyganskaia starina" *Novoe Vremia* (Sanktpeterburg) 3844 (1886).
- ^{lxxiii} V. Bobri, "Gypsies and the Gypsy Choruses of Old Russia" *JGLS*, 3rd ser. 24: 1-2 (1961), 60-61.
- ^{lxxiv} Rom-Lebedev, 15.
- ^{lxxv} Don Zhuir, "Kak my veselilis' (Iz vospominanii)" *Stolitsa i usad'ba*. 35 (1915), 16-17.
- ^{lxxvi} For the following evening's performance, Liszt invited the Gypsy choir which he had been visiting to the performance, where they sat in the front row. See Franz Liszt, *The Gypsy in Music* Edwin Evans, trans. (London: William Reeves, 1926), 149-155 and E. I. Time, *Dorogi ikusstva* (Moskva: Vserossiiskoe Teatral'noe Obshchestvo, 1967), 145.
- ^{lxxvii} Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 13.
- ^{lxxviii} See for example Cherenkov and Stéphane Laederich, *The Rroma* (Basel: Schwabe, 2004), 703-712.
- ^{lxxix} G. Golokhvastov, "U tsygan" *Stolitsa i usad'ba* 48 (1915), 19.
- ^{lxxx} Titles and lyrics in V. Safoshkin, ed. *Gori, gori, moia zvezda: starinyi russkii romans* (Moskva: ESKMO Press, 1999).
- ^{lxxxi} One such singer was Nadezhda Plevitskaia. While not a Gypsy, she was well-known for her performance of Gypsy songs and brought her repertoire with her into Parisian emigration, where she sang and became involved in several quixotic attempts to restore the autocracy. See McReynolds, *Russia at Play*, 240. The singer herself gives a colorful description of her career in *Dezhikin Karagod: vospominaniia* (Sankt-Peterburg, Logos, 1994).
- ^{lxxxii} V. Bobri, "Gypsies and the Gypsy Choruses of Old Russia" *JGLS*, 24: 1-2 (1961), 116.
- ^{lxxxiii} Don Zhuir, "Kak my veselilis' (Iz vospominanii)" *Stolitsa i usad'ba* 35 (1915), 17.
- ^{lxxxiv} N. N. K. "Tsygane" *Stolitsa i usad'ba* 48 (1915), 6-9.
- ^{lxxxv} Rom-Lebedev, 40-41.
- ^{lxxxvi} Shishkin as quoted in A. A. Pleshcheev, "Tsygane (Iz zhizni starogo Peterburga)" *Stolitsa i usad'ba* 38/39 (1915), 10.
- ^{lxxxvii} Leopold Auer, *My Long Life in Music* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1923), 125-127.
- ^{lxxxviii} David Mayall, "Lorist, Reformist, and Romanticist: The Nineteenth-Century Response to Gypsy Travelers" *Immigrants and Minorities* 4: 3, 54.
- ^{lxxxix} Don Zhuir, "Kak my veselilis' (Iz vospominanii)" *Stolitsa i usad'ba*. 35 (1915), 16-17.
- ^{xc} L. N. Cherenkov, "Tsygane Moskvyy i Podmoskov'ia." Available HTTP: <http://zigane.pp.ru/history26.htm>. Accessed 23 February 2006.
- ^{xc1} For an excellent description of the choreography of the Gypsy choral performance, see M. V. Smirnova-Seslavinskaia, "Tsyganskii tanets v Rossii" in N. G. Demeter, ed. *Tsygane: sbornik statei* (Moskva: RAN, 1999), 85-155.
- ^{xcii} M. Shishkin, "Ia tsyganka, doch' stepei" in V. Safoshkin, ed. *Gori, gori, moia zvezda: starinnyi russkii romans*, 399.
- ^{xciii} See Wim Willems and Leo Lucassen, "The Church of Knowledge: Representation of Gypsies in Encyclopaedias" in Lucassen, Willems, and Cottaar, eds. *Gypsies and Other Itinerant Groups: A Socio-Historical Approach* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 35-52.
- ^{xciv} Bobri, "Gypsies and the Gypsy Choruses of Old Russia" *JGLS*, 3rd ser. 24: 1-2 (1961), 113.
- ^{xcv} M. N. P. "Tsyganskaia starina" 3844 (1886).

- ^{xcvi} N. B. Bessonov, "Tsygane" in *Mnogonational'nyi Peterburg: Isoriia, Religii, Narody* A. V. Gadlo et al, eds. (Sankt-Peterburg: Iskusstvo, 2002), 812-813.
- ^{xcvii} See, for example, the photographs of Shura and Lelia Il'inskiia in N. N. K. "Tsygane" *Stolitsa i usad'ba* 48 (1915), 7.
- ^{xcviii} L. N. Tolstoi, *Zhivoi Trup in Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 34: 59.
- ^{xcix} A. R. Kugel' as quoted in I. V. Nest'ev, *Zvezdy russkoi estrady* (Moskva: Sovetskii Kompozitor, 1970), 37.
- ^c Lerner, "Pushkin i Tsygany" *Stolitsa i usad'ba* 48 (1915), 13-14
- ^{ci} McReynolds, *Russia at Play*, 239.
- ^{cii} For more on the culture of prostitution in Russia, see Laurie Bernstein, *Sonia's Daughters: Prostitutes and their Regulation in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 167-175.
- ^{ciii} Ruth Kedzie Wood, *The Tourist's Russia* (New York: Dodd, Mead and company, 1912), 36.
- ^{civ} Pleshcheev, "Tsygane (Iz zhizni starogo Peterburga)" *Stolitsa i usad'ba* 38/39 (1915), 10.
- ^{cv} N. N. K. "Tsygane" *Stolitsa i usad'ba* 48 (1915), 6-9.
- ^{cvi} Bessonov, "Tsygane" in *Mnogonational'nyi Peterburg: Isoriia, Religii, Narody*, 815-821.
- ^{cvi} Jean Paul Clébert, *The Gypsies* Charles Duff, trans. (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1967), 208-218.
- ^{cviii} Rom-Lebedev, 41.
- ^{cix} Gmelch, "Groups That Don't Want In: Gypsies and Other Artisan, Trader, and Entertainer Minorities" *Annual Review of Anthropology* 15 (1986), 315-320.
- ^{cx} Pleshcheev, "Tsygane (Iz zhizni starogo Peterburga)" *Stolitsa i usad'ba*. 38/39 (1915), 11.
- ^{cxii} McReynolds, *Russia at Play*, 239.
- ^{cxii} For background on the prohibition on intermarriage, see Carol Silverman, "Negotiating 'Gypsiness': Strategy in Context" *Journal of American Folklore* 101 (1988), 261-75.
- ^{cxiii} There was also a less observable trend of male Gypsy stars taking non-noble Russian wives, perhaps its own sign of prestige. Rom-Lebedev seems to have had a Russian grandmother, and the singer Ol'ga Demeter-Charskaia, who married into a wealthy St. Petersburg choral family, noted that her husband had a Russian mother. See Rom-Lebedev, *Ot tsyganskogo khora* and Demeter-Charskaia, *Sud'ba Tsyganki* (Moskva: Stankin, 1997).
- ^{cxiv} Stolpianskii, "Koe-cto o tsygankakh" *Stolitsa i usad'ba* 34 (1915), 14-17.
- ^{cxv} Alexandra Tolstoy, *Tolstoy: A Life of My Father* Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood, trans. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), 42.
- ^{cxvi} For the former explanation, see Lemon, *Between Two Fires*, 250; for the latter, see A. N. Wilson, *Tolstoy* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1988), 214-215.
- ^{cxvii} L. N. Tolstoi, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (Moskva: Khudozhestvennaia Literatura, 1964), 34:368.
- ^{cxviii} For these and other examples, see Bessonov, "Tsygane" in *Mnogonational'nyi Peterburg: Isoriia, Religii, Narody*, 805-821.
- ^{cxix} N. N. K. "Tsygane" *Stolitsa i usad'ba* 48 (1915), 9 does not give the name of the minister but only refers to him as the "former Naval Minister 'B.'" This may be a reference to Aleksei Birilev, Naval Minister from 1905 to 1907. The names of Birilev and all others who served in this position are given in Erik Amburger, *Geschichte der Behördenorganisation Russlands von Peter dem Grossen bis 1917* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 354-355.
- ^{cxix} Rom-Lebedev, 39.
- ^{cxxi} Gilliat-Smith, "Russian Gypsy Singers," 63.
- ^{cxvii} See for example, Fedya's description of his wife, in which contrasts her with the Gypsy Masha. L. N. Tolstoi, *Zhivoi Trup in Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 34: 76.
- ^{cxviii} E. I. Time, *Dorogi iskusstva* (Moskva: Vserossiiskoe Teatral'noe Obshchestvo, 1967), 147.
- ^{cxviii} One such entertainer was Iurii Morfessi, the self-styled "king of Gypsy song." In his memoirs, the musician recalls his pleasure at convincing a professor of music that he was an ethnic Gypsy. In fact, Morfessi was born to an ethnic Greek family in Odessa. See Iurii Morfessi, *Zhizn', Liubov', Stsena: vospominaniia korolia tsyganskoi pesni* (Parizh: Orfei, 1982).
- ^{cxv} See for example M. N. P. "Tsyganskaia starina." *Novoe Vremia* 3844 (1886).
- ^{cxvii} Rob-Lebedev, 48.
- ^{cxvii} "Tsygane" in *Narody Rossii: etnograficheskie ocherki* (Sanktpeterburg, 1878-1880), 451.

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- ^{cxxviii} Introduction from the 1855 *Polnoe sobranie pesen moskovskikh tsygan*, cited in Kuznetsov, *Iz proshlogo russkoi estrady*, 63-64.
- ^{cxxix} Lerner, "Pushkin i Tsygany" *Stolitsa i usad'ba* 48 (1915), 13-14.
- ^{cxx} Kuprin, "Faraonova plemia," *Sobranie Sochinenii*, 9: 132-133.
- ^{cxxxi} M. N. P. "Tsyganskaia starina" *Novoe Vremia* 3844 (1886).
- ^{cxxxii} Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture*, 14-15.
- ^{cxxxiii} Bernard Gilliat-Smith, "The Language of the Russian Gypsy Singers" *JGLS* 2: 2 (1923), 61.
- ^{cxxxiv} Angus Fraser, *The Gypsies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 201.
- ^{cxxxv} Demeter, Bessonov, and Kutenkov, *Istoriia Tsygan: Novyi vzgliad* (Voronezh, RAN, 2000), 329.
- ^{cxxxvi} For a history of the Gypsy romance see Druts and Gessler, *Tsygane: Ocherki*, 199-276. See also Rom-Lebedev, 46.
- ^{cxxxvii} See for example Bobri, who in "Gypsies and the Gypsy Choruses of Old Russia" criticizes the romance as lacking in authenticity.
- ^{cxxxviii} Ol'ga Demeter-Charskaia, *Sud'ba tsyganki*, 13.
- ^{cxxxix} To convey a sense of the group's small size, it is worth noting that they were indeed a fraction of a minor ethnic group in Russia. According to the 1897 census, there were only 44,582 Gypsies in the entire Russian Empire, a number far smaller than their prominence in Russian culture might suggest. For more statistics on the Gypsy population and an invaluable bibliography of materials on the Gypsies published in Imperial Russia, see, Aleksandr German. *Bibliografiia o tsyganakh: pokazatel' knig i statei ot 1780-1930*. It is interesting to note that the author of this bibliography was himself a Gypsy from a choral family and among the first playwrights of Moscow's Gypsy Theater *Romen*.
- ^{cxli} As suggested by Gmelch, "Groups That Don't Want In: Gypsies and Other Artisan, Trader, and Entertainer Minorities" *Annual Review of Anthropology* 15 (1986), 307-330.
- ^{cxlii} Alaina Lemon, "Roma (Gypsies) in the USSR and the Moscow Teatr 'Romen'" in *Gypsies: An Interdisciplinary Reader* Diane Tong, ed. (New York: Garland, 1998), 15.
- ^{cxliii} L. N. Tolstoi, *Zhivoi Trup* in *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 34: 22.