

Title: Moscow's Demons: Staging Lermontov in Putin's Russia
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As Iuri Lotman and others have argued persuasively, Russia is eccentric, on the edge in many senses. Like Mikhail Vrubel's poignant yet threatening rendition of Mikhail Lermontov's protagonist, "Seated Demon" (1890), Russia itself sits with its back to the east facing the west. Neither Europe nor Asia, and uncomfortable with the mash-up of "Eurasia", Russia is its own Orientalist other in Saïdian terms. From its Kievan roots, to Alexander I's expansion into the Caucasus, to the recent annexation of Crimea and incursion into Eastern Ukraine, Russia is another Venice or Istanbul, a node for global cultural exchange (even though the rate is always in flux), but it also has imperial ambitions. Especially since Vladimir Putin's first election in 2000, theatrical artists have returned to the very matrix of Rus, revisiting Russia's geopolitical positionality in ways that recall both 1800 and 1900 and return to Lermontov's Byronic lonely djin gazing down from the mountains. Millennial Orientalist productions, perhaps epitomized by the Bolshoi Theatre's 2000 production of *Kniaz' Igor*, continued to appeal to a nineteenth-century desire for an exotic and decadent display of otherness. But even popular (and now suppressed) millennial television series like *Brigada* offered a more complex view of Russia's relationship to its eastern borders, while literally invoking Vrubel's image. Where Varnier's 2000 film *Vostok-Zapad* questions whether Russia can ever be part of Europe, and the 2002 Nord-Ost hostage crisis reveals how tensions to the south and east can extend into a theatre in central Moscow, productions of Lermontov's *The Demon* reveal the full complexity of Russia's relationship to territories which it both claims and reviles. With Vrubel's painting and *Farkhad*, the son of a Chechen drug boss in *Brigada*, as backdrop, two recent productions of *The Demon*, one of Anton Rubinstein's opera and another a wordless performance at The Yermolova Theatre, offer resilient performances of a fundamental national hybridity and heterogeneity which the Kremlin tends to resist.