



## ARTICLE

# “Following Our Own Path”: Pavel Katenin’s Political Theater

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## Abstract

The present article focuses on the tension arising from Pavel Katenin’s aesthetic and literary vision for the reception of Antiquity in Russian mythological drama: his avid support of Classical purism and his denunciation of dramatists, for whom ancient myths served merely as a resource of historical parallels, is challenging to reconcile with the revolutionary conception of his play *Andromache*. The paper argues that Katenin regarded antiquity as an idealized universe from which numerous motifs could be drawn for inspiration. Semantic and structural means employed in the tragedy are analyzed as shedding light on the extent of Katenin’s transformation of the ancient myth to reflect the ideology of his time. The paper suggests that Classical antiquity served as a “mask,” allowing contemporary Decembrist circles to apply ancient models and situational resolutions to their own political crises. The dramatist’s conflation of masked political ideology with extreme innovation and intricate intertextual allusion is put forward as a cause of the brevity of the stage life that Katenin’s *Andromache* was allowed in St. Petersburg’s Bolshoi Theater.

“Above all, we want to please ourselves,  
then the chosen ones, and only afterwards the rest ...  
We follow our own path”

Katenin’s letter to Alexander Pushkin, May 16, 1835

Among nineteenth-century Russian writers and literary critics, Pavel Katenin is, without doubt, one of the most enigmatic figures of his time. His erudition, authoritative theoretical discourse, unique grasp of Russian history, and capacity for recall marked him as an extraordinary personality among his contemporaries. Katenin has been referred to as “a living encyclopaedia” and “a truly remarkable phenomenon ... due to his unusual erudition and a huge bank of miscellaneous information, with which he surprized all his acquaintances” (FIGURE 1).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Petr Karatygin, “Zapiski Petra Andreevicha Karatygina, 1805–1879,” in *Izdanie P. P. Karatygina* (St. Petersburg, 1880), 106; Pavel Bartenev, *Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin: Materialy dlia ego biografii* (Moscow, 1855), 591.

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**FIGURE 1** Portrait of Pavel Katenin (1792–53) by an unknown artist. First quarter of the nineteenth century. National Pushkin Museum.

Katenin was well versed in modern foreign languages, including German, Italian, and Spanish, while his knowledge of French was exceptional, as confirmed by the testimony of Petr Andreev: “I myself happened to witness several occasions when he, opening up a new French book, would read it out in pure Russian, without the slightest pause and without Gallicisms; his verbal gift was amazing and captivated the listener.”<sup>2</sup> Katenin’s translations of French poetry and drama, especially Jean Racine’s *Esther*, Thomas Corneille’s *Ariane*, and Pierre Corneille’s *Horace* and *Le Cid* were widely appreciated, prompting even Aleksandr Pushkin, in *Eugene Onegin*, to praise “our Katenin” for breathing “new life into the majestic genius of Corneille.”<sup>3</sup> Deemed to be one of the best-educated men of his time, Katenin exemplifies the extent to which members of his circle knew and admired Classical languages and literature. The actor playing Orestes in *Andromache*, Petr Karatygin, with whom Katenin “worked tirelessly, apparently intending to mold him in the Decembrist image,” recalls that by the age of twenty-six the poet was fluent in Latin and had an outstanding knowledge of Ancient Greek.<sup>4</sup> Indeed Karatygin testifies that Katenin’s skills were sufficient to enable him to compose theoretical essays on Ancient poetry and Greek tragedy, as well as engage in erudite polemics with the leading German theorist of the Romantic school, August Wilhelm Schlegel.<sup>5</sup> A musician and

<sup>2</sup> Petr Andreev, *Vospominanie o P. A. Katenine* (St. Petersburg, 1853), 768. On Katenin’s linguistic abilities see Viktor Miller, “Katenin i Pushkin,” in *Pushkinsky sbornik: Stat’i studentov Imperatorskogo Moskovskogo Universiteta*, ed. A. I. Kirpichnikova (Moscow, 1900), 17–40; and Ivan Rozanov, “Russkaia lirika,” in *Pushkinskaia pleiada: Starshee pokolenie* (Moscow, 1923), 94–95.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Nikolai Yazikov, *Pis'ma N. M. Yazikova k rodnym (1822–1892)* (St. Petersburg, 1913), 319, 324; Aleksandr Pushkin, *Nesobrannnye i neopublikovannye teksty*, ed. M. A. Tsiavlovskii et al. (Moscow, 1935), 158. All translations from Ancient Greek, Latin, and Russian are mine.

<sup>4</sup> Catherine Schuler, *Theatre and Identity in Imperial Russia*, (Iowa City, 2009), 136.

<sup>5</sup> Petr Karatygin, “Zapiski Petra Andreevicha Karatygina,” 55–56.



lexicographer, Nikolai Makarov, who personally knew Katenin and his brother Petr, supplemented this information by claiming that Katenin was well acquainted with many Classical works which he had read in the original.<sup>6</sup> Special literary societies were set up by individuals like Aleksei Nikolaevich Olenin, “a well-known connoisseur and lover of antiquities,” which united poets, including Katenin, who were inspired by the Classics, and so provided the necessary medium for the dissemination of ideas associated with Antiquity and its influence on contemporary minds.<sup>7</sup> Katenin’s literary criticism was greatly admired by the most prominent contemporary writers, including Griboedov and Pushkin, who credited him with shaping their creativity and talent. Griboedov expressed his deepest gratitude to Katenin for widening his literary horizons and bolstering his originality, claiming that he owed “the maturity, magnitude and even originality of [his] talent” to Katenin.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, Pushkin stated that he and many other readers of Katenin’s literary criticism were given invaluable lessons in rejecting linear interpretations of texts.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Pushkin even claimed that Russia had no true literary critics save for Katenin and recommended that he commit his oral theoretical analyses of literature to paper since they would be of “great benefit ... to Russian literacy.”<sup>10</sup>

Previous scholarship has focused primarily on Katenin’s biography, regarding him as a historical figure with a noteworthy vita and military career and assessing his connection with Pushkin, Decembrist writers such as Vil’gel’m Kiukhel’beker, and their near-contemporary Mikhail Lermontov.<sup>11</sup> There have been numerous attempts to determine Katenin’s unique contribution to Russian literature, mainly on the basis of his ballads or poems, with some scholars stating that “in the evolution of the Russian ballad from Zhukovsky to Pushkin, [Katenin] should have the most distinguished place.”<sup>12</sup> Katenin’s ballads have revealed, in Vladimir Shatskov’s opinion, his pioneering “quest for distinctive national development,” for which Vissarion Belinsky famously called him *pobornik narodnosti*.<sup>13</sup> Other scholars have proposed that Katenin’s poetic *oeuvre* reveals his desire to consolidate the autonomy of Russian literature and his own innovations in meter.<sup>14</sup>

However, although Katenin’s biography and poetic oeuvre have received extensive attention in modern Anglophone and Russophone scholarship, there have so far been few studies of his dramatic works, including *The Feast of John Lackland*, *Gossips*, and *Andromache*, which by Katenin’s estimation surpassed all his other creations: “In terms of size and volume, as well as in the importance of its genre and content,” he wrote in the preface, *Andromache* was “a work which I value as first among my creations.”<sup>15</sup> Katenin’s assessment was shared by Pushkin, who in an 1830 article on popular (*narodnaia*)

<sup>6</sup> Nikolai Makarov, *Moi semidesiatiletnie vospominaniia i s tem vmeste moia polnaia predsmertnaia ispoved'*, pt. 4 (St. Petersburg, 1882), 27.

<sup>7</sup> Vladimir Shatskov, “Pavel Aleksandrovich Katenin (11 December 1792–23 May 1853),” in *Russian Literature in the Age of Pushkin and Gogol: Poetry and Drama*, ed. Christine Rydel (Ann Arbor, 1999), 108; Barsukova, *Zhanrovaia transformatsiia antichnoi “dramy roka,”* 88.

<sup>8</sup> Alexandr Griboedov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (St. Petersburg, 1917), 168.

<sup>9</sup> Alexandr Pushkin, *Pis'ma*, vol. 2, 1826–1830, ed. B. L. Modzalevskii (Moscow, 1935), 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, *Pis'ma*, 6–7.

<sup>11</sup> Laura Senelick, *Historical Dictionary of Russian Theatre* (Lanham, 2007); Evgenii Petukhov, “Pavel Aleksandrovich Katenin. Biograficheskii i istoriko-literaturnyi ocherk,” *Istoricheskii vestnik* 33:9 (1888): 553–75; Sergei Bertenson, *Pavel Aleksandrovich Katenin. Literaturnye materialy* (St. Petersburg, 1909), 49; Schuler, *Theatre and Identity in Imperial Russia*, 121–47; Rozanov, “Russkaia lirika”; Katherine Anna Booth, *A. S. Pushkin's Boris Godunov: An European Romantic tragedy* (Canberra, 1973); Vadim Parsamov, *Dekabristy i russkoe obshchestvo 1814–1825* (Moscow, 2016); Arina Arhipova, *Literaturnoe delo dekabristov*, ed., Juri Levin (St. Petersburg, 1987); Hans Rothe, “Philologische Ausgrabungen Oder Katenin Und Die Nachshhelt,” *Zeitschrift für Slavische Philologie* 36:2 (1972): 237–65; Vsevolod Miller, “Katenin i Pushkin,” in *Pushkinskii sbornik: Stat'i studentov Imperatorskogo Moskovskogo universiteta*, ed. A. I. Kirpichnikova (Moscow, 1900); Nikolai Piskunov, “Zametki o Katenine,” in *Pushkin i ego sovremenniki*, vyp. 12 (St. Petersburg, 1909); Lina Steiner, “‘My Most Mature Poema’: Pushkin’s Poltava and the Irony of Russian National Culture,” *Comparative Literature* 61:2 (2009): 99–100; Elena Saprygina, “Katenin i Lermontov,” *Gubernskii dom* 3 (2014): 87–94.

<sup>12</sup> Rozanov, “Russkaia lirika,” 74.

<sup>13</sup> Vissarion Belinskii, “Rech' o kritike,” in his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 6 (Moscow, 1955), 321; Shatskov, “Pavel Aleksandrovich Katenin,” 108.

<sup>14</sup> Galina Ermakova-Bitner, “Vstupitel'naia stat'ia,” in *P. A. Katenin, Izbrannye proizvedeniia* (Moscow, 1965), 19, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Katenin, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 12.



drama called *Andromache* the best of all the works of the Russian tragic muse “due to the strength of feeling which it portrays and due to its truly tragic spirit.”<sup>16</sup>

The time it took to create *Andromache* is likewise remarkable, since its composition started in 1809 and lasted until 1818. Katenin outlined the drawn-out process in the Preface, revealing that he started working on *Andromache* when he was seventeen years old, composed two complete acts and most of Act III by 1812, after which he left off writing to join the army, and then resumed his work in 1815, having spent a few years abroad. After its completion in 1818, Katenin stated that he had not altered it, citing cold feet after *Andromache*’s thorny path to the Russian stage as a cause (although some scholars have taken Katenin’s emphasis on the play’s unaltered status as evidence of its relevance to “the Decembrist epoch”).<sup>17</sup>

Despite the centrality of Ancient culture in Katenin’s *Andromache*, a play centered on the wife of the Trojan prince Hector and her fate after the fall of Ilium, the playwright’s literary models have not been conclusively addressed in previous scholarship. Katenin’s *Andromache* has been primarily approached as a standard Neoclassical play, going back to French dramatic traditions.<sup>18</sup> Although Racine’s *Andromache* (1667) has most commonly been put forward as a likely prototype for Katenin’s tragedy, it is hard to accept this hypothesis since the two plays differ radically in their dramatic collision, *dramatis personae*, and dénouement.<sup>19</sup> Racine’s play centers primarily on the character of Hermione, the daughter of Helen, whereas Katenin’s tragedy revolves around the figure of Andromache and, therefore, relates to a different generation of mythological heroes of the Trojan cycle. Alternatively, scholars have pointed to the Homeric epics and Ozerov’s *Polyxena* as possible models for Katenin’s *Andromache*, however, the latter does not appear to be a plausible candidate since the subjects of the two plays relate to different Classical heroines, Polyxena, the daughter of Priam, and Andromache, the wife of Priam’s son Hector.<sup>20</sup>

## FROM CREATIVE RECEPTION TO PIONEERING INNOVATION: THE CLASSICAL SOURCES OF “ANDROMACHE”

Although isolated Classical accounts such as Virgil’s *Aeneid* and Euripides’ *Trojan Women* have been cited as potential models for Katenin’s *Andromache*, the presence of a synthesis of Classical sources has not yet been proposed in scholarship.<sup>21</sup> The present article suggests that Katenin simultaneously drew on four prototypes for different aspects of his play: not just Virgil’s *Aeneid* and Euripides’ *Trojan Women*, but also Seneca’s *Troades* and *The Iliad*. It is possible that in his treatment of the legend of Andromache Katenin was also inspired by Anton Losenko’s oil painting *Farewell of Hector and Andromache*, which hung in the Museum of the Russian Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg until 1924. Commissioned by Catherine II, the painting was well-known among the upper classes of nineteenth-century Petersburg society and has been described as “a model painting of historical Classicism.”<sup>22</sup> Compositional characteristics of Losenko’s painting, such as Andromache’s static figure (she is little

<sup>16</sup> Pushkin, *Nesobrannnye i neopublikovannnye teksty*, 158; Aleksandr Pushkin, “O narodnoi drame i o ‘Marfe Posadnize’ M. P. Pogodina,” in his *Sobranie sochinenii v 10 tomakh* (Moscow, 1959), 6:363.

<sup>17</sup> Ermakova-Bitner, “Vstupitel’naia stat’ia,” 35.

<sup>18</sup> Some scholars categorize all of Katenin’s dramatic works as “neoclassical plays.” See, for example, Maria Stadter Fox, *The Troubling Play of Gender: The Phaedra Dramas of Tsvetaeva, Yourcenar, and H. D. Selinsgrove* (London, 2001), 40.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Liudmila Koroleva-Boltovskaia, “K istorii evropeiskoi dramy: (Kontseptsiiia tragicheskogo v ‘Andromakhe’ Evripida, Rasina, Katenina),” in *Sbornik nauchnykh trudov “Modifikatsii khudozhestvennykh sistem v istoriko-literaturnom protsesse”* (Sverdlovsk, 1990), 75–76; Ermakova-Bitner, “Vstupitel’naia stat’ia,” 36.

<sup>20</sup> Senelick suggest *The Iliad* as a possible source (Historical Dictionary of Russian Theatre, 213), while Elena Barsukova proposes Ozerov’s *Polyxena* (“Zhanrovaia transformatsiia antichnoi ‘dramy roka’ v russkoi dramaturgii XVIII–XIX vekov” (kand. diss. Omsk State University, 2009), 88.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Susanna Rabow-Edling, *Liberalism in Pre-Revolutionary Russia: State, Nation, Empire* (Abingdon, 2018), 18.

<sup>22</sup> Elena Petinova, *Russian Painters of the XVIII–XX Centuries* (St. Petersburg, 2011), 50.



FIGURE 2 *The Farewell of Hector and Andromache* by Anton Losenko. State Tretyakov Gallery, 1773.

more than Hector's attentive audience and does not elicit an emotional response from her audience), her impersonal appearance "excessively influenced by the principles of abstract Classicism" and her unfinished features (her face, eyes and folds of her dress are partially complete), all point to her relatively marginal role in the painting.<sup>23</sup> It is possible that the incomplete portrayal of Andromache in Losenko's painting sparked Katenin's curiosity and inspired him to attempt a fuller depiction of the Classical heroine with the help of the dramatic genre, which, like painting, includes visual as well as compositional aspects (FIGURE 2).

Aside from the potential influence on Katenin of Losenko's painting, I argue that four Classical literary works jointly supply both a schematic plotline of the events contained within the *Andromache* (the fall of Troy, the murder of Priam, the capture of Andromache, the death of Astyanax, and Pyrrhus' possession of Andromache) and a host of famous heroes with their associated characteristics (Andromache, a loyal wife and wretched mother; Astyanax, a murdered innocent; Pyrrhus, a hot-tempered warrior; Odysseus, a cunning schemer; and Agamemnon, a weak autocrat). By relying on a system of interrelated Classical accounts, Katenin was able simultaneously to maintain an authentically Classical setting for his play and to introduce structural and semantic innovations into the plot and characters. Katenin's transformation of the Ancient mythological plot and its heroes provides an insight into his ideological aims. It is important to note that Katenin does not endow his four Classical prototypes with roles of equal significance, instead choosing to adopt the narrative focus of *Trojan Women*, *The Aeneid*, and *Troades* rather than that of *The Iliad*. Maintaining the polemical approach of Euripides, Virgil, and Seneca to *The Iliad*, Katenin treats the *peripeteia* of the Trojan War from the position of the militarily defeated but morally resilient Ilium.

Katenin's play adopts a Virgilian poetic stance best characterized by a quotation from *The Aeneid*: "There are tears of things, and mortality touches the mind" (I.462).<sup>24</sup> This stance, distinguished by a melancholy existential awareness of inescapable human sorrow, entails the acute, bitter insight that injustice and cruelty rule the world (in the context of *The Aeneid*, despite the courage of Hector and the Trojan heroes who fought for their nations and their families, death, loss, and destruction was their reward). The Virgilian stance is echoed closely in the elegiac genre, popular in Russia during the years in which Katenin composed his *Andromache* (the 1810s and 1820s). By maintaining the

<sup>23</sup> Avraam Kaganovich, *Anton Losenko and Russian Art of the Mid-XVIII Century* (Moscow, 1963), 179.

<sup>24</sup> Quotations from Classical sources are taken from LOEB editions: *The Iliad*, vol. 1, *Books 1–12*, ed. A. T. Murray (Cambridge, MA, 1924); *The Iliad*, vol. II, *Books 13–24*, ed. A. T. Murray (Cambridge, MA, 1925); Euripides: *Trojan Women. Iphigenia among the Taurians. Ion* (Cambridge, MA, 1999); Seneca Tragedies, vol. I, *Hercules. Trojan Women. Phoenician Women. Medea. Phaedra* (Cambridge, MA, 2002).





narrative focus of Virgil's *Aeneid*, which depicted the survival of the oppressed and presented the foundational myth of Roman/Italian culture, Katenin subtextually hints at the potential for the rebirth of a courageous, freedom-fighting nation once it is no longer stifled by autocratic power, be it that of Agamemnon or a more modern, Russian tsar. Katenin's innovations, concealed by his ostensible conservatism, will be approached in the article on two levels: the macro-textual (the enrichment of the dramatic plot with innovative type-scenes centered on recognizable political collisions) and the micro-textual (the shift in the system of *dramatis personae* to archetypal characters spanning chronologically diverse social structures, imbuing the myth with contemporary ideological relevance).

On the macro-textual level, Katenin can be credited with incorporating a striking innovation into the structural organization of the mythological plotline related to Andromache: a dramatic collision between a weak-willed monarch (eager to give ear to the intrigues of his advisors) and his subjects (whom he intends to subdue). Katenin creates an entirely original, profound conflict between Agamemnon and Pyrrhus, which is motivated by two causes: the king's desire to suppress the will and voice of his subject and the determination of Astyanax's fate. I suggest that Katenin's macro-textual innovation has its roots in two Classical accounts, *The Iliad* and *The Troades*. In the Greek epic, Agamemnon quarrels with Achilles, the father of Pyrrhus, whom he resembles in both strength and heroic character, over his spear-bride Chryseis, whose return is demanded by her father Chryses, the seer of Apollo. The conflict between the two Greek leaders revolves around Agamemnon's desire to assert his dominion as general-in-command over Achilles by referring both to his power ("I am mightier than you," *Il.* 1.185) and to his superlative social status as supreme ruler (cf. the comparative "I am kingly," *Il.* 9.160). The basis of Achilles' refutation of Agamemnon's claim has rebellious undertones: the hero undermines the very foundations of autocracy by questioning the sway which a physically and mentally inferior individual may hold over the lives of his subjects: "Why should any Achaeans rush to obey your orders to march or fight wars?" (*Il.* 1.149–51). The conflict between the two Greek heroes persists for nineteen books of the epic with neither side willing to yield: Agamemnon demands that Achilles submit himself to his governance, while Achilles asserts his spiritual freedom and independence, until the gods (in particular Apollo) aid in the killing of Patroclus and so force Achilles to fight.

In Katenin's *Andromache*, the same type-scene of a quarrel between a ruler and his subject is reflected in the conflict between Agamemnon and Pyrrhus, Achilles' son. As in *The Iliad*, their quarrel is based upon Agamemnon's desire to assert his power as king: "Here all the will and power to me alone belongs, / It was at my behest that Ulysses conversed with you, / and by my hand alone will you receive a gift." Lexemes denoting autocratic power, dictatorial will, and self-proclaimed omnipotence pervade the speech of Agamemnon, whom Pyrrhus describes as a "power-loving tyrant" (Act II.2).<sup>25</sup> The quarrel between Agamemnon and Pyrrhus extends beyond a single scene and progresses until, as in *The Iliad*, it is resolved by the higher agency of the gods who, through the seer Calchas, demand the death of Astyanax. The resemblance of the two quarrels is strengthened by Pyrrhus' recollection of his father Achilles ("Pyrrhus shall not be called the offspring of Achilles") and the necessity of living up to his great example in not submitting to Agamemnon's tyranny: "Upon this day he wished to rob me of the reward for my hard work / And I will stomach that my fate is lotted out by him" (Act IV.4). Thus, although the subject (the fate of Achilles' concubine, Briseis) and one of the participants in the quarrel (Pyrrhus rather than Achilles) differ, the structure, dénouement, and dramatic collision of the quarrel type-scenes are identical: in both the power of the ruler is at issue.

The conflict between Pyrrhus and Agamemnon in Katenin's tragedy inherits a resemblance not only to *The Iliad* but also to a Latin dramatic account, Seneca's *Troades*, which strengthens the ideological subtext of the plotline.<sup>26</sup> In addition to taking place at the same chronological stage of the Trojan cycle—after the fall of Troy and at the end of all fighting—the quarrel type-scene in both

<sup>25</sup> Quotations from Katenin's *Andromache* are taken from P. A. Katenin, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia* (Moscow, 1965), 361–422.

<sup>26</sup> For a detailed study of Seneca's tragedy see Atze L. Keulen, *Anneaeus Seneca Troades: Introduction, Text and Commentary* (Leiden, 2001).



plays culminates through the agency of a god: the plays share the same figure, the prophet Calchas, who in Seneca's *Troades* delivers the fate of Polyxena, and in Katenin's tragedy calls for the slaughter of Astyanax. The conflict between Agamemnon and Pyrrhus in Katenin's *Andromache* centers on the murder of an innocent victim (Astyanax, the son of Hector), who must be slain to prevent him from challenging the autocracy of the king. The issues of tyranny, freedom, and rebellion addressed in *Andromache* resonate with the revolt against the autocratic practices of Nicholas I due to a shared algorithm: disastrous consequences following the uprising of liberty-seeking resistors against the brutal impositions of a weak, violent ruler. Indeed, it is crucial to the ideological subtext of the play that Katenin chooses to explore the most barbaric form of punishment for a hypothetical rebellion (which, given the tender age of Astyanax, is chronologically distant and dependent on a wide variety of factors, ranging from his physical capacity to his ability to muster support). In an ominous allusion to the potential repercussions of a contemporary uprising, Katenin hints at parallels in status and functions between the child Astyanax and the upper circles of Russian society, in which discontent with the tsarist regime was brewing (including nobility of birth, threat to the rule of an autocratic monarch and susceptibility to violent suppression).

In his dramatization of a physically stronger "official" power overwhelming a morally more potent force that refuses to succumb to authority and physical violence, Katenin includes a parallel between the slaughter of Hector's son and the potential execution of rebels against the tsarist regime. Katenin's representation of Astyanax's death markedly deviates from his Classical models: in Ancient accounts, Astyanax is allotted three different fates, dying at the hands of Pyrrhus, dying at the hands of Odysseus, or death by suicide. The first of these fates, by far the most common, is first attested to in the lost epic poem the *Little Iliad*, retold by Pausanias in his *Description of Greece*:<sup>27</sup>

Her [Andromache's] son stands next to her clutching at her breast; Lescheos says this child was killed by being cast down from a tower, not because the Greeks decided so, but because Neoptolemus of his own free will chose to slay him. (10.25.9)

Pausanias cites no motive for the child's murder save Pyrrhus' (Neoptolemus') private hatred and bloodlust, suggesting that the Greek hero was driven by the same madness as when he slew Priam.<sup>28</sup> The second version of Astyanax's death, at the hands of Odysseus, is recounted in two extant sources, Arctinus' *Iliou Persis* ("When the Greeks burn the city, Odysseus slays Astyanax," as retold by Proclus in *Chrestomathia ii* and Euripides' *Trojan Women*: "They will kill your son ... when Odysseus prevails among all the Greeks in speech."<sup>29</sup> In both cases, the motive for requiring the child's death is either politics or fear: Odysseus murders him out of hatred for his father, the slayer of many Greeks, or out of fear lest Astyanax grow up to become a new Hector destined to avenge Troy.

The final version of Astyanax's death is given in Seneca's *Troades*, where the boy, condemned to death by the Greek army, leaps off the walls of Troy himself: "The boy jumped down into the midst of Priam's kingdom of his own free will" (1102). Despite allotting Astyanax the greatest maturity and courage, Seneca dwells upon the boy's frailty and disfigurement after his fall:

His bones were fractured and dispersed by the heavy fall; the features of his shapely body, his face, the noble image of his father, were disfigured by his crashing to earth, his neck was shattered by his fall on the rock, his skull was smashed, his brains dashed out—he lies a formless corpse. (1110–17)

<sup>27</sup> Susanna Phillippo, "A Future for Astyanax: Alternative and Imagined Futures for Hector's Son," *Journal of the Classical Tradition* 14: 3–4 (2007): 324.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Martin West, *Greek Epic Fragments: From the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries BC* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 146–47.



The graphic description of the shattered corpse and the physical details of Astyanax's limbs, neck, skull, and brains all point to the violence of his death and his human fragility.

Katenin adheres to the Classical tradition of making Astyanax die at the command of the Greeks and even goes so far as to make Odysseus responsible for the decision, facilitating a comparison with Arctinus' *Iliou Persis* and Euripides' *Trojan Women*: "So, the Greek host will rage if you refuse to hand over to them the son of Hector, whereupon they will exact their fitting vengeance for their defeat and his heroic father's deeds" (Act II.1). Furthermore, in Katenin's play, Astyanax's death is determined by the same two reasons: the Greeks' desire to avenge Hector ("But if the Greeks so will it, I must acquiesce. Let them glut their enmity with him"; Act II.1), and their fear that Astyanax might turn out like his heroic father ("thus does the young Astyanax strike fear into the Greeks"; Act II.2). Andromache expands upon the motif of fear, threatening Pyrrhus with her son's future glory and the retribution he will exact upon the Greeks when he becomes a man. However, despite his close adherence to the schematic plotline of Astyanax's demise and the motivation behind it, Katenin innovates by fashioning a completely different form of death for the child. Whereas in Classical accounts the boy dies violently, in Katenin's play Astyanax is granted a peaceful apotheosis. Like Ganymede or even the hero Heracles, the child is destined to feast among the gods: "He is transported to the heavens, like a new Ganymede ... and will sit at an eternal feast among the sons of heaven" (Act V.9). Katenin furthers the striking effect of his novel scene by introducing visual and aural elements into Ulysses' account: "suddenly a lightning bolt cut across the sky, a flash struck all and sundry blind, and from the heavens, Zeus' winged thunder hit the tent like lead" (Act V.9). An excess of lexemes from the semantic sphere of bright light, loud, heavy sounds, and physical might signifies the earnestness of the gods' divine will to preserve the body of Astyanax inviolate and unharmed.

In contrast to Seneca, who describes the crushed and disfigured body of Astyanax, Katenin preserves the motif of the boy's beauty, indicating his supra-human nature, so different from the mortally frail child of *The Troades*:

He lay as if asleep, his half-open eyes tranquil [and] lifted to the heavens; a smile beautified his deathly pale cheeks. ... And for a long time, we knew not whether he was alive or dead. (Act V.9)

Although Katenin offers no explicit reason for sparing Astyanax his traditionally violent demise (he is not described as physically irresistible like Ganymede or, due to his tender age, as heroic like Hercules), a possible explanation for the Russian poet's innovative creative choices can be posited. The child, an innocent victim of a tyrannical king (Agamemnon) and his scheming favorites (for example, Ulysses) is granted the death of a martyr: his physical body remains inviolate as it is taken up to Olympus.

At the micro-textual level of *Andromache*, the ideological views of the poet are reflected in his representation of the play's *dramatis personae*, which function not only as individual heroes but also as an interrelated system of characters, engaged in dramatic collisions worthy of the nineteenth-century Russian political arena. Katenin endows Andromache with a broad, multifaceted significance, signaled by his choice of her as both the eponymous protagonist of his drama and the main narrator of Troy's past, through whom the vanquished city still has a dramatic presence. Andromache is endowed with a new trait that makes her markedly different from Euripides' and Homer's submissive heroines or even Seneca's furious princess. Unlike her Iliadic counterpart, whose idealized femininity leads her to perform all the roles of a virtuous woman, the Russian Andromache is defined by a desire to throw off her social bonds and single-handedly oppose the crushing weight of the world beyond her *oikos* (the trifecta of family, house, and home).<sup>30</sup> In contrast to Euripides' Andromache, who contemplates a union with Pyrrhus and pleasing him as her new master, Katenin's heroine reviles Pyrrhus to his face,

<sup>30</sup> Robert Fowler, *The Cambridge Companion to Homer* (Cambridge, England, 2004), 98; Michael Shaw, "The Female Intruder: Women in Fifth-Century Drama," *Classical Philology* 70:4 (1975): 258; Jasper Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford, 1983), 3.





fighting against his dominion over her: "Can I respond? With lowered head, I must give ear to your behest. But if you give my tongue its liberty, my response to you shall not be flattering" (Act II.6). Andromache addresses Pyrrhus as a princess, rather than as a slave ("For the last time I will respond to you as a princess ought"; Act II.6), and exults in her fearlessness as she addresses the man who commands both her own life and her son's: "Do you marvel, Pyrrhus, hearkening to such brave words, disdainful of fear and cunning; tell me, what did you expect from Andromache?" (Act II.6) Indeed, she has the courage to reject Pyrrhus' advances twice before acquiescing out of fear for her son, through whom she attempts to salvage the historical continuity and lineage of Troy.

Unlike Euripides' Andromache, Katenin's princess cannot willingly yield to Pyrrhus or accept his love despite his best attempts, since the heroine's actions are governed by her aspirations for freedom.<sup>31</sup> Since Pyrrhus is her captor and the destroyer of Troy, Andromache cannot favor him without betraying her homeland and, indeed, her very nature.<sup>32</sup> Thus, Katenin introduces an element into his characterization of Andromache, absent in the Classical accounts, by fashioning her in accordance with two attitudes conventional in his own contemporary political world: the love of homeland and the right to resist the external constraints of autocracy. Katenin introduces an eloquent distinction in the symmetry of Andromache's relationship with Pyrrhus and Pyrrhus' relationship with Agamemnon, which offers an insight into his own ideological approach to conflict: it appears that in his play, Katenin posits negotiation (manifested in Pyrrhus' behavior toward Andromache) rather than violence (as embodied by Agamemnon in relation to Andromache) as a preferable and also more effective mode of settling conflicts. Although Katenin both maintains the schematic plotline of Andromache's fate (Troy is captured, the heroine's son is threatened with violence and killed, and she herself is given over to Pyrrhus) and adheres closely to dramatic scenes from one of his prototypes, *The Troades*, he innovates by creating a female character hitherto unseen on either the Classical or Russian stage.

Katenin's innovative transformation of the system of *dramatis personae*, which sheds light on his ideological outlook, can be observed further in his treatment of Andromache's captor, Pyrrhus, who acts as a catalyst in bringing the play to its dénouement. In Classical literature, Pyrrhus is traditionally presented as a bloodthirsty killer who conspicuously lacks the nobility and humanity of his father, Achilles. The first time Pyrrhus appears in Book II of *The Aeneid*, he is characterized by the vivid simile of a snake preparing to strike its victim:

Pyrrhus exults, shimmering with the glimmer of bronze: like a snake, nurtured on poisonous plants which the cold winter has kept, swollen, beneath the ground, and now it splits its skin, shining with youth, flashes its glossy back and with its belly lifted up towards the sun, flickers its triple-forked tongue from its jaws. (469–75)

In contrast to Homeric similes, which refer to noble, openly fighting animals (Achilles depicted as a hawk or a hound in Book 22; Hector as a stallion in Book 20; and Menelaus as a lion in Book 11), Pyrrhus is represented as a lowly creature, that slithers up from the depths of the earth and attacks its victims unawares.

In keeping with this vilifying characterization, Pyrrhus is given a dubious *aristeia*, which amounts to breaking open the walls of Priam's palace, raging through a throng of fearful women, chasing down and slaughtering the wounded son of Priam, Polites, before the very eyes of his father, and finally violating holy sanctuary by dispatching the helpless aged Priam at the foot of the altar. Unlike Achilles in *The Iliad*, who engages in fair combat on an open field, Pyrrhus in *The Aeneid*, although possessing his father's strength, lacks his virtue. Priam himself, when seeking protection at the altar of Athena, contrasts the villainous Pyrrhus with his great father, who respected the laws of Zeus (*xenia*: host-guest hospitality). The last time Pyrrhus' activity within the walls of Troy is mentioned, he is

<sup>31</sup> Ermakova-Bitner, "Vstupitel'naia stat'ia," 36–38.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.



described as a warrior “soaked in the blood of Priam, a man who slaughters a son in front of his father and a father before an altar,” thus pitilessly disrespecting the most fundamental laws and customs of an Ancient society (662–63).

In Seneca’s *Troades*, Pyrrhus is likewise represented as violent (“It is a fault of youth not to be able to rein in your violence”), irrational, and pitiless toward his fallen Trojan enemies.<sup>33</sup> Pyrrhus’ first monologue on stage is aimed at persuading Agamemnon to continue the bloodshed by sacrificing the maiden daughter of Priam, Polyxena, to his father’s shade. When Agamemnon attempts to reason with him, Pyrrhus responds with threats of the same sort of violence he had exercised on Priam. He has no compassion for the Trojans, but instead rejoices in his father’s killing of them (“I am proud to list my great father’s noble praises and famed deeds: Hector lies low, slain before his father’s eyes and Memnon before his uncle’s eyes”) and strives to augment his posthumous glory by murdering yet another defenseless victim, the maiden Polyxena (236–39).

In contrast to the pitiless killer of Classical accounts, Katenin fashions a completely novel representation of Pyrrhus, characterized not only by his canonical arrogance and violence but also by a gentler, compassionate quality. If Virgil’s Pyrrhus slays a wounded man (Polites) and slaughters the aged Priam before the eyes of his wife Hecabe, Katenin’s Pyrrhus is distinguished by his ability to pity the weak and fallen: “to slight the wretched is no trait of Pyrrhus’.” Katenin’s Pyrrhus is closer in nature to the Iliadic Achilles, who, despite losing his closest friend at the hands of the Trojan Hector, has the spiritual generosity to pity Priam and return to him the body of his son. In accordance with the traditional Classical representation of Pyrrhus, Katenin retains an element of haughtiness and pride in his hero’s character, manifested in his behavior toward Andromache, whom Pyrrhus derides by reminding her of her lost social status with such comments as “I will not denigrate myself by speaking to a slave,” and “I want to see that haughty slave” (Act II.7). However, despite his seemingly pitiless exclamations, Pyrrhus adopts a respectful tone, urging Andromache to set aside her fear and become his wife. In contrast to the hero of Virgil’s epic, who strives to elicit fear from his adversaries, Katenin’s Pyrrhus is endowed with the capacity to reassure and empathize with his fallen enemies.

In opposition to the Pyrrhus of Virgil’s *Aeneid* and Seneca’s *Troades*, who treat Andromache with violence and ruthlessness, Katenin’s hero is shown to love the Trojan princess and pity her plight. Unlike earlier Classical accounts, in particular Euripides’ *Trojan Women* and Seneca’s *Troades*, where Andromache is nothing more than Pyrrhus’ slave and a spoil of war, Katenin’s tragedy alters the status Pyrrhus offers the princess: instead of his concubine, Andromache can become his lawful spouse: “to be my wife ... conduct a nuptial union” (Act II.6). Unlike the Iliadic Andromache, who laments being forced to perform the duties of a slave girl, Katenin’s princess would maintain her social status and even hold equal sway with her husband: “Alkim, follow her, I count her as my wife and all that she orders is by me permitted” (Act IV.5). Already in his first meeting with Andromache, Pyrrhus treats her in a respectful, even noble manner, leaving the decision of becoming his wife to her alone. Instead of dragging Andromache off into slavery like Euripides’ heroine, Pyrrhus offers the princess the dignity of accepting him of her own free will.<sup>34</sup> Despite being rejected by Andromache, Pyrrhus strives to rescue the child Astyanax of his own accord and is prepared to make enemies of all other Greeks to prevent the child’s death. Although on the surface, Pyrrhus only claims to be defending his own honor (in a heroic society, the loss of a spoil was regarded as a great shame), the astute Andromache perceives that the driving force behind his actions is, in fact, pity and nobility of character.

Katenin introduces the motif of freedom-fighting as a further innovation in Pyrrhus’ characterization. Influenced by his own ideological outlook, the Russian poet endows Pyrrhus with an innate hatred for autocracy, embodied in the figure of a “power-lusting” tsar. Pyrrhus, in Katenin’s tragedy, resents Agamemnon’s suppression of the Greek host, deploying the words “all the host” as a *pars pro toto* for the whole Greek nation. Katenin must have expected his contemporary audience to recognize the

<sup>33</sup> Norman Pratt, *Seneca’s Drama* (Durham, NC, 1983), 108.

<sup>34</sup> Ermakova-Bitner, “Vstupitel’naia stat’ia,” 37.



situation in which a monarch suppresses the freedom of his leading citizens, in particular, Pushkin's persecution by Alexander I. Thus, instead of the single-minded killer of Virgil and Seneca, Katenin creates an entirely new character, torn between his freedom-fighting motivation and his compassionate nature. In comparison with the tragedies of his predecessor, Ozerov, which are permeated by unequivocal characters, either cruel, treacherous monsters (such as Pyrrhus in *Polyxena*, who is represented as an incarnation of evil) or their virtuous victims (such as his Astyanax and Andromache), Katenin created in Pyrrhus a uniquely multifaceted character who elicits fear and esteem from his audience.<sup>35</sup>

Katenin's transformation of the character of Pyrrhus is echoed by his innovative representation of Agamemnon, but in a diametrically opposed direction: the milder and the more virtuous Pyrrhus is depicted, the harsher Agamemnon is portrayed. In *The Troades*, which appears to have been Katenin's primary model for the representation of Agamemnon (in both plays, Agamemnon is introduced through the same type-scene: the conflict between him and Pyrrhus), the Mycenaean king is characterized as a monarch wearied by the burden of power. In response to Pyrrhus' glorification of strength and violence, Agamemnon reaffirms the transience and emptiness of mortal dominion: "Should I think the scepter to be anything more than a name adorned with empty splendor, a forehead bedecked with a false crown? Brief accident will snatch them" (271–73). He reflects upon his arrogant and shameful past and laments the bitter fate of Troy, which he wishes he had saved from ruin: "I wish I could have spared them, overthrown and leveled with the ground. ... Let all that can survive of ruined Troy survive, enough and more than enough punishment has been exacted."<sup>36</sup> Instead of gloating over his fallen enemy, Agamemnon strives to protect Polyxena, the daughter of Priam, from death ("I will not allow a royal maiden to fall and be given to a tomb"; 287–90), and pities her innocence and weakness.

In other Classical accounts, Agamemnon is given even more redeeming features: in *The Iliad*, he cherishes his brother, Menelaus, and laments his wound; in the *Odyssey*, he shows concern for the fate of Odysseus and his successful *nostos*; in Seneca's *Agamemnon*, he elicits pity by his shameful and untimely death. But in Katenin's *Andromache*, by contrast, Agamemnon is the play's most adverse character, devoid of any redeeming qualities. In his first speech on stage, Agamemnon reveals his inability to withstand the pressure of the Greek host's decision ("but if the Greeks will it, I must accede"; Act II.1); he desires to assert his power over the feeble child Astyanax and to crush all those who oppose him. In addition to endowing him with a weak and petty nature, Katenin also accentuates Agamemnon's lust for total sovereignty, to which he is not suited. Unlike Seneca's Agamemnon, Katenin's king shows no humility before the gods, usurping their role as supreme arbiters of justice: "I alone administer justice in the Greek ranks, I alone have the power to execute and pardon prisoners. To Atreus' son, the people, leaders, even you are all subordinate" (Act IV.6).

Furthermore, Katenin's Agamemnon regards fate as a tool whose function is to aid his private desires: "fate grants me an opportunity to take revenge upon this proud man" (Act II.1). In inverse correlation with Pyrrhus, a hero depicted in accordance with revolutionary principles, Agamemnon appears closer to the Decembrist representation of an autocrat, characterized by murderous vindictiveness, shameful injustice, and the desire to crush the freedom of his subjects and oppress his helpless victims (cf. Pushkin's ode "Liberty": "Alas! No matter where I cast my gaze—all round are whips; all round are irons, the deadly infamy of laws, the helpless tears of captivity / all round I see unholy power"). As in his treatment of Andromache and Pyrrhus, Katenin fashions a new character who, although represented in full accordance with his Classical schematic plotline (he is the general of the Greek army, conquers Troy and pillages it), is endowed with entirely original, iniquitous traits.

The aforementioned macro-textual and micro-textual innovations reveal Katenin's *Andromache* to be a profoundly original dramatic work, especially with respect to its transformation of Classical literary accounts, its simultaneous shifting of the system of epic heroes, and its use of a cast of pioneering characters for the Russian stage: the noble hero in Pyrrhus, the tyrannous and autocratic monarch in

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Pratt, *Seneca's Drama*, 108.



Agamemnon, the freedom-loving Andromache, and Astyanax in apotheosis. A clear and consistent political and ideological subtext pervades the *Andromache*, which Katenin assumed would be readily apparent to a contemporary audience.

## ANDROMACHE ON THE RUSSIAN STAGE

Despite its superlative political and social relevance for a nineteenth-century audience and Pushkin's and Katenin's own high opinion of *Andromache*, however, the play failed on stage. It was first presented at St. Petersburg's Bolshoi Theater on February 3, 1827, and was removed from the repertoire after three or four runs due to a lack of public interest.<sup>37</sup> For Katenin, who had played an active role in the play's production, auditions, and rehearsals, its fiasco was a terrible blow and one from which he is said to have never truly recovered.<sup>38</sup> Various explanations have been offered for *Andromache*'s failure. A contemporary Russian dramatist and translator, Raphael Zotov, argued that *Andromache* was "the last effort" to pay homage to Classicism's "dying" aesthetics: as the nineteenth century progressed, "the public wanted plays of a different kind."<sup>39</sup> Staged too late after its completion date (nine years), in Zotov's view, *Andromache* may have appeared too conservative to an audience that had developed a preference for more naturalistic drama.<sup>40</sup> Griboedov, who had first-hand experience of the play, suggested that its meter was too cumbersome and its poetry – crude.<sup>41</sup> Some contemporary scholars have hypothesized that the play may have failed because its characters were too ruthless and lacked the fashionable "gallantry" of nineteenth-century Romanticism, while others attribute the fiasco to the tragedy's focus on the fate of heroes only, without showing the lives of ordinary people.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, accusations of conservatism were levied against Katenin in scholarship, with the poet being labeled traditionalist, an archaist, and a "man of the past," born in the wrong century.<sup>43</sup> Some scholars went as far as to suggest that Katenin was "a cruel parody of a great man" whose works were forgotten after an initial laudatory response.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, Tynyanov claimed that after a lively debate around Katenin's works in the 1820s, his poetry was dead by the 1830s.<sup>45</sup>

However, it is possible to offer an alternative explanation for Katenin's seeming fall into disfavor and *Andromache*'s failure based on its hitherto overlooked, crucially important, and innovative ideological subtext. The masked political undertones with which Katenin imbues every structural level of his tragedy may be why *Andromache*'s life on the Russian stage was so brief. Despite the play's customary dismissal as conservative and therefore not suited to the stage in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, little evidence has been supplied to prove that *Andromache* is archaic.<sup>46</sup> The only aspects of the play that have ever been cited in support of this adverse judgment—Katenin's loyalty to the Classical spirit, his respect for the stylistic features of Ancient tragedy, and his adherence to the

<sup>37</sup> Shatskov, "Pavel Aleksandrovich Katenin," 111; Rafail Zotov, "I moi vospominaniia o teatre," in *Repertuar russkogo teatra* (St. Petersburg, 1840), 51.

<sup>38</sup> "Katenin trained a generation of Saint-Petersburg actors (Mochalov and Karatygin)." See Bertha Malnick, "Mochalov and Karatygin," *Slavonic and East European Review* 36:87 (June 1958): 266. See also Elena Saprygina, *Slugi vremeni* (Kostroma, 2012), 130.

<sup>39</sup> Zotov, "Moi vospominaniia o teatre," 51.

<sup>40</sup> Bertenson, *Pavel Aleksandrovich Katenin*, 49.

<sup>41</sup> "But with what ill-composed poetry does it abuse one's ear" (Griboedov letter to Begichev, July 1824, in *ibid.*, 9).

<sup>42</sup> Natalia Prokof'eva and Sergei Skibin, *Istoriia russkoi literatury XIX veka*, pt. 1, 1795–1830 (Moscow, 2005), 119; "In it was spoken only of the fate of heroes, not of the fate of peoples. This issue was solved by Pushkin in *Boris Godunov*" (Ermakova-Bitner, "Vstupitel'naia stat'ia," 39–40).

<sup>43</sup> "A second-rate poet of Pushkin's era" (Rozanov, *Pushkinskaia pleiada*, 182–83). See also Shatskov, "Pavel Aleksandrovich Katenin," 113; Bertenson, *Pavel Aleksandrovich Katenin*, 11; Schuler, *Theatre and Identity in Imperial Russia*, 127; and Fox, *The Troubling Play of Gender: The Phaedra Dramas of Tsvetaeva*, 40.

<sup>44</sup> Rozanov, *Pushkinskaia pleiada*, 93; Bertenson, *Pavel Aleksandrovich Katenin*, 28; Prokof'eva and Skibin, *Istoriia russkoi literatury XIX veka*, 51; Ermakova-Bitner, "Vstupitel'naia stat'ia," 39.

<sup>45</sup> Yuri Tynyanov, "Arkhaisty i Pushkin," in *Pushkin v mirovoi literature: Sbornik statei*, (St Petersburg, 1926), 235.

<sup>46</sup> Zotov, "Moi vospominaniia o teatre," 51.



Classical concept of fate—do not lessen *Andromache*'s creative ingenuity and originality. The main “archaic” feature pertains to the play's style, which has been termed “close to that of antique tragedy,” specifically, its use of an indigenous Alexandrian meter and an authentically Classical representation of its central characters.<sup>47</sup> Even scholars of the last three decades have undertaken no consistent effort to revise or redeem the reputation of Katenin or his dramatic *oeuvre*, unlike what they have done for Faddei Bulgarin, for example, whose work has received extensive treatment in the post-Soviet period.

Katenin's observance of the forms and conventions of Ancient drama is in keeping with his impassioned support of Classical purism and his notorious denunciation of playwrights who manipulate the *mise en scène* and lose the spirit of their chosen period. Most famously, Katenin criticized Ozerov's *Polyxena* for misrepresenting its Classical setting and Voltaire's *Oedipe* for obscuring the austere splendor of Antiquity with brash and tasteless adornments.<sup>48</sup> *Andromache* was, as Galina Ermakova-Bitner has pointed out, an innovative response to earlier dramatists who indulged in “lyrical subjectivism” and were prepared to accommodate their style to the literary tastes of contemporary society.<sup>49</sup> Reacting against poets who, despite asserting their willingness to adhere to historical veracity or preserve mythical plotlines, reshaped their Classical models, Katenin applied a veneer obscuring the political relevance of his creation from potential censors, who were empowered to reduce its performative impact on the nineteenth-century Russian stage. Katenin's attempt to restore the strict canons of Ancient tragedy can be more precisely regarded as an artistic strategy for introducing an ideological subtext into his play, behind a formally purist rendition of a Classical myth.

The early nineteenth century, and in particular the Decembrist circles of which Katenin was a member, was marked by a growing admiration of Antiquity and a desire to draw upon its culture and history as a model.<sup>50</sup> Alexander Herzen called this phenomenon “the aesthetic school of morality.”<sup>51</sup> Katenin and other members of revolutionary coteries drew upon their idealized view of Antiquity for ideas that were central to their own cultural identity: the rejection of monarchy as tyranny, the heroic fight of citizens against autocracy, the struggle of democracy against despotism and the successful attainment of freedom.<sup>52</sup> Antiquity supplied the Decembrists with Ancient ideological masks that they could apply to the political situation of their time. Yuri Lotman has described in detail how preceding literary models impacted the depiction of specific character types in modern literature, proposing that at the end of the eighteenth century the main source for the representation of behavioral patterns in literature and, more broadly, Russian culture was high literature, including Ancient tragedy, history, and occasionally hagiography.<sup>53</sup> Recourse to Ancient models enabled Katenin and other members of revolutionary coteries to add diversity and complexity to stale politico-dramatic paradigms arising from the canonical representation of autocracy, accompanied by a set of preconceived premises (including pro and contra factions, rebellious courage and egoistic cowardice, punitive measures and spiritual strength in bearing them). Indeed, Lotman suggests, the Decembrists were not merely individuals with idiosyncratic modes of behavior, but representatives of a “specific cultural-historical and psychological type” (FIGURE 3).<sup>54</sup>

Consequently, questions arise as to why Katenin, despite the warm reception of his literary criticism and poetry, as well as his striking innovations and skill, was not appreciated as a dramatist, and

<sup>47</sup> Shatskov, “Pavel Aleksandrovich Katenin,” 111; Prokof'eva and Skibin, *Istoriia russkoi literatury XIX veka*, 119.

<sup>48</sup> Vladimir Orlov, “Katenin,” *Istoriia russkoi literatury*, vols. (Moscow, 1953), 6:55; Pavel Katenin, *Razmyshleniia i razbory* (Moscow, 1981), 180.

<sup>49</sup> Ermakova-Bitner, “Vstupitel'naia stat'ia,” 28.

<sup>50</sup> Shatskov, “Pavel Aleksandrovich Katenin,” 114.

<sup>51</sup> Sochineniia A. I. Gertsena i perepiska s N. A. Zakhar'inoi (St. Petersburg, 1905), 64.

<sup>52</sup> Barsukova, *Zhanrovaia transformatsiia antichnoi “dramy roka,”* 90.

<sup>53</sup> Iurii M. Lotman, “Poetika bytovogo povedeniia v russkoi kul'ture XVIII veka,” in his *Izbrannye stat'i* (Tallinn, 2011), 560–61.

<sup>54</sup> Iurii Lotman, “Dekabrist v povsednevnoi zhizni,” in *Besedy o russkoi kul'ture: Byt i traditsii russkogo dvorianstva (XVIII–nachalo XIX veka)* (St. Petersburg, 2014), 332.





**FIGURE 3** Pavel Katenin. A sketch by Alexander Pushkin on the draft of *Ruslan and Liudmila*. Pushkin State Museum, 1818.

why Pushkin alone admired his achievement in creating a genuinely tragic play.<sup>55</sup> The answers lie in Katenin's own evaluation of his dramatic work, quoted in the epigraph to the present article: "Above all we want to please ourselves, then the chosen ones, and only afterwards the rest. ... We follow our own path." In a letter he wrote to Pushkin in May 1835, Katenin revealed that his literary works were not conditioned by current literary trends but instead aimed to satisfy only the select few who were developed enough to appreciate his gift and erudition. Recasting Katenin's own argument in the terminology of modern literary criticism, Katenin's *Andromache* was set before a mixed, "knowing" and "unknowing" audience. The "knowing" audience, according to Linda Hutcheon, is "knowledgeable" and possesses "a straightforward awareness of the adaptation's enriching, palimpsestic doubleness." The "unknowing" audience, meanwhile, does not "know that what [they] are experienc[ing] is an adaptation" because they are "not familiar with the particular work" that is being adapted" and are therefore "simply experiencing the adaptation as ... any other work."<sup>56</sup> We can develop Hutcheon's tenets further by introducing yet one more audience category – an "inner circle" that is familiar not only with the text but also with the author of that text, as well as the literary setting and context which enabled the author's activity. This is akin to Eikhenbaum's *literaturnyi byt*.<sup>57</sup> Thus *Andromache*, an ostensibly Neoclassical play according to some scholars, such as Maria Stadter Fox, would have had three types of audience: an "inner circle" who knew Katenin was a prominent member of the *Soiuz Spaseniia* and a close friend of Nikita Muravyev, who may have read the *Andromache* as a radical political statement; a "knowing" audience capable of decoding Katenin's references to *The Iliad*, Euripides' *Trojan Women*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and Seneca's *Troades*; and a putative "unknowing" audience comprised of average theater-goers whose understanding of the play depended on their intellect, spiritual development, and even linguistic abilities. The last of these audience types may have appreciated *Andromache*

<sup>55</sup> Dmitry Blagoi, *Masterstvo Pushkina* (Moscow, 1955), 363.

<sup>56</sup> Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (Abingdon, 2006), 120.

<sup>57</sup> Boris Eikhenbaum, "Literaturnyi byt," in *O literature*, (Moscow, 1987), 428–36.



as a play presenting conflicting ontological modes (based on the opposing concepts of cowardice and power-mongering versus courage and nobility) or, indeed, dramatizing a complex romantic collision, without deciphering either Katenin's innovative synthesis of Classical accounts or his covert ideological subtext. A theatrical work, then, would elicit a response from all types of audience—"inner circle," "knowing," and "unknowing." But since an "unknowing" audience would not be able to appreciate either Katenin's erudition or his masterful transformation of Ancient sources, their judgment of the play would have depended mainly on "extra-textual" factors: Katenin's knowledge of stagecraft and his desire to cater for a wide audience, as well as *Andromache's* performative aspect (for example, the appeal of costumes, the *mise en scène*, lighting, and props, the popularity of the acting ensemble). Indeed, for an "unknowing" audience, the actors likely played a crucial role in *Andromache's* failure, since Alexandra Kolosova, the actress cast in the role of Andromache, was a comedic performer unequipped for an innately tragic role. Pushkin specifically referred to this unfortunate casting decision when he partially connected Andromache's fate to the fact that Ekaterina Semenova did not take the part of the eponymous heroine. Initially, she had seemed enthusiastic about taking on the role, but in 1826, changed her mind and asked that the role be handed to a different actress.<sup>58</sup>

Katenin's contemporaries shed invaluable light on his attitude to stage-writing. Philip Vigel' recalls that Katenin did not strive to gratify but rather to stun or shock his audience by breaking free from, not adhering to, their expectations.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Pushkin testified that Katenin "never tried to please the dominant taste of the public, on the contrary: he always went his own way, writing for himself, what and how he pleased."<sup>60</sup> In March 1833, Pushkin suggested that the cold reception of Katenin's drama was caused entirely by his independence and originality: "it [his coldness] demonstrates the poet's aversion to petty techniques of garnering success, and secondly, his independence." In Pushkin's opinion, the disfavor surrounding Katenin's drama did him credit since it underlined its striking novelty and complexity. Thus the *kruzhkovaia poetika* that was characteristic of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which segregated reader and audience according to the ability (or lack thereof) to appreciate encoded allusions and literary quotations, ensured that Katenin's play would not be readily appreciated by a public theater's audience, which he wished neither to entertain, nor please, but inspire to reflection and action.

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<sup>58</sup> Ermakova-Bitner, "Vstupitel'naia stat'ia," 703–4.

<sup>59</sup> Filipp Vigel', *Vospominaniia Filippa Filippovicha Vigelia*, 7 vols. (Moscow, 1866), 3:147.

<sup>60</sup> Aleksandr Pushkin, "Sochineniia i stikhotvornye perevody Pavla Katenina," in his *Sobranie sochinenii v desiati tomakh*, ed. Dmitry Blagoi (St. Petersburg, 1962), 2:22.



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