3 – The Feminization of the Post-Stalin Opera

3.1 Contextual Framework

As debated in the previous section of this study, the Soviet operatic canon that emerged from the Stalinist opera project can conclusively be regarded as a vessel of the masculine principle. Within this crucible of the Stalinist masculinity, the logic of narrative flow is subordinated to male perspectives, paying scant regard to female voices, experiences, and, coincidentally, spaces of introspection and reflection. However, the primacy of the 'masculine' and the 'male' on the operatic stage was not an isolated phenomenon limited solely to the Soviet musical production during the first half of the twentieth century. Namely, the masculinization of opera was a trend evident also on Western operatic stages, supplanting the nineteenth century tradition of intricate and tragic operatic female roles and renowned prima donnas. The reasons for this cultural turnover could be partially attributed to significant political upheavals and rapid industrialization, perhaps fostering a climate in which authors felt that male (operatic) voices would serve as better-suited agents in the exploration of the new world and society. In this context, one might consider the rise of the Zeitoper during the 1920s and 1930s, which dealt with contemporary topics reflecting the current political and social climate.[380] Furthermore, certain

380 Zeitoper introduced reinvigorated gender dynamics on the stage, including pieces such as Paul Hindemith's *Neues vom Tage* (1929), Kurt Weill's *Die Bürgschaft* (1932), and Ernst Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf* (1927). While Hindemith explores contemporary romantic and marital relationships with a satirical undertone,

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musicologists assert the deeply ingrained connection between modernist music and masculinity, while also interrogating the notion that modernist music inherently clashed with feminine principles and the "effeminacy" of European Romanticist musical culture.[381] This, to some extent, might explain the newfound emphasis on masculine voices and perspectives in early twentieth century Western opera, or at least the depletion of the operatic "effeminacy."

In the Soviet case, however, the modernist musical language, as understood in the West, cannot be held liable for marginalizing the female

Weill's opera, serving as a political allegory, centers around Johann Mattes and his rise to power during the ever-changing social and political landscape. See Geoffrey Skelton, "Neues vom Tage," in: *Grove Music Online*, print publication 1992, published online 2002, ‹https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.O008874›; Stephen Hinton, "Bürgschaft, Die," in: *Grove Music Online*, print publication 1992, published online 2002, ‹https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.O003043›. Krenek's opera, with a plot revolving around a jazz player named Jonny, and probably the most famous of the three examples, has already received a gendered reading. In his study, musicologist Joseph Henry Auner approaches Jonny as a "dehumanized puppet," dedicating the analysis to the ways the opera renegotiates masculinity. Joseph Henry Auner, "'Soulless Machines' and Steppenwolves: Renegotiating Masculinity in Krenek's Jonny spielt auf," in: Mary Ann Smart (ed)., *Siren Songs. Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, Princeton, NJ 2000, pp. 222–236, here p. 233. For more information on Zeitoper see Wulf Konold, "Musiktheater," in: *MGG Online*, print publication 1997, published online 2016, ‹https://www.mgg-online.com/mgg/stable/499303› 16 July 2026; Nils Grosch, "Neue Sachlichkeit," in: *MGG Online*, print publication 1997, published online 2016, ‹https://www.mgg-online.com/mgg/stable/43966› 16 July 2026. Another opera worth mentioning from the same decade is Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* (1925), set from the perspective of a psychologically mutilated soldier. Musicologist Amanda Hsieh published a study on masculinity in *Wozzeck*, approaching the main character as an emasculated figure who could not satisfy the post-war ideal of masculinity. See Amanda Hsieh, "Lyrical Tension, Collective Voices: Masculinity in Alban Berg's Wozzeck," in: *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 144/2 (2019), pp. 323–362.

381 See, for instance, Judith Tick, "Charles Ives and Gender Ideology," in: Ruth A. Solie (ed.), *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, Berkeley, CA 1993, pp. 83–106. In her essay, Tick delves beyond the discussion of Ives's attribution of masculine principles to music and his perspectives on the masculinity and effeminacy of music. She provides a perceptive overview of how European musical styles were gendered and the drastic transition from the feminine nineteenth century to the masculine twentieth century. To read more on the topic, see also Catherine Parsons Smith, "'A Distinguishing Virility': Feminism and Modernism in American Art Music," in: Susan C. Cook and Judy S. Tsou (eds.), *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music*, Urbana, IL 1994, pp. 90–106.

perspective in opera since the relatively brief period of avant-gardist explorations was abruptly concluded with the birth of Socialist Realist dogma in the 1930s.[382] Yet, the Soviet Union and its artists were, in fact, exploring their own version of modernity,[383] without relying on modernism (or formalism) as coded on the West. The pursuit of Soviet modernity was, among other, evident in the construction of a socialist utopia, guided by the vision of the New Soviet *man*. The advent of an industrial and militaristic society, coupled with the cult of Stalinist masculinity, directly correlates with the masculinization of Soviet opera. This transformation was harnessed to reflect, bolster, and perpetuate the remarkable achievements of Soviet society on the stage.

The onset of the Thaw (*ottepel'* in Russian) and the shift in the political atmosphere were also mirrored in Soviet musical production. Composers seemingly sensed both the overt and subtle demands of the evolving Soviet culture and society. Whether intentional or not, this catalyzed a heightened interest in the female-centric 'Soviet' operatic worlds. To gain a deeper insight into this gender turnover during the period spanning the mid-1950s to the early 1970s, or the Soviet long sixties, it is essential to step back and delve into the ever-fluctuating and tumultuous social and cultural landscape of that relatively concise chapter in Soviet history.

Following Stalin's death in 1953 and the subsequent dissolution of the Zhdanov Doctrine, Soviet music culture found itself in a profoundly optimistic position. However, the situation was by no means simple or

382 It is important to note that the conservative shift during the 1930s is not exclusive to Soviet music. A similar phenomenon can be observed in Nazi Germany with the introduction of the concept of "Entartete Musik," condemning various modernist musical expressions, among other. See Erik Levi, "Entartete Musik," in: *Grove Music Online*, print publication 2001, published online 2001, ‹https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.45065›; Bernd Sponheuer, "Nationalsozialismus," in: *MGG Online*, print publication 1997, published online 2016, ‹https://www.mgg-online.com/mgg/stable/43959› 16 July 2026. This trend is also noticeable in fascist Italy, but also in France, where a partial turn towards more traditional values and musical expressions occurred during the same time period. See Charles Maier and Karen Painter, "'Songs of a Prisoner': Luigi Dallapiccola and the Politics of Voice Under Fascism," in: Roberto Illiano (ed.), *Italian Music During the Fascist Period*, Turnhout 2004, pp. 567–588; Jane F. Fulcher, "Musical Style, Meaning, and Politics in France on the Eve of the Second World War," in: *The Journal of Musicology* 13/4 (1995), pp. 425–453.

383 More on the discussions surrounding Soviet modernism and modernity see David-Fox, *Crossing Borders*. Although to some scholars the notion of Soviet modernity might seem counterintuitive, David-Fox warns that "modernities can be multiple, illiberal and non-Western, tension-ridden, evolutionary, and punctuated by crises." David-Fox, *Crossing Borders*, p. 33.

straightforward. The initial years after Stalin's passing marked a period of almost schizophrenic discourse, revealing the challenges of addressing the demise of the Great Leader not only from a political standpoint but also from the everyday, emotional, and fundamentally human perspectives. As written by the literary scholar Polly Jones: "Although the death itself prompted an outpouring of the language and rituals of the cult, especially from a grief-stricken population apparently unable to conceive of a future not governed by the *vozhd'* […], it was precisely this hysterical sense of the impossibility of life without Stalin that the post-Stalinist Central Committee had to contain and, at least implicitly, attack."[384] The trauma caused not only by Stalin's death but also by Stalinism itself needed to be addressed, and the only questions were how to set the tone for the new narrative regarding the immediate past and what kind of coping mechanism would be provided for the grieving and perplexed nation. It quickly became evident that there was a strong political and ideological urge not only to de-Stalinize the Soviet narrative but also to reinvent and reconstruct it. This undertaking, known as The Thaw and extending throughout the Nikita Khrushchev's government (1953–1964), is primarily characterized by a process of de-Stalinization in all spheres of Soviet society and culture.

Possibly the clearest signal of the new direction the Soviet ideology was about to take was the famous Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' on February 25, 1956 to a closed session of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Not only did Khrushchev denounce the late Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, but his oration also became the epicenter of a comprehensive de-Stalinization campaign with the purpose of eradicating the Stalinist cult and its further influence. According to Tarakanov, this pivotal moment in Soviet history not only signified the conclusion of a period of detachment from global cultural and artistic currents, but also set the stage for a transformation in the direction of Soviet music.[385] Another turning point that heavily influenced the path of Soviet music took place on May 28, 1958, the day of adoption of the resolution "On correcting errors in the evaluation of operas *Velikaya druzhba*, *Bogdan Khmel'nitsky*, and *Ot vsego serdtsa*."[386] As agreed on by many musicologists, not only did this resolution signal a

384 Polly Jones, "From Stalinism to Post-Stalinism: De-Mythologising Stalin, 1953–56," in: *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 4/1 (2003), pp. 127–148, here p. 128.

385 Mikhail Tarakanov, "Muzykal'naia kul'tura strany v gody Velikoĭ Otechestvennoĭ voĭny i v pervyĭ poslevoennyĭ period," in: Mikhail Tarakanov (ed.), *Istoriia sovremennoĭ otechestvennoĭ muzyki*, vol. 2 (1941–1958), Moscow 1999, pp. 5–61, here p. 27.

386 For the whole text, see "Ob ispravlenii oshibok v o͡tsenke oper 'Velikai͡a druzhba', 'Bogdan Khmel'nitskiĭ' i 'Ot vsego serdt͡sa'," in: *Sovetskai͡a muzyka* 7 (1958), pp. 3–4.

changing attitude toward composers and musical production, but it also provided much-needed stimulation for its way toward recovery and further development.[387] The second half of the 1950s brought to the musical scene a new generation of composers who were seemingly granted the liberty to introduce novelty to their modes of artistic expression.

Naturally, as Clark warns, the division between the Stalin and post-Stalin periods is rather blurred, emphasizing that Stalin's death "did not mark an absolute BC/AD dividing line."[388] The Thaw permeating the Soviet operatic stage turned out to be a rather slow-moving process.[389] The 1950s post-Stalin opera still progressed within the well-known confines of the heroic-patriotic song opera, which was also characteristic of the previous decade. Moreover, the predominant themes were still centered around Revolution and wars, as exemplified by operas like Ivan Dzerzhinsky's *Daleko ot Moskvï* (*Far from Moscow*, 1954), Dmitry Kabalevsky's *Nikita Vershinin* (1955), Vasily Dekhteryov's *Fyodor Talanov* (1955), and Kirill Molchanov's *Zarya* (*The Dawn*, 1956).[390] Another subgenre of the patriotic opera dealt with the post-bellum life, as seen in *Kavaler Zolotoy Zvezdï* (*Cavalier of the Golden Star*, 1956) by Yury Biryukov (1908–1976). A cursory glance at the themes and plotlines of these compositions provides an impression (and indeed an accurate one) that those early post-Stalin Soviet operatic worlds were still predominantly militant and male-centric. Dzerzhinsky's opera, based on Vasily Azhayev's (1915–1968) eponymous novel first published in 1946, explores a group of Soviet laborers constructing a pipeline during the days of World War II.[391]

387 See Hakobian, *Music of the Soviet Era*, p. 201; Tarakanov, "Muzykal'naîâ kul'tura strany," p. 29.

388 Katerina Clark, "'Wait for Me and I Shall Return': The Early Thaw as a Reprise of Late Thirties Culture?," in: Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd (eds.), *The Thaw. Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*, Toronto 2013, pp. 85–108, here p. 87.

389 When examining the listed operas, one must always bear in mind a rather banal but crucial fact: The year when the opera was completed or premiered should be approached with caution, as it only symbolizes the culmination of a longer period of the opera's crafting, which might have taken multiple years and spanned different political and cultural climates.

390 Although not written on a Soviet subject, another significant opera dealing with a grand domestic revolution is *Dekabristï* (*The Decembrists*, 1953) by Yuri Shaporin (1887–1966), but also the second revision of Aleksandr Kas'yanov's *Stepan Razin* (1953, 2nd redaction). Within the genre of the heroic-patriotic opera, it is also worth acknowledging the series of revolutionary operas that are set overseas, such as Antonio Spadavecchia's (1907–1988) *Ovod* (*The Gadfly*, 1957) and Kirill Molchanov's *Ulitsa del' Korno* (*Del Corno Street*, 1961).

391 See Lîûdmila Polîâkova, "Novaîâ opera I. Dzerzhinskogo," in: *Sovetskaîâ muzyka* 2 (1955), pp. 17–27.

Kabalevsky's opera, written after the play *Bronepoyezd 14–69* (*Armoured Train 14–69*, 1927) by Vsevolod Ivanov (1895–1963), follows the titular protagonist during the Civil War and his path toward heroic self-actualization.[392] Molchanov's opera, inspired by Boris Lavrenyov's (1891–1959) play *Razlom* (*The Break*, 1927) is set in the revolutionary times and primarily follows Godun, the Bolshevik leader of the sailors on a cruiser, *Zarya*.[393] Dekhteryov's opera, inspired by the play *Nashestviye* (*Invasion*) by Leonid Leonov (1899–1994), follows the titular protagonist amid World War II.[394] Biryukov's opera, adapted from Semyon Babayevsky's (1909–2000) eponymous novel, focuses on a soldier's return home after World War II and the challenges of reconstructing a homeland devastated by war.

However, the trend of masculine-centric operas gradually began to shift. Antonio Spadavecchia's *Hozhdeniye po mukam* (*The Road to Calvary*, 1953), based on Aleksey Tolstoy's (1883–1945) eponymous trilogy, features distinct female protagonists navigating the revolutionary turmoil. Nevertheless, these characters were still not Spadavecchia's primary focus.[395] In 1955, a relatively overlooked lyrical opera *Tanya*, composed by the similarly forgotten composer Georgy Kreytner (1903–1958), made its debut. Despite written after eponymous and widely acclaimed play by Aleksey Arbuzov (1908–1986), both the opera and the composer held a rather peripheral position within the Soviet operatic landscape. Yet, it was welcomed with great enthusiasm. The opera follows the titular protagonist's coming of age. Stumbling across many hardships, such as enduring a failed marriage and the loss of a child, Tanya evolves from a frivolous, over-reliant, and desultory young girl to an independent and self-sustained woman, becoming a doctor and moving to the Far East.[396] This opera stands as an interesting example, first of all, of an opera set in Soviet time and space but not within a martial and heroic setting. Secondly, and tightly connected to the previous point, the chronotope is not reliant on any grand historical event, making the notion of historicity very vague. Thirdly, it follows a *female* protagonist in a lyrical and psychological genre, addressing the craving expressed earlier in the decade (see the chapter on Kabalevsky's *The Taras Family*). As noted in *Sovetskaya muzïka*: "A lyrical opera about Soviet people! Our

392 See Lı̂ûdmila Polı̂âkova, "Novaı̂â sovetskaı̂â opera ('Nikita Vershinin' D. Kabalevskogo)," in: *Sovetskaı̂â muzyka* 1 (1956), pp. 13–22.

393 See Konstantin Sakva, "'Zarı̂â' (Novaı̂â opera K. Molchanova)," in: *Sovetskaı̂â muzyka* 6 (1956), pp. 3–15.

394 See Orest Evlakhov, "Fedor Talanov," in: *Sovetskaı̂â muzyka* 4 (1956), pp. 14–18.

395 See Elena Grosheva, "Obrazy Al. Tolstogo v opere," in: *Sovetskaı̂â muzyka* 8 (1954), pp. 11–16.

396 Georgiĭ Kreĭtner, *Tanı̂a. Opera v 4-kh deĭstviı̂akh, 9-ti kartinakh. Libretto A. Arbuzova i G. Kreĭtnera po p'ece A. Arbuzova "Tanı̂a." Stikhi H. Dorizo. Klavir*, Moscow 1959.

audience and performers have long dreamed about it. Who wouldn't want to hear music in an opera performance that poetically reveals the richness and beauty of the emotions of our contemporaries, music in which everyone would find a fragment of their own experiences?"[397] Furthermore, in 1957, Khrennikov's *Mat'* (*Mother*) premiered, an opera that will be more extensively examined in a separate chapter, setting the stage to the dissection of the female-centric Soviet operatic universes.

The overarching question of this brief introduction to the second part of this study is what exactly made the new post-Stalinist artistic spaces capable of allowing and supporting substantial changes in the Russian operatic canon. More specifically, why did female-centric operatic universes turn out to be a particularly fertile ground for experimentation and exploration of the updated version of post-Stalin Sovietness? Naturally, this shift in the operatic narrative fields is not a phenomenon isolated from the general cultural and artistic developmental trajectories; it can relate to the overall change in the construction of Soviet subjectivity after Stalin or, in other words, it derives from a structural change of the Soviet subject and its agency.

According to Svetlana Boym, a renowned cultural theorist, and her book *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*,[398] which stands as a pivotal work in exploring cultural practices in the Soviet Union, the post-Revolutionary Soviet subject became "progressively depersonalized and less individuated."[399] This led to the creation of what Boym explains as the "new anonymous Soviet citizen mass-produced by bureaucratic and authoritarian de-individuation, a process that follows prescriptive rules and rules out creative choices."[400] Furthermore, the categories of 'individual' and 'individuality' were not the only ones affected; 'the private' became equally ineligible during the Stalinist era. In fact, it could be seen as cynical, but not entirely untrue, to assert that Bolshevism abolished the existence of private life. For the Bolsheviks, the concept of 'private' was deemed politically dangerous and deprived of social meaning.[401]

397 Marina Berko, "'Tania͡' (Opera G. Kreĭtnera v Sverdlovskom teatre)," in: *Sovetskaia͡ muzyka* 9 (1955), pp. 89–93, here p. 89. Original Russian text: Лирическая опера о советских людях!— об этом давно мечтают наши слушатели и исполнители. Кому не хотелось бы услышать в оперном спектакле музыку, поэтично раскрывающую богатство и красоту чувств наших современников, музыку, в которой каждый нашел бы и частицу своих собственных переживаний?

398 Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*, Cambridge, MA and London 1994.

399 Ibid., p. 90.

400 Ibid.

401 Ibid., p. 73.

The end of the Stalinist era, however, marked a new approach to individuality and the concept of 'the private.' According to Boym, "by the late 1960s, privacy began to be seen as the only honorable and uncompromising response to the system of public compromise. Privacy was sought not as an escape but rather as a way of carving an alternative space and of personalizing and deideologizing [...] the official maps of everyday life."[402] Furthermore, Yurchak argues that "the performative shift of authoritative discourse that occurred in the 1950s and 1960s allowed Soviet people to develop a complexly differentiating relationship to ideological meanings, norms, and values."[403] Historian Anatoly Pinsky suggests that while the party-state leadership did not necessarily achieve the desired harmony with the citizenry, "the post-Stalin subject at once became a more creative, autonomous agent."[404] As he explains further:

> The new creativity and autonomy were a result not simply of the absence of terror and a consequent feeling that one had more room for maneuver. Rather, they were a function of discourses and practices that emerged in this context and in some cases proved self-propelling. [...] Put another way, the post-Stalin USSR witnessed a turn to things new and imperfect, exploratory and unofficial, and unfinished and inconclusive. Thus, in the Soviet Union after Stalin, History, or Marxist–Leninist teleology, became more open ended, giving rise to another paradox, for a teleology is not quite a teleology if the telos is obscured or interrogated.[405]

The new worldview quickly found reflection in post-Stalinist literature and cinema, and subsequently in the new opera as well. Namely, already in the early 1950s it became evident to the contemporary scholars, such as Bertha Malnick, that Stalinist art was not equivalent to Soviet life nor to the audience it was intended for.[406] The key moment that led to the construction of the new literature and the new literary hero was undoubtedly the Second Writers' Congress in 1954. As explained by Malnick, "if the first Writers' Congress saw as an essential task the creation of an epoch-reflecting and epoch-making hero, the second seemed preoccupied by the delicate and difficult task of endowing him with a credible human psychology."[407] Writers

402 Ibid., p. 94.
403 Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, p. 28.
404 Anatoly Pinsky, "Subjectivity After Stalin," in: *Russian Studies in History* 58/2–3 (2019), pp. 79–88, here p. 80.
405 Ibid., p. 81.
406 Bertha Malnick, "Current Problems of Soviet Literature," in: *Soviet Studies* 7/1 (1955), pp. 1–13, here p. 3.
407 Ibid., p. 5.

began denouncing the ideal heroes of Stalinist literature and the non-conflict literary environment in which they were portrayed. The literature of the early fifties was, to some degree, reactionary, specifically reacting against the values and norms of High Stalinism, which led to a transformation in the portrayal of the new Soviet protagonist. Indeed, according to Clark, the Stalinist "cult of the titanic hero," which was also prevalent in operas of the time, was slowly (and partially) getting replaced with a cult of the ordinary "little man":

> The fifties saw a growing cult, not of the "little man" as a "cog" or "bolt" in society's great "machine," but rather of the ordinary person as an individual. This cult was reflected in several ways: in campaigns to reintroduce "sincerity" and "the lyric" in literature (read: individual expression, debunking of unrealistic characterization, and paying more attention to love and other feelings) and in concern for the right of individuals to a full and unhindered private life.[408]

Similarly, literary scholar Sigrid McLaughlin describes a "turn toward intimate individual themes" and asserts that in the post-Stalin literature "the private lives and concerns of individuals moved into the focus of attention, and the details of the real Soviet social and individual landscape began to emerge."[409] The analogous sentiment echoes in the research on Soviet film of the era. When talking about the cinema of the post-Stalin era, Oksana Bulgakova, a scholar in the field of the film studies, explains that the re-evaluation of the traditional Stalinist hero image produced a contrasting and successful new screen identity.

> At last, here were films which did not examine life which was festively unreal, historically pompous or heroically solemn, but ordinary prosaic existence. In place of monumentalism, brilliance and the abstraction of the ideals, the camera looked at everyday life as if through the eyes of someone who had just returned from the war (or from a labour camp). It rediscovered the value of unobtrusive detail—the pleasures of family, of the birth of a child, a simple friendship. For the first time, heroes had to tackle difficulties not from outside (in the form of foreign enemies and saboteurs) but within their own lives.[410]

408 Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, pp. 215–216.

409 Sigrid McLaughlin, "Introduction," in: Sigrid McLaughlin (ed. and trans.), *The Image of Women in Contemporary Soviet Fiction: Selected Short Stories from the USSR*, Basingstoke 1989, pp. 1–17, here pp. 2–3.

410 Oksana Bulgakova, "The Hydra of the Soviet Cinema: The Metamorphoses of the Soviet Film Heroine," in: Lynne Attwood (ed.), *Red Women on the Silver Screen: Soviet Women and Cinema from the Beginning to the End of the Communist Era*, London 1993, pp. 149–174, here p. 163.

Nevertheless, it is difficult to approach this turbulent era of Soviet literature as a uniform movement. Polly Jones asserts that the Thaw experienced fiery conservative opposition, and that "neither 'liberal' nor 'conservative' values were clearly differentiated or securely embedded in the fabric of Soviet cultural life,"[411] while Clark contends that the mid-1950s brought back the interest in heroic Stalinist literary narratives as a response to the liberalism and idealism of the early post-Stalin years.[412] Furthermore, as the most prominent feature of the new type of prose in the late fifties and early sixties, both liberal and conservative, Clark highlights "the return to the 'garden' and 'storm' romanticism of the late thirties," highlighting how "many of these works used the precise thirties ensemble of flight, struggle, and the elements as the setting for an allegorical saga of Soviet man's quest."[413]

At the outset of the 1960s, the operatic genre grappled with a crisis, as the path for its ongoing development became increasingly uncertain. According to musicologist Alla Bayeva, the song opera of the Stalinist era faced intense scrutiny, exposing its closed and inflexible structure and its limited capacity to capture the evolving spirit of the times, including the incapability to satisfy new artistic aspirations and challenges.[414] The changing social landscape during the 1960s not only introduced a fresh cultural atmosphere and a relative freedom of artistic expression but also resulted in a shift of interests among Soviet composers and the Soviet audience. According to Bayeva, the contemporary listener developed a growing interest in complex, philosophical, and original protagonists, and the new opera needed to cater for this craving.[415] Dolinskaya writes that, gradually, the composers began to focus on universal human values, eternal hardships, and profound plotlines, a trend that permeated musical culture from the 1960s to the 1980s.[416] According to Clark, while "Socialist Realism had traditionally written of wholeness," the new literature "wrote not of wholeness and harmony but of alienation, disintegration, confusion."[417] Similarly, in their

411 Polly Jones, "The Personal and the Political: Opposition to the Thaw and the Politics of Literary Identity in the 1950s and 1960s," in: Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd (eds.), *The Thaw. Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*, Toronto 2013, pp. 231–265, here p. 234.

412 Clark, "Wait for Me and I Shall Return," p. 88.

413 Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, p. 225.

414 Baeva, "Opera," pp. 186–187.

415 Ibid., p. 186.

416 Elena Dolinskaĭa, "Russkaĭa muzykal'naĭa kul'tura 60–90-kh godov," in: Elena Dolinskaĭa (ed.), *Istoriĭa sovremennoĭ otechestvennoĭ muzyki*, vol. 3 (1960–1990), Moscow 2001, pp. 9–56, here p. 11.

417 Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, p. 232.

operas, authors started to delineate complex psychological and existential processes within their characters. This portrayal simultaneously mirrored the inner world of the new Soviet subject, culminating in the emergence of the new Soviet operatic protagonist: a profoundly introspective and contemplative individual, in stark contrast to the physically driven protagonists of the Stalinist era. As Bayeva writes, the once martial and action-oriented figure transformed into a "philosophical-existential and lyrical" entity, and "the hero-fighter, the leader of the masses, is being replaced by a preacher, a prophet, a hero who is not so much acting as reflecting, thinking, and keenly feeling."[418] When talking about music specifically, the Thaw and the softening of the Iron Curtain, which isolated musical culture from Western influences, led Soviet music towards stylistic pluralism, which, as Dolinskaya aptly points out, marched in step with the fortification of individual artistic stances.[419] However, the notion of 'stylistic pluralism,' although not incorrect, should be taken with caution. The 1960s were marked by a profound polarity between modern European tendencies, tolerated albeit not completely accepted, on one side and the established norms on the other. Naturally, a notable cohort of composers found little appeal in delving into contemporary musical idioms, leading to further development of neoclassicism, neofolklorism, and neoromanticism. Coincidentally or not, Russian operas written on a Soviet subject were exclusively based on the mentioned 'safe' musical idioms, examples of which will be presented in separate chapters.

This abrupt shift in worldview also manifested in the topics of the 1960s operas, causing Soviet-themed opera with a male lead to become a conspicuously marginalized subgenre. However, it did not entirely fade into oblivion. For instance, Vano Muradeli composed *Oktyabr'* (*October*, 1964), Kirill Molchanov wrote *Neizvestnïy soldat* (*The Unknown Soldier*, 1967), and Boris Kravchenko (1929–1979) composed *Zhestokost'* (*Cruelty*, 1968). While Muradeli's opera is set against the backdrop of the October Revolution and even features a singing portrayal of Lenin himself, its primary focus is on a love triangle involving a young woman, a Bolshevik, and a White Guardist, ultimately leading to a tragic conclusion.[420] In the opera by Molchanov, the entire action unfolds in the garrison of the Brest Fortress amid the World

418 Baeva, "Opera," p. 193. Original Russian text: В двух планах — философски-бытийном и лирическом — раскрывает мир своих героев отечественная опера последних десятилетий. [...] На смену герою-борцу, предводителю народных масс приходит проповедник, пророк, герой не столько действующий, сколько рефлексирующий, мыслящий и остро чувствующий.

419 Dolinskaĭa, "Russkaĭa muzykal'naĭa kul'tura," p. 20.

420 See Mikhail Bĭalik, "V partiture i na st͡sene," in: *Sovetskaĭa muzyka* 3 (1965), pp. 49–56.

War II. The opera reveals the psychological resilience of a collage of regular, but courageous, Soviet people who managed to endure at the cost of their own lives.[421] Kravchenko's opera, set in a Sibirian town during the 1920s, follows a young criminal investigator's, Veniamin Malïshev, work to rid their district of bandits. The narrative unfolds as he encounters many different personalities, faces challenges in capturing notorious criminals, and grapples with personal relationships, culminating in a tragic turn of events involving unrequited love and his untimely suicide.[422]

There are three aspects which immediately stand out upon examining those examples. Firstly, the protagonist of Kravchenko's opera departs from the typical Stalinist depiction of two-dimensional superhuman hero; more specifically, in this opera, the composer is coquetting with disintegration of the heroic wholeness, and he employs different narrative tools and perspectives in uncovering his protagonist in a more complex and relatable manner. Secondly, another innovation present in Kravchenko's *Zhestokost'* is the gradual disintegration of Soviet historicity. Specifically, in this opera, historical context functions primarily as a backdrop to the main conflict rather than its focal point, marking a distinct departure from the conventions of Stalinist operas. Thirdly, all three operas manifest a shift toward tragedy, a notion that should not be taken lightly, as it sets them in stark contrast with the Stalinist operas. Lastly, as apparent from the composers' names, it is hard not to observe that neither of these composers were precisely considered the 'superstars' of the Soviet 1960s operatic landscape. Many influential composers, most of them belonging to the generation born during Stalin era and starting their professional careers after Stalin's death, and who significantly shaped the Soviet musical and operatic scenes of the era, such as Yury Butsko (1938–2015), Boris Tishchenko (1939–2010), Grigory Frid (1915–2012), Andrey Petrov (1930–2006), and Mieczysław Weinberg (1919–1996), among others, exhibited no artistic inclination towards Soviet subjects. However, there are two notable exceptions—Rodion Shchedrin and Sergey Slonimsky—whose operas on Soviet themes will be expounded upon and analyzed in the subsequent chapters.

During the long Soviet sixties, the inclination towards classical, foreign, and generally thematically 'non-Soviet' libretti increased compared to the Stalin era. The increased interest in using domestic and foreign literary classics as the basis for libretti got formulated already during the 1950s, and in those operas, Tarakanov detects a certain revolt against the mainstream,

421 See Konstantin Sakva, "Bessmertnyĭ garizon," in: *Sovetskaîa muzyka* 11 (1967), pp. 76–86.

422 See Dora Romadinova, "U samogo sinego morîa..." *Sovetskaîa muzyka* 4 (1969), pp. 39–45.

explaining that the authors wanted to move beyond the political undertones and focus on timeless plots and motifs.[423] Such operas include, for example, *Ukroshcheniye stroptivoy* (*The Taming of the Shrew*, 1957) by Vissarion Shebalin (1902–1963) and *Maskarad* (*Masquerade*, 1957) by Dmitry Tolstoy (1923–2003). During the latter half of the long sixties, for instance, Butsko wrote *Zapiski sumasshedshego* (*Diary of a Madman*, 1964) and *Belïye nochi* (*White Nights*, 1968), Tishchenko wrote *Kradenoye solntse* (*The Stolen Sun*, 1968), Frid wrote *Dnevnik Anny Frank* (*The Diary of Anne Frank*, 1969), and Weinberg wrote *Passazhirka* (*The Passenger*, 1968), *Madonna i soldat* (*Madonna and the Soldier*, 1970), and *Lyubov' d'Artanyana* (*D'Artagnan in Love*, 1972), just to name a few examples.

The phenomenon of diminished interest in masculine perspectives is hardly exclusive to the Soviet operatic production at the time, and can be attributed to the general crisis of masculinity during the Thaw observed by a number of scholars. Helena Goscilo and Andrea Lanoux, both scholars in the fields of Russian and gender studies, when elaborating the "melting masculinity" of the post-Stalin era,[424] state that it is exactly "the rehabilitated qualities of smallness and inferiority (i.e., sentiment and domesticity)" that "pointed to the nation's embrace of femininity."[425] While approaching the topic of gender and masculinity, Dumančić similarly characterizes the long Soviet sixties as a period of "superfluous masculinity," asserting that the rapid economic changes "generated fears that men could not rise to the challenge, disoriented as they were by seismic changes taking place."[426] When elaborating the post-Stalinist masculinity, scholar in the field of Russian studies Elena Prokhorova elaborates similar sentiment to Dumančić's, and as reasons for the crisis of masculinity points out, first of all, the breaking of the illusion of the political utopia, and secondly, the releasing of the political pressure, causing the public space losing its heroic quality.[427] Furthermore, Dumančić also states that during Khrushchev's government, "Stalinist conceptions of masculinity came under scrutiny as distinctly unmodern."[428] Specifically, Erica Fraser in her study on the post-war

423 Tarakanov, "Opera 40-kh i 50-kh godov," p. 335.

424 Helena Goscilo and Andrea Lanoux, "Introduction: Lost in the Myths," in: Helena Goscilo and Andrea Lanoux (eds.), *Gender and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Russian Culture*, DeKalb, IL 2006, pp. 3–29, here p. 16.

425 Ibid., p. 17.

426 Dumančić, *Men Out of Focus*, pp. 18–19.

427 Elena Prokhorova, "The Post-Utopian Body Politics: Masculinity and the Crisis of National Identity in Brezhnev-Era TV Miniseries," in: Helena Goscilo and Andrea Lanoux (eds.), *Gender and National Identity in Twentieth-century Russian Culture*, DeKalb, IL 2006, pp. 131–150, here p. 133.

428 Dumančić, *Men Out of Focus*, p. 254.

military masculinity states that this shift started even before the Thaw: "Military masculinity was in flux at the end of the Second World War in the Soviet Union. Catastrophic wartime casualties and the exceptional circumstance of women serving in combat roles combined to shatter prewar ideals about what service meant for masculine identity."[429] Utilizing diverse visual sources, McCallum examines the significant shifts in portraying the Soviet man after World War II in visual arts. Her study particularly emphasizes the evolution of two key identities in the postwar era: the Soviet man as a soldier and his subsequent role in the domestic sphere.[430] Although McCallum is rather wary about characterizing the post-Stalinist period as one enduring a crisis of masculinity,[431] in her book she asserts that the portrayal of masculine identities did change in the post-Stalin era. Furthermore, she sees the changed portrayal of Soviet parenthood and fatherhood "as part of the wider development in post-Stalinist visual culture, in which Socialist Realism moved closer to depicting the realities of Soviet life."[432]

Although the count of Russian operas with Soviet subjects was gradually diminishing, the inclination to create female-driven operatic universes began to ascend within this particular subgenre. That phenomenon is not limited only to opera but can be also observed in Soviet film. Scholars Marina Rojavin and Tim Harte assert that during the 1960s and 1970s, a "striking" number of Soviet films had a female lead, a phenomenon they explain with the rise of feminism and Soviet culture adopting "innovative filmic styles that complemented changing attitudes toward women."[433] Indeed, one could, as proposed by Rojavin and Harte, interpret this transfiguration of the cinematic canon by political circumstances during the Thaw. As explained by historian Melanie Ilič, Khrushchev revitalized discussions on the 'woman question' and overturned several key legal measures related to women and family matters implemented during the Stalinist 1930s and 1940s. The new social climate also led to increased representation of women in government and administration, revitalizing women's social and political organizations.[434] However, perhaps the shift from the 'external' and physical, traditionally connected to the masculine principle, to the 'internal'

429 Fraser, *Military Masculinity and Postwar Recovery*, p. 188.

430 See McCallum, *The Fate of the New Man*.

431 Ibid., pp. 198–199.

432 Ibid., p. 191.

433 Marina Rojavin and Tim Harte, "Introduction," in: Marina Rojavin and Tim Harte (eds.), *Women in Soviet Film: The Thaw and Post-Thaw Periods*, Oxford and New York 2018, pp. 1–10, here p. 1.

434 Melanie Ilič, "Women in the Khrushchev Era: An Overview," in: Melanie Ilič, Susan E. Reid, and Lynne Attwood (eds.), *Women in the Khrushchev Era*, New York 2004, pp. 5–28.

and emotional, connected to the feminine principle, can be explained by the mere existence of these inseparable dichotomies—in times that allowed and required more intimate introspection and dissection of the inner world of Soviet society and the Soviet individual, composers gravitated toward complex female protagonists as agents of this new exploration.

In the context of the female-driven 1960s Soviet Russian operas with a Soviet topic, one might mention, for instance, Rodion Shchedrin's *Ne tol'ko lyubov'* (*Not Love Alone*, 1961), Nina Makarova's (1908–1976) *Zoya* (1963), Aleksey Nikolayev's (1931–2003) *Tsenoyu zhizni* (*At the Cost of Life*, 1965), Aleksandr Kholminov's (1925–2015) *Optimisticheskaya tragediya* (*Optimistic Tragedy*, 1965) and *Anna Snegina* (1967), Sergey Slonimsky's *Virineya* (1967), Vladislav Agafonnikov's (1936) *Anna Snegina* (1968), and Kirill Molchanov's *Russkaya zhenshchina* (*Russian Woman*, 1969).[435] Shchedrin's opera explores the intimate longings of a female chairman of a post-war Soviet kolkhoz, while Makarova's nearly forgotten *Zoya*, based on Margarita Aliger's (1915–1992) eponymous long poem, follows the life of the legendary Soviet World War II partisan Zoya Kosmodem'yanskaya. While it is challenging to reconstruct what Makarova's operatic vision of Zoya might have entailed, one might hypothesize that the opera relied more on Stalinist operatic norms than on those of the Thaw, considering not only composer's generational placement, the nature of the original text, but also the fact that Makarova signed to commission the opera as early as in 1947.[436] Nikolayev's opera, based on the 1958 play *Barabanshchitsa* (*The Drummer*) written by Afanasy Salïnsky (1920–1993), follows Nila, an undercover Soviet agent during World War II with a tarnished reputation, who is eventually fatally betrayed by local suspicion and loses her life while heroically fighting against the Nazi underground.[437] Kholminov's opera, based on a 1932 play by Vsevolod Vishnevsky (1900–1951), portrays events of WWI and a female commissar navigating a male-dominated environment on a warship, eventually losing her life. As the composer himself described his heroine: "How much this woman has been given! Heroism and romanticism, decisiveness and gentleness, and most importantly, kindness and humanism. […] Naturally, I wanted to create a multifaceted, dimensional, and lively image. I

435 Another noteworthy example is Dmitry Kabalevsky's opera for children *Syostrï* (*Sisters*, 1969). Furthermore, interesting examples of female-driven operas from other parts of the Soviet Union include: Grigory Pukst's (1900–1960) heroic opera for children *Marinka* (1955), Vitaly Gubarenko's (1934–2000) opera *Gibel' ėskadrï* (*The Loss of the Squadron*, 1967), and Zagir Ismagilov's (1916–2003) *Gul'zifa* (1966).

436 See Elena Grosheva, "Kompozitor i teatr," in: *Sovetskaīā muzyka* 6 (1953), pp. 23–28, here p. 25.

437 See "Final vtorogo akta opery 'Zapomnite nas'," in: *Sovetskaīā muzyka* 11 (1964), pp. 3–7. The opera is also known as *Barabanshitsa* in the literature.

wanted to show the heroine in close-up and at the same time not deprive her of lyrical warmth."[438] Kholminov's opera *Anna Snegina* is based on Sergey Yesenin's (1895–1925) 1924 poem and is set during the revolutionary period, same as Agafonnikov's teleopera. While Slonimsky's opera explores the titular heroine's tumultuous position between the old and the new revolutionary Soviet worlds, leading to her ostracism and eventual death, Molchanov's nearly forgotten opera, based on the story "Bab'ye tsarstvo" ("Woman's World") by Yuri Nagibin (1920–1994), follows female members of a kolkhoz navigating life during World War II.

By reconstructing opera plotlines based on available data, certain characteristics immediately stand out. First, similar to the male-centric operas of the 1960s, these female-centric operas challenge the balance between the acting and thinking agents, introducing tragic elements into their narratives. Additionally, political overtones and a sense of historicity persist in these stories as well, though they are less pronounced. Some of these operas, most notably *Ne tol'ko lyubov'* and *Virineya*, which will be elaborated upon in separate chapters, present a diluted and converted version of Soviet historicity, despite being set in Soviet times. Furthermore, a striking trend is the introduction of female characters as heroic and capable of navigating martial and militant settings, as seen in some of the protagonists' functions, professions, and environments within which they assert their agency. The most unequivocal examples of this trend are found in the operas by Makarova, Nikolayev, and Kholminov.

As described by Clark, the Thaw can be interpreted in three ways: as a period of liberalization; as a time when the snow melts, "revealing what lies beneath, what was always there, if invisible, but dormant and drab under the impact of the cold and lack of light;" and lastly, as one of the seasons, a "phase in a repeated cycle."[439] And indeed, the end of Khrushchev's government in 1964 marked not only the end of cultural liberalization but also a return to certain narrative tendencies found in Stalinist art. As explained by Clark, despite Socialist Realism not being as dogmatic and obligatory anymore, the new literary production did not cease to exist completely independently of it.[440] Norman Luxenburg, scholar in the field of Russian studies, wrote in 1971 that Socialist Realism had consistently been the dominant

438 Aleksandr Kholminov, "Romantika revolut͡sii," in: *Sovetskai͡a muzyka* 11 (1962), pp. 7–12, here p. 7. Original Russian text: Как много дано этой женщине! Героика и романтизм, решительность и мягкость, а самое главное, добросердечие, гуманизм. [...] Естественно, мне хотелось создать образ многогранный, объемный, живой. Хотелось показать героиню крупным планом и в то же время не лишать ее лирической теплоты.

439 Clark, "Wait for Me and I Shall Return," p. 85.

440 Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, p. 236.

trend in Soviet literature up to that point, although, starting in 1954 with the Thaw, writers repeatedly tried to move beyond the constraints it imposed. "In the course of the last fifteen years the pendulum has sometimes seemed to be swinging far in favor of artistic freedom only to be pulled back again by the dictates of the hard-line party members."[441]

Leonid Brezhnev's era witnessed the reinvention and partial reconstruction of old Stalinist narratives. According to Jones, the second half of the 1960s, or the early Brezhnev years, were marked by an urge to "re-heroize the Stalinist past."[442] After the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, "the ideological vigilance of the Brezhnev regime increased" and was accompanied by "signs of 'neo-Stalinism' and 'genuine re-Stalinization,' including a marked intensification in praise for Stalin in the Soviet press."[443] Indeed, the final phase of the Soviet long sixties can be marked by a beginning of a new cultural climate, and it was a palpably more conservative one. Elena Prokhorova points out that the Brezhnev era was the time of "obsession with memory and the past," which was written as "the era of true heroes, clear goals, and resolved (and resolvable) conflicts."[444] Furthermore, Brezhnev's narrative of Sovietness was merely an extension of preexisting myths of power and martial masculinity that had persisted in Soviet consciousness since the Stalin era. As explained by Dumančić when talking about post-1968 Soviet cinema:

> The regime glamorized Civil War and Second World War film heroes in order to rearticulate a masculinist, patriarchal paradigm within a grand historical schema and thereby project the virility and grandeur of bygone eras onto a lacklustre contemporaneity. […] The (re)turn to grand historical narratives and monumental masculinity reflected the authorities' preoccupation with projecting its authority; it also mirrored more general concerns about the state of Soviet masculinity. Widespread disillusionment emerged during the early to mid-1970s and brought about a retreat into the country's more glorious (and certain) past.[445]

The Soviet Russian operas that premiered in the early 1970s are distinctly characterized by a heightened interest in Soviet patriotic themes and notable political upheavals, in contrast to the Thaw period. Additionally, these

441 Norman Luxenburg, "Current Trends in Soviet Literature," in: *Books Abroad* 45/2 (1971), pp. 264–266, here p. 264.

442 Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953–70*, New Haven, CT and London 2013, p. 239.

443 Ibid., p. 243.

444 Prokhorova, "The Post-Utopian Body Politics," p. 133.

445 Dumančić, *Men Out of Focus*, p. 259.

operas prominently feature heroic male leads. Vladimir Rubin (1924–2019) wrote *Iyul'skoye voskresen'ye* (*July Sunday*, 1971), and follows a group of soldiers in Sevastopol amid World War II in the genre of music tragedy.[446] Vladislav Uspensky (1937–2004) wrote *Interventsiya* (*Intervention*, 1972), dealing with the Allied intervention in Sevastopol 1919.[447] Boris Kravchenko wrote *Leytenant Shmidt* (*Lieutenant Schmidt*, 1972), following a real-life figure, Pyotr Shmidt (1867–1906), amid Sevastopol uprising in 1905.[448] Kholminov's opera *Chapayev* (1974) also follows a real-life figure, Vasily Chapayev (1887–1919), a Red Army commander during the Russian Civil war.[449] Aleksey Nikolayev's *Razgrom* (*Devastation*, 1976), based on a famous eponymous novel by Aleksandr Fadeyev (1901–1956), follows a partisan division during the Russian Civil War,[450] just to name a few examples. The female operatic perspective once again came to an end, and the male-centric, patriotic, and militant operatic canon with a Soviet subject was reinstated, regaining its dominance. A notable exception of a female-driven opera at the dawn of the Soviet long sixties is Kirill Molchanov's *Zori zdes' tikhiye* (*The Dawns Here Are Quiet*, 1973). Molchanov's work instrumentalized the female perspective for a different purpose than his predecessors. Therefore, it will receive a more in-depth analysis in a separate chapter, serving not only as a symbolic ending to the effeminacy of the post-Stalin opera, but also a conclusion to this study.

The second section of this study aims to explore the female-centric Soviet operatic canon during the long Soviet sixties, spanning approximately from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s, succeeding the dominance of the masculine heroic operas of the Stalin era. The newfound artistic autonomy led to the creation of 'intimate,' lyrical, and introspective operatic spaces which, coincidentally or not, also meant a greater focus on the female perspectives within the Soviet operatic imaginary. Unlike the previous section, which was dedicated to male-centric heroic operas of the Stalinist era where female voices revolved like satellites around the main male protagonists, this section will focus on operas with a Soviet subject in which the main protagonists are, in fact, women. This different approach to the analysis of Soviet female operatic characters, compared to the previous text, is not an arbitrary decision or a mere editorial choice, as it derives precisely

446 See Givi Ordzhonikidze, "Oda-rekviem" in: *Sovetskai͡a muzyka* 7 (1971), pp. 22–30.

447 See Abram I͡Usfin, "'Interven‿si͡a' na opernoĭ s‿tsene," in: *Sovetskai͡a muzyka* 11 (1973), pp. 29–37.

448 See Aleksandr Demchenko, "Letopis' gneva i bor'by," in: *Sovetskai͡a muzyka* 12 (1980), pp. 58–63.

449 See "Rasskaz boĭ‿tsa iz opery 'Chapaev'," in: *Sovetskai͡a muzyka* 6 (1974), pp. 28–31.

450 See Roman Ledenev, "Fadeev na openoĭ stsene," in: *Sovetskai͡a muzyka* 7 (1976), pp. 17–22.

from the nature of the canon. The new female operatic heroines are autonomous and complex ambassadors of the Soviet ideology, but, at times, also its subversion. They no longer exist solely as a material and physical force accompanying the hero on his journey toward the highest form of Soviet existence. The new type of female character remains tied to the historical, martial, and revolutionary context surrounding her; however, the tension needing resolution does not occur solely in the physical world, but within the intimate sphere of the persona itself.

The section commences with an analysis of Tikhon Khrennikov's opera *Mother*, based on Maksim Gorky's (1868–1936) eponymous magnum opus, tracing Pelageya Nilovna's path to emancipation through her revolutionary activity. The subsequent opera, Rodion Shchedrin's *Not Love Alone*, provides insight into the life of Varvara Vasil'yevna who, after the terror and devastation of World War II, found herself as the chairwoman of a Soviet kolkhoz. The ensuing opera, Sergey Slonimsky's *Virineya*, follows the tumultuous life of a young woman forging her own path toward revolutionary self-actualization during the 1917 Revolution. The final opera, Kirill Molchanov's *The Dawns Here Are Quiet* delves into the experiences and struggles of female soldiers fighting on the World War II front. Although the four operas differ significantly from a musical standpoint, they are united by the composers' focus on the inner lives of their protagonists, who are no longer the ideal Stalinist heroes but, rather, 'imperfect,' intricate, and relatable—heroines.

3.2 Tikhon Khrennikov's *Mother* (1957)

Stalin's death in 1953 marked an end of an era, to say the least, but it also signaled a beginning of a new chapter in the development of Soviet music. According to Hakobian, although the subsequent period was not particularly "rich in spectacular events of political importance," the following decades cannot be portrayed as perfectly peaceful, as the "'thaws' would alternate with 'frosts'" and arti sts still faced some pressure from the political apparatus.[451] The years following his 1939 operatic debut, *Into the Storm,* turned out to be particularly fruitful for Tikhon Khrennikov, both politically and artistically. In terms of his artistic production, during the 1940s and 1950s, Khrennikov continued to write orchestral music, music for plays, film scores, and various vocal and choral pieces. He also produced another opera, the comical *Frol Skobeyev* (1950), based on Dmitry Averkiyev's (1836–1905) eponymous 1869 play. Additionally, in 1948, he was appointed General Secretary of the Union of Composers, a position he held

451 Hakobian, *Music of the Soviet Era*, p. 197.

until the dissolution of the USSR. According to Hakobian, this made him a record-holder in terms of political longevity among high-ranking Soviet functionaries.[452]

Although the Thaw and the subsequent decades brought a certain, as Hakobian writes, "'lightened' mode of ideological surveillance," it did not mean that all Soviet composers immediately and eagerly embraced the previously forbidden Western music techniques.[453] According to Schwarz, in 1954, Khrennikov found himself caught between two different factions. The first was the 'liberal camp,' demanding more artistic freedom and less surveillance, while the second was the 'hard-liners,' advocating for the continuation of the old artistic and political models.[454] In this regard, Khrennikov took a particularly regressive position, remaining loyal to the Zhdanov-Stalin line and adhering to the principles of Socialist Realism. This is evident in his opening address to the Second Composers' Congress, which began on March 28, 1957, where he clearly expressed his reactionary stance. As noted by Schwarz: "It was his task to salvage Socialist Realism from the wreckage of Stalinism. By doing so, Khrennikov dampened all hopes for a liberalization of artistic concepts."[455] In his speech, Khrennikov also touched upon the state of the Soviet opera, which, as noted by Schwarz, between 1948 and 1957 appeared to be in a state of hibernation. Around 120 operas were written during that time, but only half of them made it to the stage or entered the production process. Moreover, out of those operas, only seven were performed at more than one theater, including examples such as Prokofiev's *War and Peace* and Kabalevsky's *The Taras Family*.[456] On the other hand, Khrennikov did allow a new breeze into the Soviet musical circles, permitting the Thaw gradually making its way into Soviet music production, yet with caution. As pointed out by Schwarz, he also played a role in rehabilitating composers who were victimized during the Zhdanov era.[457]

In addition to the Second Composers' Congress, the year 1957 was marked by another significant event. The Fortieth Anniversary of the October Revolution in 1957 was commemorated with a series of events and the creation of new musical pieces. This included a new production of Prokofiev's *War and Peace*, the premiere of Shostakovich's Eleventh Symphony subtitled *The Year 1905*, but also Khrennikov's opera *Mother* (*Mat'*) in four acts, written after Maksim Gorky's eponymous novel form 1906. Khrennikov himself

452 Ibid., p. 198.
453 Ibid.
454 Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, p. 277.
455 Ibid., p. 300.
456 Ibid., p. 301.
457 Ibid., p. 224.

expressed his eagerness to provide a musical setting for the quintessential Soviet novel in an interview for *Sovetskaya muzïka*:

> In the summer of 1950, I reread Gorky's story, and it became immediately clear to me that I would certainly write an opera based on its plot. The reasons are evident: Gorky's work combines revolutionary pathos and sharp social commentary with a profound exploration of the human soul, the unveiling of hero's psychology as they undergo the internal process of obtaining the characteristics of a new man...[458]

However, this was not the first time an opera was written after Gorky's famous novel. Valery Zhelobinsky's (1913–1946) *Mother* premiered in 1938, and it is also known that Yury Shaporin planned to write an opera in collaboration with Gorky himself, but the project got abandoned after the writer's death in 1936.[459]

By examining the premiere dates of Soviet musical adaptations of Gorky's work, it becomes difficult to ignore the impression that Gorky's popularity did not diminish over the years. In fact, it seems to have grown.[460]

458 "Kak sozdavalas' opera 'Mat'," in: *Sovetskaīā muzyka* 6 (1961), pp. 120–122, here p. 120. Original Russian text: Летом 1950 года я перечитал горьковскую повесть. И мне сразу же стало ясно, что обязательно буду писать оперу на ее сюжет. И понятно, почему: революционный пафос, острая публицистика соединяются в произведении Горького с глубоким проникновением в тайники человеческой души, раскрытием характера героя через внутренний процесс формирования в нем черт нового человека...

459 See Rita McAllister and Iosif Genrikhovich Rayskin, "Shaporin, Yury Aleksandrovich," in: *Grove Music Online*, print publication 2001, published online 2001, ‹https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.25589›.

460 Gorky's prolific body of work inspired large-scale stage productions that went beyond his magnum opus. In the realm of opera, in addition to *Mother*, another of Gorky's works that received an operatic treatment is his story "The Mother of a Traitor" ("Mat' izmennika," 1911). It served as the basis for two operas: Yuri Levitin's (1912–1993) *Monna-Marianna* (1939) and Boris Kravchenko's opera of the same name, completed in 1972. Additionally, Dmitry Vasil'yev-Buglay (1888–1956) composed an oratorio titled *The Maiden and Death* ("Devushka i smert'," 1948), as did German Galïnin (1922–1966), whose oratorio of the same name premiered in 1950. Another genre that proved surprisingly fertile in embodying Gorky's work was ballet. During the Thaw, Andrey Pashchenko (1885–1972) composed the ballet *Radda i Loyko* (1957) based on Gorky's "Makar Chudra," while Dmitry Tolstoy created *Nuncha* (1964). In the Brezhnev era, Israeli composer of Latvian origin Sarah Feigin (1928–2011) wrote her ballet *The Storm* (1969), Vladimir Sapozhnikov (1945) composed *Twenty-Six And One Woman* ("Dvadtsat' i odna," 1971), and Nikolay Sidel'nikov (1930–1992) created *Stepan Razin* (1977) based on the works of both Gorky and Stepan Zlobin (1903–1965).

This serves as persuasive evidence that the Thaw was not a uniform and universal trend that permeated every composer's body of work. Traditionalists and loyalists still occupied the Soviet musical scene, avoiding excessive or any artistic innovations and perpetually reviving the sacred scriptures of Socialist Realism on the stage. One might assume that in the time of Soviet society opening up and modes of life and art changing more quickly and freely than ever before, while at the same time, the past is being dissected and put under question, Gorky served as a peaceful harbor, an anchor of sorts, strengthening the continuum with the grand and untarnished Soviet past. This is precisely why I argue that Khrennikov's detour in the Soviet revolutionary past had another reason beyond the celebration of the Revolution's anniversary. After the process of Khrushchev's de-Stalinization, where else could one seek the pristine Soviet past? The myth of Stalin and World War II were being dissected and reexamined, exposing all the atrocities of the regime, adding to the sense of uncertainty and confusion. Where does one search for spiritual and ideological strongholds when everything seems to be falling apart?

3.2.1 A Glance into the Periphery of a Soviet Hagiography

There is a plethora of quintessential mother characters offering assistance and gentle guidance to their sons present inside the Soviet operatic canon. In the already mentioned *The Story of a Real Man*, at the beginning of the second act, it is decided that Aleksey's legs will need to be amputated, much to his terror. During the operation and while in a deep state of delirium, Aleksey is haunted by a distorted and fragmentary vision of his mother saying: "Legs, take care of your legs, Alyosha! Don't get cold, and don't get your legs wet, Alyosha. I knitted warm socks from angora wool."[461] Aksin'ya, the mother of Lyon'ka and Listrat in Khrennikov's *Into the Storm*, is portrayed as a gentle, caring, and accepting parental figure. Her arioso from the first act is a tender cry of a mother whose children are dispersed on different sides, both physically and ideologically. Aksin'ya is well aware of the unfortunate state kulak Storozhev and Antonov have put the village in. However, while Listrat and Lyon'ka clash over their opposed opinions on the problem, she remains neutral, trying to avoid any harshness or judgment towards her young son, who has yet to grasp the political connotations or the extent of the danger looming over the villagers. She repeats the same line: "Oh, so

461 Prokofiev, *The Story of a Real Man*, p. 82. Original Russian text: Ноги, ноги береги, Алеша! Не студись, не промочи, Алеша, ноги. Я теплые носки связала из ангорской шерсти.

strange, oh, so strange, I don't understand anything."[462] The libretto hints, though, that the situation is indeed perfectly clear to her and that she is siding with Listrat on the question of village politics. Her way of assisting Lyon'ka's path of understanding is by giving him space to draw his own conclusions and encouraging him to do so on his own terms. In Prokofiev's *Semyon Kotko*, Semyon's mother has a rather peripheral function inside opera's narrative structure, while Khivrya plays a crucial and slightly more complex role. She is trapped inside her seemingly burdensome position between her duty toward her demanding and cruel husband and her tormented daughter Sof'ya, suffering from her father's maltreatment. Although Khivrya shows empathy toward her burdened daughter, she still fears her abusive husband and lacks decisiveness and willingness to take concrete steps towards changing her and her daughter's unfortunate situation. Yet, she serves as a bridge between the passiveness of the oppressed generation on one side and the revolutionary spirit of the younger women in the opera on the other. Khrennikov's titular mother embodies many of the mentioned qualities, but also goes multiple steps further—unlike the other mothers in the Soviet operatic canon, Pelageya Nilovna does not solely revolve around the main hero but also demonstrates her own agency, revealing to the audience all the psychological complexities of her persona and her relentless path of self-discovery and self-actualization.

The libretto, which follows Gorky's novel rather faithfully,[463] revolves around the Vlasov family, Pelageya Nilovna (mezzo-soprano) and her son Pavel (baritone), a factory worker, prior to the Russian Revolution of 1905. The two are living by themselves since Pelageya's alcoholic husband died. Pelageya Nilovna is alarmed by the change that has occurred in Pavel—he has become silent, always immersed in books. One day, arriving home with a bundle of books as usual, Pavel informs his mother that his friends will start meeting at their home every Saturday, much to her suspicion. After hesitating at first, Pavel admits to Pelageya about his fellow revolutionaries and the nature of their meetings, but also about the forbidden books they study. At the gatherings, there are numerous participating workers like Andrey Nakhodka (bass), Nikolay Vesovshchikov (bass), and Fyodor Mazin (tenor), as well as city girls, including Sashen'ka (soprano). What is happening in the house is of great interest to the factory timekeeper Isay Gorbov (tenor). Pavel and Sasha love each other but restrain their feelings, as romance and family could distract them from the revolutionary activity to which they have devoted their lives. One day, the gendarmerie brought in by

462 Khrennikov, *V burю*, p. 83. Original Russian text: Уж так чудно, уж так чудно, не понять ничего.

463 See Maxim Gorky, *Mother*, Secaucus, NJ 1974.

Gorbov burst into the house. They are looking for pamphlets, which are increasingly appearing at the factory. Finding nothing, as the illegal literature was buried near the house, they nevertheless arrest Pavel, Nakhodka, and Vesovshchikov. Seeing the importance of spreading pamphlets in the factory, Nilovna recalls that her neighbor Mar'ya Korsunova (mezzo-soprano) once asked her to assist in selling meals at the factory. She decides to accept the task as a pretense to spread the pamphlets among the workers. After leaving the prison, Pavel's plan is to prepare for the First of May demonstration. Having learned that Pavel decided to carry the banner in front of the procession, Nilovna and Sasha cannot hide their concern, as he will certainly face prison again. However, Pavel's decision is firm. The demonstration is suppressed by the soldiers, and the protestors are arrested, including Pavel. He is sentenced to exile to Siberia, and Nilovna decides to continue his mission and spread his speech on pamphlets around the villages.[464]

Even though Khrennikov's opera did not receive much attention from the academic community, the same definitely cannot be claimed for Gorky's novel, which was subjected to numerous insightful analyses and positioned itself as the ultimate precursor and paragon of Socialist Realist literature. While discussing the pre-Bolshevik literary models as well as the early years of Socialist Realism, Clark notices a deep underlying connection between Soviet fiction on the one hand and Russian hagiography and nineteenth-century radical literature on the other. The latter two have their own specific set of 'symbolic patterns' that eventually played a crucial role in the future construction of the Bolshevik literary narratives. The first symbolic pattern Clark highlights is the political movement being identified with a family, meaning, the political movement was ought to supplant members' natural families. The second pattern is identified through a relationship between a mentor and a disciple, where the latter undergoes a certain "conversion process" and "is brought to see the light by some emissary of the new enlightenment." The third and final pattern is martyrdom, ranging from leading an ascetic life of dedication to the movement and self-deprivation to the supreme sacrifice of one's own life, with the ongoing movement symbolizing the hero's resurrection.[465] Clark draws attention to a parallel between the construction of the literary Soviet hero and the conventions inherent in hagiography as a genre. She notes: "Although an amazing number of Socialist Realist classics are based on actual events, their protagonists' lives always manage to follow the conventionalized stages of the master

464 See Tikhon Khrennikov, *Mat'. Opera v 4-kh deĭstviiākh, 8-i kartinakh*, Moscow 1956, ‹https://khrennikov.ru/noty/item/mat-opera› 16 July 2026.

465 Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, p. 49.

plot."[466] Clark characterizes Gorky's novel as a "secular hagiography," further explaining that it was believed that in communism people would reach "such heights of human development that he would become as God. And so, to Gorky, Bolshevism was literally, and not just functionally, a secular substitute for religion."[467]

If we follow the presented fragments of Clark's shrewd analysis of the novel, one might assume that Pavel is the main character of the story, but that is not the case here—Gorky's and Khrennikov's interests are strongly centered around Pelageya Nilovna. Pelageya is perhaps not even much different from other Soviet heroines described previously, nor did the authors disrupt the vista of a typical revolutionary Soviet family. However, the crucial difference is that now it is she who stands under the spotlight, not her revolutionary son. Suddenly, the main beam of the stage light is not shining over the main protagonist of his own hagiography, but towards the periphery of the constellation—towards his mother.

3.2.2 Pelageya as an Active Agent of the Revolution

By examining the brief overview of the plot and considering the general portrayal of women within the Soviet operatic canon elaborated in previous chapters, one noticeable aspect is that women are seemingly never depicted as being able and capable of leading revolutionary activities by themselves. Instead, they heavily rely on their male counterparts' guidance and leadership. However, in the context of *Mother*, this dynamic takes on a different flavor and a certain twist.

Many have offered their own views on the mother archetype; however, it is undoubtedly Carl Gustav Jung and his writings that dominated the construction of the archetypal theory throughout the twentieth century and still manage to reinvent themselves in the writings of contemporary scholars. Jung specifies the main characteristics of the mother archetype as "maternal solicitude and sympathy; the magic authority of the female; the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason; any helpful instinct or impulse; all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility."[468] The mother archetype can be viewed from multiple perspectives and most certainly elaborated on more in-depth, but in general, she traditionally

466 Ibid., p. 47.

467 Ibid., p. 55.

468 Carl Gustav Jung, *Four Archetypes: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster*, London and New York 2003, p. 15.

represents the source of empowerment, offering help and care, pointing out the way, while also instilling the courage to explore and confront the risks.[469]

It would be expected to see Pelageya holding a traditional role as a spiritual and emotional guide to her son, Pavel, who, being the 'child' (following the traditional archetypal theory and the writings by philologist and cultural historian Eleazar Meletinsky), should symbolize "the awakening of the individual consciousness from the forces of the collective unconscious."[470] However, that is not the case here. Although inside their family Pavel is the child, within the revolutionary hierarchy, it is actually Pelageya who represents the "awakening of the consciousness," and as such, she becomes a sort of symbolic child while remaining Pavel's mother. Suddenly, it is Pavel who serves as the mentor, and Pavel's mother, Pelageya Nilovna, becomes the disciple, undergoing an active metamorphosis towards both her own self-actualization and the revolutionary one. Interestingly enough, Pelageya is aware of this curious role reversal. After Pavel's second arrest, she states: "Everything seems small and empty to me compared to your great and beautiful fate. Who is the older of us? Me or you—I don't know! But there is no fear and no pain in the chest, I see joy, joy is ahead."[471]

According to literary scholar Alyssa Dinega, Pavel Vlasov is an entirely "static character." He completes his metamorphosis early on in the novel, and from then on, he is present as a continuous and linear "light in the distance," toward which every character aspires. Dinega describes him as a "stationary star, a mentor to his mother's roaming bark."[472] Khrennikov goes even a step further, completely reducing the audience's insight into Pavel's metamorphosis discussed in Gorky's novel, presenting him in his ultimate state and further strengthening the perception of his static nature. Unlike Pavel, who is a static character, Pelageya, as described by Clark, is a dynamic one: "Pavel's mother is not so static a figure. Indeed, the novel is

469 Mary Beth Spore, Marsha Dianne Harrison and Nelson L. Haggerson Jr., "The Good Mother," in: *Counterpoints* 187 (2002), pp. 155–167, here pp. 155–156.

470 Eleazar Meletinskiĭ, *O literaturnykh arkhetipakh*, Moscow 1994, p. 6. Original Russian text: «Дитя» символизирует начало пробуждения индивидуального сознания из стихии коллективно-бессознательного [(но и связь с изначальной бессознательной недифференцированностью, а также «антиципацию» смерти и нового рождения).]

471 Khrennikov, *Mat'*, pp. 457–459. Original Russian text: Всё кажется мне маленьким, пустым — перед судьбой твоей великой и прекрасной. Из нас кто старше? Я иль ты — не знаю! Но страха нет и боли нет в груди,— я радость вижу, радость впереди.

472 Alyssa W. Dinega, "Bearing the Standard: Transformative Ritual in Gorky's *Mother* and the Legacy of Tolstoy," in: *The Slavic and East European Journal* 42/1 (1998), pp. 76–101, here pp. 85–86.

ostensibly about her development. In this sense Mother might be called a Bildungsroman, with the mother as the one being 'formed.' But, unlike a Bildungsroman hero, her final incarnation has already been determined when she begins her progress to 'consciousness'."[473]

Besides portraying the titular mother as a dynamic agent, in contrast to her static son, Pelageya Nilovna also serves as Pavel's antithesis in a different regard. If we again refer to Jungian terminology, then Pavel is represented by the rational and critical masculine principle of Logos, while Pelageya is represented by the emotional and irrational feminine principle of Eros. Naturally, this simplified characterization could be potentially limiting, as it is necessary to acknowledge a certain skepticism when approaching Jung's theories, given that they have received criticism, particularly from feminist circles. However, it is clear that Khrennikov, while softening Pavel's Logos, simultaneously strengthens Pelageya's Eros. Moreover, her transition to the sphere of Logos does not seem unnatural or abnormal, as it often happens with female characters going through the same passage, as pointed out by feminist scholar Naomi Goldenberg.[474] While Pavel undergoes a process of softening through his romantic plotline with Sasha, Pelageya goes through a process of balancing out her inherent female poetic lyricism, or Eros, by embracing the revolutionary values, mentality, and overall *modus operandi*. Furthermore, her 'toughening up' also results from finally confronting the stark reality of her grim past, accepting the pain she endured, and acknowledging the constraints of the patriarchy that held her down.

Gorky's Pelageya has tension written into her right from the start, which becomes obvious through a mere acknowledgment of her temporal and spatial positioning. She belongs to a critical generation of women who found themselves amidst a great societal change; she grew up in an old social and political system and suddenly found herself on the threshold of a new one. Simultaneously, she is influenced by the bygone traditional society and its set of values, while also closely tied to the rapidly growing industrial sector and revolutionary proto-urban society. Notably, the number of women in the industrial sector progressively increased in the decade preceding 1917, especially during the times of the war.[475] According to Evans Clements, the processes of industrialization and urbanization did not fully liberate working-class women from the "peasant values" and the influence of the traditional society. These women largely did not participate in the political parties or trade unions—their priority was working for the family. While some textile

473 Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, p. 57.

474 Naomi R. Goldenberg, "A Feminist Critique of Jung," in: *Signs* 2/2 (1976), pp. 443–449, here p. 445.

475 Evans Clements, "Working-Class and Peasant Women," p. 225.

workers engaged in pre-revolutionary protest, most city women remained uninvolved due to burdens like being uneducated, overworked, poorly paid, and responsible for childcare. "There were a few women unionists, primarily among the thousands of textile workers, who were active in protest before the revolution; but most city women—uneducated, badly paid, overworked, responsible for children, and subject to abuse from men—stayed away from unions and revolutionaries."[476] Though Pelageya may not participate in industrial work, most likely due to her age, Gorky's work nevertheless serves as a realistic portrayal of the historical, societal, and everyday burden that many middle-aged women suddenly found themselves carrying on their shoulders.

We first learn about Pelageya's past when she confronts her drunk neighbor, Mar'ya Korsunova. Korsunova states: "Yes. I drank. And who will stop me? I, my mother, am my own master, unlike you, my dear, who trembled all your life in front of your husband, in front of the drunkard tyrant."[477] Soon after the encounter with Korsunova, Pavel expresses a similar observation in a conversation with his mother: "Recall your life. Did you even live in fact? What kind of pleasures did you know? What will you remember about your life? Father beat you up, took out the grief of his life on you, he couldn't understand where did it come from, how to overcome it."[478] Nilovna's short and simple response, "And what do you want [from me]?,"[479] sums up the whole dynamic between different generations, but also genders to some extent. It is almost as if she cannot even imagine living a different version of her life, burdened by her husband's tyranny. When Yegor Ivanovich triggers her memories of her past life and marriage, she soon comes to a tristful conclusion:

> He came from childhood, and disturbed my soul. I look into the past and don't see anything, I forgot what happened before marriage. I forgot everything. In a haze, I can see some kind of houses, wells, and fires... how the smoke used to pour down, how the tongues of fire used to beat… They knocked everything out of my soul, you know, and nailed it tightly.[480]

476 Ibid.

477 Khrennikov, *Mat'*, pp. 21–22. Original Russian text: Да. Выпила. А кто мне запретит? Я, мать моя, сама себе хозяйка, не то, что ты, сердешная моя, всю жизнь пред мужем трепетала, пред пьяницей-тираном.

478 Ibid., pp. 35–36. Original Russian text: Припомни жизнь свою. Жила ты разве раньше? Какие радости ты знала? Чем можешь прожитое помянуть? Отец тебя бил, на тебе вымещал горе жизни своей, что давило его, не мог он понять откуда оно, как его одолеть.

479 Ibid., p. 36. Original Russian text: А ты что хочешь?

480 Ibid., pp. 116–119. Original Russian text: Пришёл из детства, душу растревожил. Я в прошлое гляжу и ничего не вижу, что было до замужества — забыла, я всё забыла. В тумане видятся какие то дома, колодезь и пожары...

As the opera revolves around the occurrences during the First Russian Revolution in 1905, it is safe to assume that Pelageya was undoubtedly born and spent most of her life in the second half of the nineteenth century, which is surely not an unimportant fact for this discussion, considering how deeply the narrative is set in a real-life historical setting. Understanding Pelageya's position within her marriage and family is important to fully grasp her metamorphosis, as this way it acquires a particular gravitas it otherwise would not. Indeed, while a handful of replicas referring to her past might have been enough for the first readers of the novel or the contemporary spectators of the opera to recall and understand all the nuances of the weightiness of Pelageya's burdensome position, it might not be as straightforward for the modern audience.

While examining the status of women in nineteenth-century Russian society, historian and jurist Marianna Muravyeva portrays a grim picture of men performing acts of violence against their wives and daughters to keep them in absolute subjection. This behavior derived from both the patriarchal attitude toward family and the low social standing of women. Both the Church and the State insisted on the husband's right to 'discipline' his wife and children, leaving the wife obliged to obey him and stay in absolute compliance.[481] Muravyeva explains that wife-beating was rampant among nineteenth-century peasants and workers, a phenomenon underpinned by the common belief that a husband possessed a lawful right to punish his wife and an absolute power over her.[482]

Even though certain women resisted and managed the violence through various legal and non-legal measures, the majority opted to comply. This choice was primarily influenced by the fact that their safety and financial stability often relied on the man of the household.[483]

Although her fear, which became a narrative thread throughout the entire libretto, slowly fades as the plot progresses, Nilovna demonstrates acts of bravery, and her newfound strength and sense of purpose are evident. However, Pavel's first arrest deeply upset her and shook her sense of purpose. Her aria (Act II, Tableau 3) is permeated by motherly pain and worry, along with

Как дым валил, как огненные бились языки... Всё из души, знать, выбили моей и наглухо её заколотили.

481 Marianna Muravyeva, "Between Law and Morality: Violence Against Women in Nineteenth-Century Russia," in: Wendy Rosslyn and Alessandra Tosi (eds.), *Women in Nineteenth-Century Russia. Lives and Culture*, Cambridge 2012, pp. 209–238, here p. 227.

482 Ibid., pp. 229–230.

483 Ibid., p. 237. For more information on family violence in Soviet Russia, see Marianna Muravyeva, "Bytovukha: Family Violence in Soviet Russia," in: *Aspasia* 8/1 (2014), pp. 90–124.

reflections on her role in the Revolution (Fig. 21). In contrast to *Into the Storm*, where the song served as the essential basis for the opera, Nilovna's aria is expressive, elaborate, and avoids the cliché of a de-individualized song, which illustrates Khrennikov's departure from the song opera format.

A clear signal of Nilovna's successful transition and the loss of her fear occurs after Pavel's second arrest, which was expected and even purposefully provoked. Nilovna is at peace with his destiny and declares that she no longer fears anything. Moreover, she takes the initiative and offers to spread his words around the villages by herself. The main revelation take place in the fourth act when Nilovna is on the train on her quest to spread Pavel's words. It is then that she realizes that everybody is connected in a way more profound way than she ever expected— through the revolutionary goal itself: "Now I understand all of you—all of you are comrades, dear to me, all of you are children of a mother of one great truth."[484]

It is necessary to highlight the fact that her Eros was not suppressed throughout the novel and the opera, just the opposite—the feminine principles inherent in her, such as concern and nurture, were redirected from one figure, her son, to the children of the entire Revolution. Gorky celebrates her Eros by showcasing and utilizing its potential and importance within the revolutionary movement. Although our heroines, Nilovna and Sasha, participate in the revolution in the same manner as their male counterparts, we can still observe that women, besides worrying about the outcome of their revolutionary activities, also take care of their male comrades, while men are seemingly exclusively and wholeheartedly focused on their revolutionary agenda. Nilovna and Sasha play a crucial role in supporting Pavel's path, and communist agenda in extent, but they are always standing in the shadow of his greatness, never capable of great sacrificial feats of grand importance equal of his. As explained by historian and gender scholar Elizabeth Jones Hemenway in her research on 1920s memorial literature and female revolutionary identities,

> women Bolsheviks continued to function as surrogate mothers and sisters, their work conceived as both distinct from, and morally superior to, that performed by men. Women revolutionaries' collective role of symbolizing the spiritual and moral side of the Revolution corresponded to traditional Russian conceptions of femininity. Such a moral elevation not only restricted the range of female representations, but also overlooked or erased significant aspects of these women's lived experience.[485]

484 Khrennikov, *Mat'*, pp. 500–501. Original Russian text: Теперь я всех вас понимаю — все вы товарищи, родные, все дети матери одной великой правды.

485 Elizabeth Jones Hemenway, "Mothers of Communists: Women Revolutionaries and the Construction of a Soviet Identity," in: Helena Goscilo and Andrea Lanoux

Figure 21. *Mother*, Act II, Tableau 3, pp. 216–217.

Translation: Nilovna: No, I cannot believe it! I cannot! In prison, my son is in prison, [...]

Furthermore, Hemenway points out that memorial literature not only idealized female revolutionaries, but also desexualized them, stating that "the Soviet system of representation acknowledged no sexual identity in the female revolutionary."[486] However, Gorky challenges this notion through the exploration of Pavel's and Sasha's romantic relationship, and Khrennikov does so to an even higher degree.

3.2.3 Could There Be an Opera Without Romance?

As explained by Khrennikov himself, his surroundings were not particularly supportive of his decision to write an opera based on Gorky's novel: "I will not deny it—I was discouraged. People were trying to convince me that the plot, as they said, is not 'operatic,' that there is almost no love intrigue in it, that the lyrical style is closer to me, and the lyricism in *Mother* is in the background. […] I didn't even argue—I firmly knew that I would still try to write an opera."[487] Besides clarifying his motivation, Khrennikov also raises two other interesting points in this short fragment of his text for *Sovetskaya muzïka*. The first is his awareness of his affiliation to the "lyrical style." Although Khrennikov incorporated old revolutionary songs in his opera and invented his own melodies following the same idiom,[488] *Mother* is nevertheless predominantly lyrical in its expression. Secondly, Khrennikov's point about the lacking love intrigue is particularly interesting. Although the romance is undoubtedly pushed to the background in the original text by Gorky, and the "love intrigue" is virtually non-existent, it is surely not lacking in the libretto written by Aleksey Fayko. This is the core difference between the two texts, which are otherwise very complimentary, as the extremely restrained relationship between Pavel and Sasha gets loosened up by Fayko and Khrennikov. Furthermore, this rebalance is mostly achieved through re-elaborating Gorky's Sasha. In the original text, Sasha's revolutionary passion is much more pronounced than in Fayko's libretto, and the original character has more psychological depth than its operatic

(eds.), *Gender and National Identity in Twentieth-century Russian Culture*, DeKalb, IL 2006, pp. 75–92, here p. 88.

486 Ibid.

487 "Kak sozdavalas' opera 'Mat''," p. 120. Original Russian text: Не скрою — меня отговаривали. Убеждали, что сюжет, дескать, не «оперный», что в нем почти нет любовной интриги, что мне более близка лирическая интонация, а лирика в «Матери» — на втором плане. […] Я даже не спорил — я твердо знал, что все равно буду пытаться писать оперу.

488 Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia*, p. 311.

Figure 22. *Mother*, Act I, Tableau 2, p. 97.

Translation: Pavel: Oh, if I could carry you all our way in my arms. Sasha: I want to press myself to your chest, hear the beating of your heart, and give all my tenderness to you.

version. Namely, operatic Sasha seems to be predominantly worried about Pavel, and her revolutionary agency appears to be subdued to the cultivating romance she shares with him. Is it because of the operatic conventions, which commonly rely on a romantic clash between the main characters, as admitted by Khrennikov himself, or is it to build any kind of inner tension into the otherwise static Pavel? Or is it perhaps both?

Although the literary versions of Pavel and his love interest Sasha claim not to be interested in a romantic relationship out of concern that it might stand in their way of pursuing their revolutionary agency, Khrennikov nevertheless puts a palpable emphasis on their relationship. He makes Pavel's scenes with Sasha probably the dramatic peaks throughout the whole opera, as seen, for example, in their duet from the first act (Tableau 2) (Fig. 22). In this particular instance, they are separated by a wall and cannot hear each other's confessions; however, the complementarity of two lyrical melodies, which mostly move in straightforward octaves and thirds, also suggests the complementarity of their feelings despite the literal and metaphorical obstacles.

Although Pavel represents a particularly linear and static character in regard to his devotion to the revolutionary cause as discussed earlier, he nevertheless undergoes a metamorphosis, and it is an emotional one, explored through his relationship with Sasha. As he stated in the second act (Tableau 4), "I don't want love, which interferes, clings, holds, ties up!,"[489] referring, of course, to Sasha. However, after the trial and their last farewell before going into exile, Pavel admits his tender feelings and finally

489 Khrennikov, *Mat'*, p. 284. Original Russian text: Я не хочу любви, которая мешает, цепляется, удерживает, вяжет! . .

Figure 23. *Mother*, Act IV, Tableau 7, pp. 469–470.

Translation: Pavel: Stretch out your hands through the grate, let me cling to your tender palms, let me absorb the clean coolness!

Figure 24. *Mother*, Act IV, Tableau 7, pp. 446–447.

Translation: Pavel: I will not stand up to our defense, I want to explain to you what you could not understand [...]

embraces their love for each other, which can possibly be considered the musical climax of his character in the opera (Fig. 23). He finally asks for and craves her touch, the smallest act of physicality he was avoiding from the start, and also addresses her with *tï*, as opposed to formal *vï* he used from the beginning.[490]

The first theory explaining Khrennikov's pronounced interest in Pavel's and Sasha's romance is also the more obvious one—it is easy to interpret Khrennikov's effort as a way of giving depth and flexibility to the rigid and one-dimensional Pavel. He is not only a passionate and goal-oriented revolutionary but also a man in love, imbued with internal conflict between love for a woman and a holy duty toward the Revolution. Khrennikov makes the dichotomy between these two sides of Pavel very apparent in his music. Besides the lyrical parts reflecting his blooming feelings for Sasha, the musical idiom used to describe his revolutionary fervor is, on the other hand, completely contrary in nature (Fig. 24). It is less lyrical and poetic but more stable and simplistic, resembling a militaristic musical idiom, as evident from his speech in the court scene, where he remains calm and collected despite the looming punishment.

The second theory worth exploring is the one of extraoperatic nature: is the reason behind this focus on the romantic sphere of the relationship between two revolutionaries perhaps Khrennikov's and Fayko's way of conveying the regressive Stalinist vision of gender roles and functions in the new society? As already mentioned earlier, we can still see that Khrennikov's women, Sasha in particular, besides worrying about the outcome of their revolutionary activities, take bigger care of their male comrades, while men

490 *Tï* stands for 'you,' second person singular. *Vï* stands for 'you,' grammatically second person plural, but it is also used formally when addressing somebody with respect.

are exclusively and wholeheartedly concentrated on the revolution. After it has become clear that Pavel will willingly end up in prison after the First of May protest, Sasha becomes worried for him: "Who will give him something to drink? Who will carefully wipe the sweat from his forehead? Pavel! Pavel! And what if I never see you again?"[491] And, connected to the previous question, why did Sasha get reduced to a mere helper and a caretaker to Pavel, and just another operatic love interest? Naturally, diluting Sasha to a mere outline of a character is reasonable, considering the operatic conventions that do not necessarily allow for a plethora of complex characters to exist simultaneously on the stage, especially as the focus is centered on Pelageya and, to some extent, Pavel. While this argument partially explains the change of balance visible in the libretto, I would argue that the roots of this decision lay deeper than that. Suddenly, Sasha became even more of a peripheral helper figure than she was in the novel.

Sasha's revolutionary agency does not present such a novelty in 1957 as it did at the time of the release of Gorky's novel. As explained by political scientist K. B. Usha, Marx and Engels insisted that economic independence combined with allowing women to enter the political, cultural, economic, and social spheres will provide a solid ground for full gender equality.[492] Lenin only affirmed these standpoints; however, he put the greatest emphasis on the importance of the political participation of women, claiming it is the imperative factor in women's liberation.[493] Considering that Stalin allegedly resolved the 'woman question,' and women finally achieved equality with men, it was perhaps not so hard to overlook Sasha's agency. However, reality often does not fit the official political and historical narrative, as is the case in the history of female participation in revolutionary activities. Although Sasha's marginalization might be a completely innocent act of practical nature, it could also be read as a result of regressive gender politics that did not and could not recognize female participation in revolutionary activity as something of value.

However, the marginalization of female revolutionary activity is not limited only to the Stalinist period. As explained by Katy Turton, a historian of the Russian Revolution, when looking into the contemporary Soviet writings on the topic of the Revolution, it is noticeable that the acknowledgment of female participation is very limited. Although they do make a mention of exceptional individuals and their roles, they miss acknowledging the contribution of the mass of "less extraordinary" members and their crucial role

491 Khrennikov, *Mat'*, p. 393. Original Russian text: Кто даст ему напиться? Кто пот со лба заботливо сотрёт? Павел! Павел! А если я тебя уж больше не увижу?

492 Usha, "Political Empowerment of Women," p. 143.

493 Ibid., p. 144.

in revolutionary activities,[494] not to mention that the official narrative persistently demoted women to a secondary position inside the movement.[495] Generally speaking, they were still recognized as helpers more than initiators of revolutionary activities.

Sasha's proactivity and revolutionary fervor got lost in the operatic version, and so did her "revolutionary hardness." As noted by Evans Clements, "the Bolshevichki declared *tverdost*, hardness, to be their defining characteristic, and in so doing, laid claim to an entire set of revolutionary virtues. […] A woman who was *tverdaia* was unsentimental, determined, efficient, and industrious. She was utterly dedicated to her work and ruthless toward opponents. She was coldly rational and unsentimental. Her emotions were always under control."[496] Furthermore, among the revolutionaries, the emotional connections and ties were perceived as mere interference, as they would stand in the way of determined and rational revolutionary activity. As explained by Turton, "for a number of radical women the idea of avoiding romantic relationships with men and thereby emancipating themselves from patriarchy was attractive."[497]

Sasha being a revolutionary exists only as an etiquette, as the audience is denied a glimpse into her revolutionary participation in any other way but as a following figure to her male comrades. She exists only to test Pavel's worldview, and her only function inside Pavel's revolutionary circle is to interfere as little as possible to let him fulfill his holy function. Similarly to the Stalinist operatic heroines, she is not able to showcase her capabilities, as her paramount function is still that of a female companion, a caretaker to the *real* male revolutionary.

3.2.4 The Absent Soviet Father

What strikes the most after looking into the corpus of the thus far elaborated Soviet operas is the evident lack of fathers or father figures in the lives of the main protagonists. However, this rather peculiar tendency seems to refer exclusively to the lives of the male protagonists, as female characters usually start off with a father and lose them to murder as the narrative progresses. Examples of obliterated fathers include Natasha's father, Frol, in

494 Katy Turton, "Gender and Family in the Russian Revolutionary Movement," in: Melanie Ilic (ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century Russia and the Soviet Union*, London 2018, pp. 69–82, here p. 70.

495 Ibid., p. 72.

496 Barbara Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Women*, Cambridge 1997, p. 60.

497 Turton, "Gender and Family," p. 72.

Khrennikov's *Into the Storm*, and Sof'ya's father, Tkachenko, in Prokofiev's *Semyon Kotko*. Both held substantial roles not only in their daughters' lives but also served a crucial narrative function, either as impellers of good or, in the case of the latter, as villains plotting against the main protagonist. An exception is Natasha and her father Taras from Kabalevsky's *The Taras Family*, where it is the daughter that loses her life. Furthermore, while the absence of Pavel's father is rather well-explained and plays a determining role in Pelageya Nilovna's metamorphosis, other Soviet operatic protagonists like Lyon'ka and Listrat from *Into the Storm*, Semyon Kotko from the eponymous opera, as well as Aleksey from *The Story of A Real Man*, are all fatherless, and this aspect is not addressed in any way in the libretti.

Naturally, one cannot hastily conclude that no hero of Stalinist opera had a father;[498] however, the absence of fathers truly seems to be more of a rule than an anomaly. The fathers are basically completely erased from the male protagonists' families, while the bond they have with their mothers is consistently preserved, or at least that seems to be the case in the mentioned operas of the Stalin era. However, the narrative institution of a missing parent inside classical literature, and opera to some extent, is not a new one, nor is it exclusive to the Soviet operatic canon; quite the opposite. To understand the phenomenon of the 'absent Soviet fathers,' it is necessary to first explore the 'absent mother,' which is, in fact, equally as common in classic libretti. Looking within the framework of Jungian archetypal theory, literary scholar Ruth Bienstock Anolik asserts the so-called absent mother can be interpreted as a lack of solicitude, spiritual ennoblement, consolation, or even birth and growth—or more generally, a lack of social order and control, causing permeation of evil and vice into society.[499] However, besides approaching the missing mother through this broader archetypal theory, another possible reading of the absent mother is the materialist one, relying on the historical and sociocultural context surrounding operas throughout time.

As explained by musicologist and cultural historian Martha Feldman, the early decades of eighteenth-century Italian opera did not showcase any aversion toward operatic mothers, portraying them as valorous and protective. The switch happened, however, with the libretti of Metastasio in the 1720s and 1730s, "in which almost nobody had a mother, and almost nobody

498 Allow me to count *Mother* in the larger grouping of the Stalinist opera for the sake of forming this argument. Although it premiered four years after Stalin's death, its substance and essence is nevertheless closer to the Stalinist operas than it is to the operas of the long sixties elaborated further in the study.

499 Ruth Bienstock Anolik, "The Missing Mother: The Meanings of Maternal Absence in the Gothic Mode," in: *Modern Language Studies* 33/1–2 (2003), pp. 25–43, here p. 27.

seemed to notice."[500] Feldman suggests the root of this unusual occurrence, the crisis of motherhood, to be the institution of marriage going through its peculiar crisis in eighteenth-century Italy, stemming from the ever-changing lifestyle of the contemporary people.[501] In the coming decades and amidst the French Revolution, the new social climate was reflected in the operatic narrative, remolding, or better yet, concealing the other crucial family figure—the father. The abolition of the monarchy and the tumultuous dissolution of the kingship caused the French culture to experience "a shattering ambivalence about the role of fathers, figurative and real. Since the magical nature of kingship was inseparable from the axiomatic nature of fatherhood, parental authority generally—especially, though not only, paternal—had to be reevaluated."[502]

While this odyssey to the distant past might seem disconnected from Soviet Russia and the Stalinist and early post-Stalinist operatic canon, Feldman's insightful approach to the question of an absent operatic parent can undoubtedly be applied to this particular context as well. However, it is first important to highlight the fact that the artistic tendency of 'absent Soviet fathers' surpasses the limitations of the period discussed inside the confines of this study and can be traced back to the early decades of the Soviet Union. Namely, as explained by McCallum, "while women, right from the earliest days of the Revolution, were readily cast as political activists, workers, and mothers, the male role in the creation of a Soviet society was largely limited to that of a proletarian-hero, a person too consumed with the task at hand to be hindered by personal relationships or a private life of any sort."[503] Despite women entering the labor force, historian Thomas Schrand explains that it still did not substantially influence their traditional attachment to domestic obligations, while the conception of masculinity was never challenged or altered to suit or complement the newfound female dual position.[504]

Although the female question was pronounced to be resolved, and equality was supposedly achieved, it still did not change the fact that women were primarily tied to the domestic sphere, while manhood was predominantly

500 Martha Feldman, "The Absent Mother in Opera Seria," in: Mary Ann Smart (ed.), *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, Princeton, NJ 2000, pp. 29–46, here p. 32.

501 Ibid., p. 30.

502 Ibid., p. 42.

503 McCallum, "The Return: Postwar Masculinity," p. 120.

504 Thomas G. Schrand, "Socialism in One Gender: Masculine Values in the Stalin Revolution," in: Barbara Evans Clements, Rebecca Friedman, and Dan Healy (eds.), *Russian Masculinities in History and Culture*, Basingstoke and New York 2002, pp. 194–209, here p. 195.

performed outside of it. Furthermore, as a reason for the fatherly absence during the 1930s, McCallum, who approaches the topic from the point of view of visual arts, sees "the persistence of the idea that a present and proactive father was not a necessary component in the Soviet family, especially now that mothers and their children had Father Stalin to look after their every need."[505] Interestingly enough, even in those rare instances when a painting portraying a family would involve a father, "there was a tendency to place him on the periphery of the family unit."[506]

Regardless of the notorious Family Law of 1936, which strengthened the institution of marriage and emphasized man's importance within the family, the de facto role of fatherhood was not reinvented. New political regulations still did not influence the general perception of fatherhood and fathers, leaving them on the margins of the family discourse, as parenting was not deemed essential to the masculine identity; building socialism remained the primary task, and family life was of secondary importance. As explained by historian Amy Randall, the new Family Law in 1944 only reinforced the trend of estranged fatherhood by encouraging unmarried women to reproduce with the promise of governmental assistance for their children, thus legitimizing families lead by single mothers, and relieving men of responsibilities for their extramarital offspring.[507] The political situation and social expectations virtually removed fathers from their families, as they were preoccupied with the goals of rapid collectivization and industrialization. Additionally, they endured political repression, purges, and later on, fought in World War II.[508] Indeed, during the 1940s, the father figure was once again separated from his family unit, this time because he was fighting at the front, leaving his family behind. As further explained by Randall:

> Visual culture reinforced alienated paternity by rarely featuring men as fathers, instead depicting Stalin as the "universal father" of a communal and "great Soviet family." Stalinist policies removed fathers from children's lives: forced collectivization and the drive for rapid industrialization as well as political repression and the purges resulted in men's mass migration, deportation, incarceration, and death. World War II ruptured fathers' connection to their families even more, as many marched off to war and never returned.[509]

505 McCallum, "The Return: Postwar Masculinity," p. 122.

506 Ibid.

507 Amy E. Randall, "Soviet and Russian Masculinities: Rethinking Soviet Fatherhood After Stalin and Renewing Virility in the Russian Nation Under Putin," in: *The Journal of Modern History* 92/4 (2020), pp. 859–898, here pp. 864–865.

508 Ibid., pp. 863–864.

509 Ibid., p. 864.

Furthermore, parallel to the official post-war imagery of the homecoming and depictions of soldiers returning to their wives and children, the visual culture of the postwar period also tended to marginalize or completely exclude fathers in representations of the family. "If included, fathers were often depicted negatively as drunkards or as mentally and physically disabled veterans who benefited from the loving care of their wives."[510]

Considering the briefly presented historical background and substantially relying on Feldman's materialist reading of the institution of the absent parent in classic opera seria, the lacking representations of fatherhood and absent fathers inside the Stalinist operatic narrative suddenly become less enigmatic. Their dispensability can be explained by two main reasons. First of all, the male sphere of agency was tied to the public sphere, and secondly, the literal and metaphorical void their absence left in familial units was filled with an even greater father figure, the Vozhd himself. The archetypal father figure, offering guidance, protection, support, rationality, suggesting law, discipline, and rationality, was simply not necessary for operatic male protagonists when they had Stalin, the government, and the communist goal guarding over them and offering ultimate inspiration.

3.3 Rodion Shchedrin's *Not Love Alone* (1961)

Stalin's death in 1953 initiated an abrupt revision of the Soviet political and cultural trajectory. The Thaw instigated a substantial transformation of Soviet society and permeated artistic production as a whole. According to Pinsky, the new Soviet subject suddenly enjoyed greater freedom of artistic expression, and its focus transitioned to the exploration of the internal and imperfect spheres of Soviet man and society.[511] One of the most prominent composers whose artistic path was significantly shaped during that era is Rodion Shchedrin, probably one of the best-known Soviet and Russian composers of the second half of the twentieth century. His style reflects various types of Russian folk music, affiliating him with the New folklore wave emerging in the Soviet music scene, but is also permeated by the spirit and techniques of the avant-garde,[512] signaling his affiliation with the new generation of Soviet composers.

510 Ibid., p. 865.

511 Pinsky, "Subjectivity after Stalin," pp. 80–81.

512 Valentina Kholopova, "Shchedrin, Rodion Konstantinovich," in: *Grove Music Online*, print publication 2001, published online 2001, ‹https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.25613›.

The most prominent part of Shchedrin's oeuvre is surely the stage music, particularly his seven operas.[513] The first one, *Ne tol'ko lyubov'* (*Not Love Alone*, 1961), a lyrical opera in three acts, represents a peculiar case in Soviet operatic history, both for external and internal reasons. Although the opera can be chronologically aligned with the Thaw period, its early dismissal nevertheless reflects the somewhat dubious political and cultural stance on the new artistic production and its examination of the Soviet man and society. Furthermore, I would argue that the borderline tension of the changing cultural epochs and narratives is already woven into the opera, and can be examined in both the text and the music. Shchedrin himself constructed an operatic world of clashing narratives, positioned on a tremulous line between the old and the new conception of Sovietness. The main objective of the following analysis is to examine in what ways Shchedrin's opera and his portrayal of the post-war Soviet kolkhoz and its intrigues reflect both the old narratives of Stalinist art and those of the Thaw, and furthermore, how the destiny of the main heroine captures and communicates the turbulent cultural and societal revolution of the Thaw.

Not Love Alone is written on a libretto by writer and literary historian Vasily Katanyan (1902–1980) based on motives from short stories by writer Sergey Antonov (1915–1995), predominantly "Tyotya Lusha" ("Auntie Lusha"). In his autobiography, Shchedrin writes about meeting Antonov during an editing session for the movie *Lyudi na mostu* (*Men on the Bridge*, 1959), for which he composed the music and Antonov wrote the screenplay. During one of their meetings, Antonov presented Shchedrin with a copy of his new collection of stories. The composer recalls:

> Among the stories I was already familiar with, my attention was drawn to "Auntie Lusha," a tale about the unfortunate destiny of a mature and solitary woman who bears the weighty responsibility of managing a collective farm during the post-war period of devastation. Witnessing firsthand the hardships faced by Russian villages left without men after the war, I considered it to be an important theme.[514]

513 Besides from *Not Love Alone*, Shchedrin wrote the following operas: *Myortvïye dushi* (*Dead Souls*, 1977), *Lolita* (1994), *Ocharovannïy strannik* (*The Enchanted Wanderer*, 2002), *Boyarïnya Morozova* (2006), *Levsha* (*The Left-Hander*, 2013), *Rozhdestvenskaya skazka* (*A Christmas Tale*, 2015).

514 Rodion Shchedrin, *Avtobiograficheskie zapiski*, Moscow 2008, p. 106. Original Russian text: Среди знакомых историй мое внимание привлек рассказ «Тетя Луша». Рассказ о горькой судьбе немолодой одинокой женщины, на плечи которой легла нелегкая ноша руководить колхозным хозяйством в годы послевоенной разрухи. Я своими глазами видел российские села, оставшиеся с военных годин без мужчин. И эта тема представлялась мне серьезной.

Nevertheless, despite the peculiar position of Antonov's heroine, Shchedrin explains how he was primarily captivated by Auntie Lusha's tragic romance and the Freudian undertones stemming from the significant age difference between the protagonists, rather than the political implications of the story or Auntie Lusha's role as the chairman of the kolkhoz.[515] In fact, Shchedrin once remarked that he was essentially writing a Soviet version of *Eugene Onegin*.[516]

Although heavily relying on the literary template, the operatic version does have certain crucial differences compared to the original story. Antonov's heroine, renamed Varvara Vasil'yevna in the opera, is significantly older than her love interest, the teenage Volodya Gavrilov, who remains completely oblivious to her intentions and desires. Her unrequited attraction is never reciprocated or consummated. However, in the opera, the attraction is portrayed as mutual. Nevertheless, Varvara ultimately decides to sacrifice her own happiness for the greater good, driven by her overwhelming sense of duty. The main tension of the opera arises from the conflict between Varvara Vasil'yevna's unfulfilled internal needs and desires on one hand, and her duty and obligation to the members of the collective farm on the other.

The plot of the libretto unfolds on a slow-moving spring day, with rain preventing everyone from working. Volodya Gavrilov (tenor) unexpectedly returns from the city, and his somewhat arrogant behavior is immediately met with disapproval among the men of the collective farm. This quickly escalates into a fight that is broken up by Varvara Vasil'yevna (mezzo-soprano), the chairman of the collective farm. After a private conversation with Volodya, her interest is swiftly sparked. The villagers organize a gathering with singing and dancing, and Volodya arrives with his fiancée, Natasha (high lyric soprano), reigniting the tension between him and the other men. Varvara unexpectedly and somewhat timidly appears at the gathering and agrees to dance with Volodya, while a heartbroken Natasha looks on with tears in her eyes. Later that evening, Varvara and Volodya share a kiss, leading them to discreetly arrange a rendezvous. They plan to meet the following evening in the cattle yard, under the pretense of attending to certain repairs. Upon arriving at the cattle yard, Varvara encounters Natasha, who is crying, and sends her on an errand. Shaken by the scene, Varvara reflects on her attraction to Volodya and her hurtful actions, torn between her strong sense of responsibility and her personal needs. However, by the time Volodya appears, Varvara has already made up her mind. She sends Natasha to Volodya's side

515 Ibid.

516 Valentina Kholopova, *Put' po t͡sentru*, Moscow 2000, p. 51.

upon her return from the errand. At the end of the opera, Varvara greets the collective farm workers and joins them in their work.[517]

Although the period of the Thaw brought about certain new freedoms in artistic production, it did not mean that post-Stalin composers were exempt from harsh censorship. On the contrary, the Ministry of Culture imposed strict approval protocols for all operatic productions and closely monitored every step of the process. Initially, during the opera's evaluation, everything seemed to be progressing in the right direction, and the composer was praised for his compositional mastery. Shchedrin cynically explains that the initial approval of the opera stemmed from the fact that the commentators did not truly understand its underlying theme. "None of the commentators grasped the essence of the idea, as they were captivated by its superficial elements: the depiction of contemporary Soviet village life, the chairman of the collective farm, the amateur wind band at the village festivity, and the incorporation of Russian folklore."[518] However, upon closer inspection, it became evident that the plot was far more problematic than initially presumed, primarily due to the affair and the age-gap between Varvara Vasil'yevna and Volodya Gavrilov, which sparked a significant amount of anxiety in the production circle.

> The director started narrowing the age gap between the two leads. However, if Varvara Vasil'yevna […] and Gavrilov are approximately the same age, where is the conflict? Go ahead and love each other. And why would one judge Varvara for falling in love? The entire Freudian motivation got thrown out of the window. For the first cast, Ansimov [Georgy Ansimov (1922–2015), director] chose singers who were both young and handsome. It is delightful to look at such a couple.[519]

517 See Rodion Shchedrin, *Ne tol'ko lı̄ubov'. Liricheskaı̄a opera v 3 deĭstviı̄akh s ėpilogom. Libretto V. Katanı̄ana po motivam rasskazov S. Antonova. Perelozhenie dlı̄a peniı̄a s fortepiano avtora*, Moscow 1965.

518 Shchedrin, *Avtobiograficheskie zapiski*, p. 107. Original Russian text: В суть идеи выступавшие не вникли, их возрадовали чисто внешние атрибуты — современная советская деревня, колхозный председатель, самодеятельный духовой оркестр на вечеринке, русская фольклорная основа.

519 Ibid. Original Russian text: Режиссер стал поспешно выравнивать возраст главных героев. Но если Варвара Васильевна (так назвал вместо тети Луши Катанян нашу героиню) и Гаврилов почти одногодки, то в чем же конфликт? Любите себе друг друга на здоровье. И зачем осуждать Варвару, что влюбилась? Вся фрейдистская мотивация пошла побоку. Певцы, намеченные Ансимовым для первого состава, были молоды и статны. Пара — любо-дорого смотреть.

Immediately after its premiere, further performances of the opera were canceled. In her study, musicologist Hannah Schneider discusses potential reasons for opera's early dismissal concluding that its destiny "demonstrates the hangover of the culture of fear left behind by the Stalin era, and the messy, illogical, inexpert, and contradictory operation of artistic policy during the Thaw."[520] She continues: "It was most probably the charming music that had initially disguised the scandalous elements, which once on stage, were more obvious and more offensive."[521]

3.3.1 Shchedrin's Kolkhoz at the Partition Between the New and the Old

The scandalous love affair was not the only stumbling stone on the opera's path toward its unrealized success. Schneider reveals that the Ministry of Culture had two main concerns about *Not Love Alone*. The first apprehension stemmed from Varvara Vasil'yevna's provocative affair, and the second concern, quite surprisingly, arose from Shchedrin's portrayal of the Soviet kolkhoz.[522] Viktorina Krieger (1893–1973), the director of the Bolshoi Museum, was particularly agitated by the composer's frivolous depiction of the Soviet kolkhoz, specifically by the fact that everyone seemed more focused on love rather than work.[523] In her study, Schneider expands on how Krieger's concern regarding Shchedrin's portrayal of the kolkhoz likely arose from the prevailing political climate and Khrushchev's emphasis on agriculture on one hand, and the deepening ideological influence on the masses on the other. Literature and art were expected to align with this agenda. Schneider concludes, "*Not Love Alone* [...] displayed a different picture of Soviet life from the one that Khrushchev had so passionately promoted, and more than any other opera produced that year, it contradicted his ideology."[524] As stated by Krieger: "The opera is called *Not Love Alone*, but it should be called *Love Alone*, getting rid of the 'not' because while there may be rain on stage, or any kind of weather, people just play around but don't do anything!"[525] Shchedrin, however, never even intended to showcase Soviet laborers in a grand patriotic operatic genre. He straightforwardly

520 Hannah Schneider, "Opera After Stalin. Rodion Shchedrin and the Search for the Voice of a New Era," PhD diss., University of Oxford 2021, pp. 57–58.
521 Ibid., p. 69.
522 Ibid., p. 96.
523 Ibid., p. 101.
524 Ibid., p. 98.
525 Cited from ibid., p. 97.

classified *Not Love Alone* as a "lyrical opera," aligning himself with a different genre and mode of expression, and, most importantly, indicated a different angle to the life of a kolkhoz he is about to present.

The critique of Shchedrin and his work by the Ministry's officials does not stem from the fact that he performed a groundbreaking or provocative feat forward in his portrayal of the Soviet kolkhoz. The assessment simply arises from the alleged portrayal of his collective farmers as lazy and idle, which was not particularly ideologically acceptable even during the Thaw period. However, Shchedrin's idyllic and joyous depiction of the kolkhoz is still deeply rooted in Socialist Realist dogma. This becomes evident when, for instance, isolating the supporting female characters in the opera. In her work on women in Soviet fiction, Gasiorowska discusses a unique genus of *kolkhozniki* and that is, namely, the Stalinist kolkhoz girls. She notes: "They are as cheerful as the stylized peasant dancers and singers of eighteenth-century fiction, and like them, appear mostly in groups. But the resemblance ends there because, unlike their forebears, kolkhoz girls are blissfully happy, know it, and want the whole world to know it too."[526] Somewhat cynically, Gasiorowska suggests that they resemble a *corps de ballet*, as within their respective group, they are all ingenues and interchangeable.[527] And indeed, this tendency is also evident in Shchedrin's portrayal of kolkhoz girls, even apparent in the superficial examination of the characters' names. Aside from Varvara Vasil'yevna and Natasha, the opera includes characters like The Girl With a High-Pitched Voice (Devushka s vïsokim golosom) and Katerina the Divorcee (Katerina razvedyonka). Shchedrin's kolkhoz is diverting, lively, idyllic, and untouched by the trauma of the War, filled with young people primarily preoccupied with love and romantic intrigues. However, when describing the model literary kolkhoz girl and the fate of this specific archetype in the literature of the Thaw, it becomes evident that Shchedrin's kolkhoz has not yet reached it:

> With the coming of the thaw, peasant girls once again faded into the background in Soviet literature. […] The fairy-tale kolkhoz of the postwar period vanished, revealing in its place inefficient management, poor work, and lean cattle standing in filthy, dilapidated barns. The golden coach had turned into a pumpkin, the horses into rats, and much of her former finery was also lost by Cinderella.[528]

526 Gasiorowska, *Women in Soviet Fiction*, p. 82.
527 Ibid.
528 Ibid., p. 86.

Although both the opera and its literary source were written during Khrushchev's Thaw, the portrayal of the kolkhoz and its members still resembles the trends found in the Stalinist fiction more than the former. Shchedrin's kolkhoz remains the "gingerbread kolkhoz of the postwar decade,"[529] rather than the impoverished, abandoned, and devastated kolkhoz of the Thaw.

In comparison to the archetypal kolkhoz girls, the kolkhoz woman of the postwar decade appears as a distinct subtype within Gasiorowska's classification of the literary Soviet woman. The author describes the typical literary kolkhoz woman of the postwar decade as follows: "She has a certain delicacy of feelings; offering personal sacrifices on the altar of duty costs her some anguish; she distinguishes right from wrong and makes decisions in favor of the former with the naïve seriousness of a good child."[530] Varvara Vasil'yevna, while still partially rooted in the aforementioned archetype of the post-war kolkhoz woman, emerges as a complex and tragic individual, already representing a step forward from that stereotype towards the new heroine of the Thaw period. During the Thaw, "the kolkhoz chairwoman was no longer lionized. A woman holding that job had become routine, and the job itself, heroic during World War II and the subsequent reconstruction, was now dull and frustrating."[531] It appears that Shchedrin's Varvara Vasil'yevna embodies both the characteristics of the Thaw's heroine and the former post-war one, symbolizing progress and presenting a refreshed version of a Stalinist heroine. However, she nevertheless remains trapped, both literally and metaphorically, within the confines of the 'gingerbread kolkhoz.' We could read Varvara Vasil'yevna as a schizochronotopic agent,[532] positioned on the turbulent line between two discourses, the Stalinist postwar one and the one of the Thaw. Shchedrin explores and presents to the audience a comprehensive examination of her hidden yearnings, conflicts, and hardships, heightening the tragedy when juxtaposed with the backdrop of a pastoral idyll, filled with young and blissful individuals engaged in song, dance, and love.

Although the literary portrayal of a female chairman in the years following World War II was not uncommon,[533] indirectly reassuring the readership that this kind of situation was somewhat typical, it does not fully reflect the actual state of the post-war Soviet kolkhoz. According to data presented by

529 Ibid., p. 69.

530 Ibid., p. 62.

531 Ibid., p. 70.

532 Term coined by anthropologist Safet HadžiMuhamedović, who asserts that "people and landscapes are sometimes trapped between discursive timespaces and thus 'schizochronotopic'." Safet HadžiMuhamedović, *Waiting for Elijah. Time and Encounter in a Bosnian Landscape*, New York 2018, p. 58.

533 See Gasiorowska, *Women in Soviet Fiction*, pp. 64–65.

Fitzpatrick, at the end of the war, the total kolkhoz population was more than eleven million smaller than it had been at its beginning. Furthermore, when isolating the working-age group, the ratio of women to men was four to one, not to mention that in some parts of the USSR the imbalance was even greater, for example, in Belarus, where the ratio was six to one.[534] Men massively emigrated to urban areas after demobilization in search of a job and to support rapid industrialization. However, they were not alone. In 1945–1946, more than half a million working-age women left collective farms to escape economic hardship, in search of a better-earning job in the city, or simply to rejoin their husbands who had already gone to cities after demobilization from the army.[535] According to scholar of Soviet economics Robert Stuart, the massive migration from rural areas to urban ones because of rapid industrialization and war losses of men resulted in a rural population whose average age and proportion of women had risen tremendously.[536] Considering the presented data, one would expect that women occupied a great share of managerial positions in Soviet collective farms; however, that was not the case. For instance, as Stuart points out, in 1956, women occupied only 1.5 percent of the kolkhoz chairman positions in the USSR.[537]

Although Varvara Vasil'yevna's situation is definitely rooted in reality, being an 'older' unmarried woman who found herself in a highly responsible position after a societal and demographic collapse, her holding the post of a chairman of a kolkhoz is not a fact that should be taken lightly. While there were a certain number of women who held such positions for the aforementioned reasons, Varvara's destiny is still very specific in the grand scheme of things and somewhat of an anomaly, rather than the norm. Her unfortunate fate is a direct consequence of the post-war demographic catastrophe, and the image of the idealized Stalinist kolkhoz only amplifies the pronounced nature of her personal tragedy. However, the evidence of Shchedrin's kolkhoz existing on the tremulous line between the old and new artistic modes goes beyond the portrayal of female characters and the contrast between Varvara and the kolkhoz girls of the past. The music of the opera captures the tension of the cultural turnover in an even more striking way than the libretto does.

534 Sheila Fitzpatrick, "War and Society in Soviet Context: Soviet Labor Before, During, and After World War II," in: *International Labor and Working-Class History* 35 (1989), pp. 37–52, here p. 42.

535 Ibid., p. 46.

536 Robert C. Stuart, "Women in Soviet Rural Management," in: *Slavic Review* 38/4 (1979), pp. 603–613, here p. 603.

537 Ibid., p. 604.

3.3.2 Chastushka as a Driving Force of the Opera

Shchedrin's opera operates on two main idiomatic levels, the first being the traditional operatic idiom and the second being folk music, specifically chastushka. Notably, *Not Love Alone* garnered attention for the author's use of chastushka, a traditional and colorful humorous folk song, and its pioneering incorporation into the academic genre of opera. This perhaps contributed to the accessibility and comprehensibility of *Not Love Alone*, despite its high standing among other Soviet operas in terms of composition and craftsmanship. In the score itself, the author included a remark indicating that he used contemporary chastushka texts,[538] suggesting his intention to create a musical world of the kolkhoz that would feel authentic and familiar to the audience. According to Soviet musicologist Irina Prokhorova, Shchedrin's trip to rural areas of Belarus heavily influenced and inspired him, and the frequent encounters with the chastushka idiom there left a lasting impression, forging a unique connection between folklore and the academic musical idiom in his oeuvre. However, this was not the first time Shchedrin had employed chastushka in his compositions. He had previously used it in his first piano concerto from 1954 and his ballet *Konyok-Gorbunok* (*The Little Humpbacked Horse*) from 1960.[539] The use of chastushka, coupled with the unconventional operatic structure, generated significant interest among contemporary critics, as evidenced by the existing commentary. As written by Soviet critic Liana Genina:

> And if he, the reader, cannot conceive of creating an individual operatic character without "portrait" arias or love duets, if he is a staunch advocate of traditional operatic forms and means of expression, then we must disappoint him right away: none of this exists in the work of R. Shchedrin. […] The novelty lies in the fact that, while subordinating the chastushka to his intention, Shchedrin lovingly preserved its unique charm of melody, rhythm, and distinctive form. Moreover, he granted the chastushka an independent dramatic role in the opera: with its help, its words and intonations, the atmosphere of the action, the inner emotional experiences of the characters, and their relationships are conveyed.[540]

538 Shchedrin, *Ne tol'ko lı̄ubov'*, p. 5. For instance, in the first act Shchedrin used lyrics of a chastushka "Oh ï da skoro sneg rastayetsya"("Oh, soon the snow will melt"), and in the second act "Eh pover'te serdtsu toshno" ("Ah, believe me, my heart is unwell"), "Zavalite nashu rechku" ("Obstruct our river"), "Ozero nozhki primorozilo" ("The lake froze the feet"), "Brigadir vtoroy brigadï" ("Foreman of the second brigade"), "Khorosho drova rubit'" ("It is nice to chop firewood"), just to name a few examples.

539 Irina Prokhorova, *Rodion Shchedrin. Nachalo puti*, Moscow 1989, p. 9.

540 Liana Genina, "Novo, talantlivo," in: *Sovetskaı̄a muzyka* 7 (1961), pp. 23–28, here p. 24. Original Russian text: И если он, читатель, не мыслит создание

However, why did Shchedrin employ chastushka in his opera, and what makes it a fruitful dramatic device in the context of *Not Love Alone*, as well as in general? According to musicologist Irina Likhachyova, chastushka is a genre that encapsulates folk wisdom and, moreover, reflects a wide range of human psychological states, all with the added flavor of humor and subtle irony.[541] In addition to its element of folk wisdom and its penchant for irony and humor, Likhachyova also highlights the genre's lyrical potential, concluding that it serves as a potent tool in creating an opera of both lyrical and humorous character.[542] Indeed, in *Not Love Alone*, chastushka assumes the role of providing commentary on the action, both past and present, and at times even predicting the future. Furthermore, it also acts as the voice of the people's court and passes judgment on morality, oftentimes serving as an outlet for provocative or taboo topics. Lastly, chastushka contributes to the overall ambiance, which is particularly important for Shchedrin's opera. It immerses the listener in the world of idyllic kolkhoz life, brimming with joy, wit, youth, and love. The genre is introduced to the audience right from the beginning of *Not Love Alone*, setting the tone for the entire opera (Fig. 25).

The tranquil atmosphere painted through the gentle cantilena is disrupted by men shouting while playing dominoes, creating a striking contrast between the two gender groups right from the beginning. While girls daydream about love and heartache, boys are engrossed in playing a game. This recurring musical theme, which we can refer to as the 'romance theme' for the purposes of this discussion, appears throughout the entire opera. It first re-emerges announcing Volodya Gavrilov's arrival in the village (Act I, No. 5), and resurfaces after Varvara intervenes to end the fight between Volodya and the kolkhoz men (Act I, No. 6). The theme then appears in the orchestra as everyone exits the scene, followed by Varvara's arioso. Volodya eventually returns and interrupts her contemplation, leading to their first conversation while waiting for the rain to pass. However, their conversation is interrupted by Volodya's fiancée Natasha calling for

индивидуального оперного образа без «портретных» выходных арий или любовных дуэтов, если он — убежденный приверженец традиционных оперных форм и средств выразительности, то мы вынуждены сразу разочаровать его: ничего этого в произведении Р. Щедрина нет. [...] Новое и в том, что, подчинив частушку своему замыслу, Щедрин любовно сохранил неповторимое обаяние ее мелоса, ритмики, особенности формы и — больше того — предоставил частушке самостоятельную драматургическую роль в опере: ведь с ее помощью, ее словами и интонациями переданы и атмосфера действия, и внутренние душевные переживания героев, их взаимоотношения.

541 Irina Likhacheva, *Muzykal'nyĭ teatr Rodiona Shchedrina*, Moscow 1977, p. 59.

542 Ibid., p. 61.

Figure 25. *Not Love Alone*, Act I, No. 1, "Instead of an Introduction," rehearsal mark 2, pp. 5–6.

Translation: Girls: Ah yes, soon, soon the snow will melt, whole land will warm up, ah...

him. After Volodya leaves Varvara Vasil'yevna alone on the scene, we hear a female alto choir commenting on the plot using the same tune (Act I, No. 9). The message is clear from the outset—the central love story of the opera will revolve around Varvara and Volodya, as indicated from the contexts the introductory chastushka is being attached to. While the 1965 version of the partiture concludes with new musical material, some contemporary performances choose to end with the same chastushka. This choice serves to unambiguously illustrate, through the symmetrical frame and cyclical formation, that the threat has been resolved and everything has returned to normal. As a result, it sheds a slightly different light on Varvara's suffering and unrequited love affair.

However, the role of the female choir is not only that of a clairvoyant messenger or an omnipresent narrator simply commenting on the story. In fact, it is the choir that can delve into Varvara's inner world, revealing her intentions, feelings, and desires. Through the genre of folk songs, Shchedrin provides us with a direct glimpse into the characters' psychology, while still leaving room for ambiguity and playfulness. The second act, possibly the central act in terms of the composer's craftsmanship and its potential appeal to the audience, begins with a vibrant collage of various chastushki

Figure 26. *Not Love Alone*, Act II, No. 10, "Maiden's Chastushki (Little Cantata)," rehearsal mark 123, p. 82.

Translation: Choir: Oh, we know many chastushki, we know one and a half thousand of them.

performed by girls divided into different chamber groups. They mock love, men, and societal expectations surrounding relationships and marriage. The whole scene, formulated as a "little cantata" by Shchedrin, is constructed as a six-part rondo with the scheme A B A C B A. The scene opens with a lively allegro principal theme, as the girls proudly proclaim, "Oh, we know many chastushki, we know one and a half thousand of them. Oh, we think them up by ourselves, we are the composers" (Fig. 26).

Joking episodes or couplets that follow the reappearances of the principal theme, or refrain, are brief, striking, and humorous. At the end of the refrain, in a question–answer form, the so-called Girl With a High-Pitched Voice, whose real name is never revealed throughout the opera, declares: "Girls, what a misfortune! Boys, what a misfortune! My Vanyusha is getting married, where should I go now?,"[543] implying that she is the 'other woman.' The choir's response represents the first couplet and takes the form of a contrasting theme: "Oh, girls, do not get married, marriage is not worth it. Oh, they will not give you another sweetheart, keep your eyes on a single one."[544] The joking and provocative commentary on romantic relationships continues. In the second couplet, constructed as an alto quartet, girls complain as follows: "We have no suitors, we will apply for one at the selsoviet. At the selsoviet, they will sort them out and give a sweetheart to each one of us."[545] The third and final couplet is a duet of two girls reflecting on their heartache: "Ah, believe us, the heart is aching when you fall in love

543 Shchedrin, *Ne tol'ko lu͡bov'*, p. 84. Original Russian text: Девки, беда! Парни, беда! Мой Ванюшка женится — я-то куда?

544 Ibid. Original Russian text: Ой, не ходите, девки, замуж, замужем-то каково. Ой, не дадут другого милого — гляди на одного.

545 Ibid., pp. 85–86. Original Russian text: Ухажоров у нас нет, мы заявим в сельсовет. В сельсовете разберут, нам по милому дадут.

with somebody. In one moment, you can fall in love, but what should one do after?"[546]

As evident from this example, Shchedrin utilizes chastushka as a means of expressing gender norms and stereotypes in a lighthearted manner, but also as an outlet for provocative topics, such as adultery and the critique of marriage. Additionally, the kolkhoz men also exhibit gender-coded behavior and formulas in their chastushkas. In the scene "The Arrival of the Guys" (Act 1, No. 11), the men mock female behavior and play with gender clichés. After the initial chant by the men, "Block the river so there would be no water. Remove these girls so there would be no trouble,"[547] the girls engage in a jesting and audacious conversation with them. The ensuing dialogue satirizes gender expectations and stereotypical desirable qualities in a partner:

> Girls: It is nice to chop the wood when it is the birch tree. It is nice to love sober men.
> Boys: Fine! It is nice to mow the short grass. It is nice to love young girls.
> Girls: It is nice to chop the wood when it is the aspen tree. It is nice to love young handsome men.
> Boys: Fine! It is nice to mow the green grass. It is nice to love bright girls.[548]

It is not difficult to see why the negative critique of the opera, which also led to its abrupt downfall, focused so heavily on Shchedrin's portrayal of the kolkhoz. When taking a superficial glance at the opera's structure, it becomes evident that the group scenes, predominantly relying on the chastushka idiom, are significantly more prevalent compared to the introspective moments depicted through Varvara, following the traditional operatic idiom. More specifically, Shchedrin reserves the academic operatic style exclusively for Varvara, using it as a means for her profound introspection, creating a striking contrast with the lively and light-hearted chastushka that permeates her surroundings. However, this (dis)balance creates a unique effect, and it is certainly not accidental.

546 Ibid., p. 88. Original Russian text: Ах, поверьте, сердцу тошно, если влюбишься в кого. В один час влюбиться можно, а потом-то каково?

547 Ibid., pp. 93–94. Original Russian text: Завалите нашу речку, чтобы не было воды. Уберите этих девок, чтобы не было беды.

548 Ibid., pp. 98–99. Original Russian text: Девушки: Хорошо дрова рубить, которые березобы. Хорошо ребят любить, которые тверезые. Парни: Хорошо! Хорошо траву косить, которая коротенька. Хорошо девчат любить, которые молоденьки. Девушки: Хорошо дрова рубить, которые осиновы. Хорошо ребят любить, которые красивые. Парни: Хорошо! Хорошо траву косить, которая зеленая. Хорошо девчат любить, которые смышленые.

First and foremost, the contrast between the youthful and joyful depiction of love and affection expressed by the voices of the young kolkhoz girls and boys, and the weighty, earnest, and academic operatic style represented by Varvara Vasil'yevna, serves to accentuate her gravitas and age. With the continual display of youthfulness and by intentionally choosing contrasting genres and idioms, Shchedrin unequivocally establishes that she no longer belongs to the young and blissful generation. Varvara attained her esteemed position out of postbellum necessity, which likely prevented her from fully experiencing her own youth and realizing her aspirations of finding romantic happiness. Secondly, the pervasive use of the chastushka idiom and the underscore the insignificance of Varvara's personal needs, making her quiet pleas even more inaudible. She is an integral part of a working structure, and as its leader, she has no time or space to focus on her own needs or prioritize them. Although she fulfills her role successfully and commands respect within the kolkhoz, her position also isolates her from the other villagers. Thirdly, and closely tied to the previous point, it further emphasizes Varvara's tragedy. Shchedrin's kolkhoz is portrayed as a pastoral utopia, brimming with cheer and young love, and Varvara simply does not fit into this idyll. Her age, position, underlying unhappiness and unfulfilled desires contribute to her sense of not belonging. This becomes particularly evident during the village gathering in the second act. Shortly after Varvara unexpectedly appears at the festivity, the young villagers ask her to sing. The first song she performs is slow, elegiac, and sorrowful, and commences with her musical theme (likely signifying that it is her true self she is about to express in front of everybody), to be discussed further in the study (Fig. 27). In the song Varvara expresses her inner longing and unfulfilled love for a man with blue eyes, presumably referring to Volodya. Her performance leaves the crowd slightly shocked and creates a sense of unease.

After realizing the impact her likely overly revealing song had on her audience, subsequently dampening the joyful atmosphere of the gathering, Varvara makes the decision to perform a chastushka that is completely contrasting in nature to her previous song (Fig. 28). Not only does this choice prompt her to discard her facade as a chairman and virtuous leader, but she also directly employs it as a means to flirt with Volodya, pulling him onto the dance floor. This action appears artificial and forceful, almost as if she is desperately attempting to conceal her emotions following the moments of weakness and vulnerability she exhibited in front of everyone.

The performance of the chastushka appears highly out of character, to say the least. It can be interpreted as Varvara's desperate attempt to recapture a sense of youthfulness and uninhibited behavior, while the sense of artificiality arises from her inability to genuinely embody such behavior anymore. It is as if a sense of madness has overtaken her, causing her to

Figure 27. *Not Love Alone*, Act II, No. 17, "Varvara Vasil'yevna's Song," rehearsal mark 210, p. 144.

Translation: Varvara Vasil'yevna: Through the curly forests, through the humpbacked mountains, through the flat valleys—I went everywhere. All the flowers, all the flowers [...]

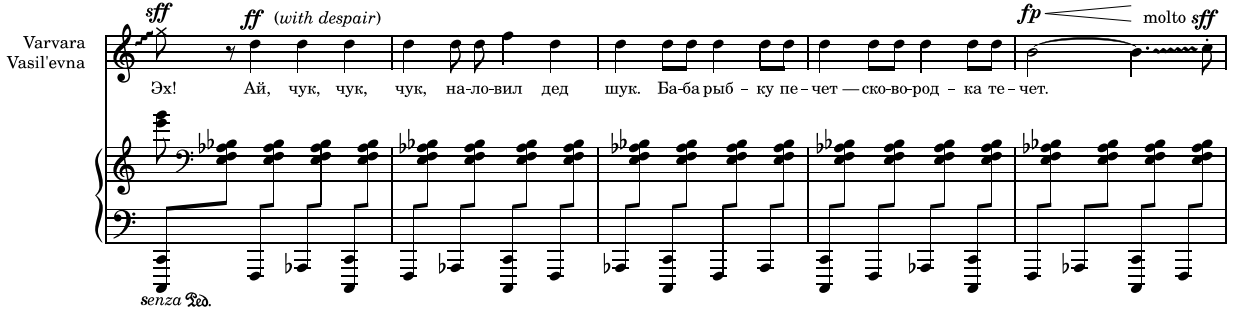

Figure 28. *Not Love Alone*, Act II, No. 18, "Varvara Vasil'yevna's Dance," rehearsal mark 215, p. 148.

Translation: Varvara Vasil'yevna: Eh! Ay, chuk, chuk, chuk, grandpa caught pikes. Grandma bakes the fish—the pan is leaking.

shed her strict chairman persona and revert back to a carefree girl, unabashedly displaying her affection for Volodya. Within this particular context, the chastushka serves as a pretext, providing a suitable platform to express deep inner feelings and desires under the guise of an ambiguous and humorous ditty. As they dance, Natasha observes from the sidelines and sheds tears. The conclusion of the gathering is marked by a highly significant and symbolic chastushka, indicating what will soon follow: "When a man cheats, it is not considered cheating. It is only considered cheating when a girl cheats."[549]

However, this powerful scene, which cements the idea of Varvara not fitting into the context of the joyful pastoral, communicates even more. Even while suffering, Varvara tries to express her true inner self to her surroundings, but she encounters a complete lack of understanding and even collective discomfort. We can interpret the kolkhoz members' stunned reaction to her revelation and 'truth' as their inability to confront naked and vulnerable introspection and reflection from a person of power, someone who should serve as an authority. Furthermore, we can also interpret it as the *kolkhozniki* not yet being ready to grapple with the tragic and complex figure of the Thaw, and Varvara, as evidenced by her performance of the chastushka, understands this and decides to play along. This observation becomes even more intriguing when we consider the fate of the opera and the commentators' failure to grasp its point. Could this be a sign of Shchedrin's awareness of the political climate in which he exists and creates? Is Varvara, like Shchedrin himself, testing the limits of free expression and attempting to negotiate their boundaries, albeit with limited power? We will delve further into this notion later in the text.

Moreover, Shchedrin's opera not only revolves around the conflict between Varvara, symbolizing the novelty of the Thaw era, and the kolkhoz, representing the outdated Stalinist narratives. The conflict also takes place within Varvara herself and warrants a more in-depth examination.

3.3.3 Varvara Vasil'yevna Between Love and Duty

Right from the beginning of the first act, Ivan Trofimov, a tractor driver in the kolkhoz, addresses the audience and provides background information about Varvara Vasil'yevna, drawing them into the story. "In our kolkhoz, we have chosen a woman, Varvara Vasil'yevna, to be our chairman... It was many years ago... She is intelligent, no doubt about it. She knows how to

549 Ibid., pp. 155–156. Original Russian text: То, что парень изменил, это не изменушка. Считается изменушка, когда изменит деувушка.

do everything: manage the lot, handle the steering wheel, drive a tractor, build a stove, and she even plays the accordion. Moreover, she is very beautiful."[550] However, apart from this initial mention of the opera's protagonist, we do not encounter Varvara until the sixth scene of the first act. By this point, all the other key characters have already been introduced, and the atmosphere has been well established. Varvara makes her first appearance on stage after a fight breaks out between Ivan Trofimov and Volodya Gavrilov, and the kolkhoz girls scream for her help. As soon as she appears on stage, the entire dynamic between the characters abruptly changes, with the men suddenly behaving like scared schoolboys caught in mischief. Shchedrin immediately establishes her unquestionable authority, not only through the text but also through the music. Her presence also sets a new tone for the conversation, as the previously melodic exchanges give way to rigid recitativos.

> Varvara Vasil'yevna: What happened here? Well?
> (everybody is remaining quiet in guilt)
> Ivan Trofimov: (almost speaking, in a clear whisper) Well...
> Varvara Vasil'yevna: (almost speaking, in a clear whisper) What, your tongues have dried out? You, Ivan?
> Ivan Trofimov: It was not me...
> Mishka and Grishka: It was not him, Varvara Vasil'yevna...
> Varvara Vasil'yevna: Then who was it? What happened?
> Ivan Trofimov: The newcomer...
> Mishka and Grishka: Natashka's fiancé...
> Varvara Vasil'yevna: What did he do?
> Ivan Trofimov: He started it. He was quiet, almost insulting.[551]

Immediately after everyone disperses and leaves the scene, Varvara Vasil'yevna performs her arioso (Act I, No. 7), finally offering the audience a glimpse into her inner life and struggles. Interestingly enough, this

550 Ibid., p. 5. Original Russian text: В нашем колхозе председателем выбрана женщина — Варвара Васильевна... Много лет уже... Толковая, ничего не скажешь. Все умеет: и хозяйствовать, и баранку крутить, трактор водить, и печь сложать может, и на гармошке играет. Красивая к тому же...

551 Ibid., pp. 54–55. Original Russian text: Варвара Васлиьевна: Что у вас здесь вышло? Ну? (Все виновато молчат.) Иван Трофимов: (почти говорком, четким шепотом): Да вот... Варвара Васильевна: (почти говорком, четким шепотом) Что, языки присохли? Ты, Иван? Иван Трофимов: Не я... Мишка и Гришка: Не он, Варвара Васильевна... Варвара Васильевна: Так кто же? Что случилось? Иван Трофимов: Вот приезжий... Мишка и Гришка: Жених Наташкин... Варвара Васильевна: Что он сделал? Иван Трофимов: Он все начал. Он и молчал, словно ругал...

introductory introspection, offering a preliminary glance into the main conflict to some degree, is presented to the audience only after a quarter of the opera has passed. By choosing this specific distribution of narrative elements, Shchedrin achieves an intriguing effect. We begin to sense Varvara's insignificance and her vulnerability amidst the vastness of the kolkhoz, where numerous characters, personalities, and destinies intertwine.

> I scream at everyone. I scold. I lecture. I demand. What else am I supposed to do? What more can I do? My soul aches for everyone. I carry the responsibility for everyone. Yet, things are not going well. Neither in heaven nor here, on our collective farm. The rain has prevailed. Work has come to a halt. I have given the order, but will it rain tomorrow or not? Who should I raise my voice to then? The sky? The clouds?[552]

The author clearly emphasizes that while we follow Varvara's tragedy, it is just a minuscule drop in the vast sea of motivations and actions unfolding around her. There is even an instruction to her arioso stating "To be performed as quiet as possible. It is like she is thinking out loud.,"[553] just further highlighting the smallness of her voice and her tragedy in extent. Her arioso illustrates her frustration with her position and explores the conflict between her true self and her chairman persona. Varvara expresses her discomfort with her responsible role while hinting that the version of herself she presents to others is an artificial construct, a mask she wears to protect herself. In the arioso, the first and rare instance of a traditional operatic idiom in the entire opera, we hear her simple, serene, and elegiac theme, based on the second inversion of a minor chord (Fig. 29), which was already mentioned earlier in the context of the song proceeding her chastushka (Fig. 27). It moves slowly but constantly, perpetuating a sense of an almost ticking clock.

This theme, which we can etiquette as the 'melancholy theme' or simply 'Varvara's theme,' recurs throughout the entire opera. We first hear it in the orchestra during the second number of the first act when her name is mentioned by the tractorists, causing the mood of the scene to rapidly decelerate and grow gloomier. This initial mention of her name within the diegesis unequivocally signals that the character we are about to meet is

552 Ibid., pp. 59–63. Original Russian text: На всех кричу. Ругаю. Выговариваю. Требую. А что мне делать? Мне-то делать что? За все душа болит. За все она в ответе. А все не ладится. И в небесах, и здесь, у нас в колхозе. Дождь одолел. Стоит работа. Приказ-то я дала, а будет завтра дождь, или нет? Не будет? На кого мне тогда голос подымать? На небо? Облака?

553 Ibid., p. 59. Original Russian text: Исполняется максимально тихо. Это как бы ее мысли вслух.

Figure 29. *Not Love Alone*, Act I, No. 7, "Varvara Vasil'yevna's Arioso," rehearsal mark 87, p. 60.
Translation: Varvara Vasil'yevna: What else am I supposed to do? What more can I do?

somber and tragic. The theme resurfaces in the orchestra during the sixth number of the same act, coinciding with her appearance on stage to stop the fight between the kolkhoz men and Volodya.

When Varvara Vasil'yevna starts her first conversation with Volodya Gavrilov, who interrupted her contemplation, her entire demeanor abruptly changes. Once again, she performs in recitativo style, steady and sustained (as indicated by Shchedrin's remark "again very firmly"[554]), essentially staging her role as the chairman in a manner she deems most suitable. However, Shchedrin immediately establishes an intriguing dynamic between the two characters, and he accomplishes this through music. While all the other characters quickly adapt their tone and manner of 'speaking' (the dialogue on the operatic stage is, naturally, sung) to align with Varvara's, showing respect for her and solidifying a clear hierarchy, Volodya never adheres to these unspoken rules. His responses to her are melodic, humorous, and ambiguous. Their conversation while hiding from the rain very quickly adopts a witty and somewhat impudent tone, but Varvara nevertheless plays along.

> Varvara Vasil'yevna: We need men.
> Volodya Gavrilov: What kind of man am I? I am Volodya.
> […]
> Varvara Vasil'yevna: What do you know how to do?
> Volodya Gavrilov: To drink tea in the morning. With bagels.
> Varvara Vasil'yevna: Well done! And during the day?
> Volodya Gavrilov: During the day?[555]

Volodya's musical theme is jolly and lighthearted, cheeky, and starkly contrasts Varvara's theme (Fig. 30). Interestingly enough, it begins with a motif that is also a figuration based on the inversion of a triad, this time in major, which may or may not be a coincidence, but is nonetheless intriguing. Furthermore, Varvara does not contrast only the members of kolkhoz and Volodya. Another contrasting figure to Varvara is Volodya's fiancée, Natasha. Although she is not as prominent or striking a character as him or Varvara, Natasha does have a solo moment at the beginning of the third act, which represents the culmination of her apprehension that she is losing Volodya to Varvara. It is important to stress that her sorrowful cantilena cannot be characterized as a stereotypical operatic idiom, as it was deliberately

554 Ibid., p. 64. Original Russian text: Опять очень твердо.

555 Ibid., pp. 70–72. Original Russian text: Варвара Васильевна: Мужики нам нужны. Водоля Гаврилов: Какой я мужик? Я Володя. [...] Варвара Васильевна: Что делать умеешь? Володя Гаврилов: По утрам чай пить. С баранками. Варвара Васильевна: Молодец! А серед дня? Володя Гаврилов: Серед дня?

Figure 30. *Not Love Alone*, Act I, No. 8, "Scene of Varvara Vasil'yevna with Volodya Gavrilov," rehearsal mark 106, p. 72.

Translation: Volodya Gavrilov: Strong and fragrant, we smoke selected tobacco, and our brother loves its pure smoke.

reserved for Varvara on the stage. Her song, "Tumanno krasnoye solnïshko, tumanno" ("Hazy is the red sun, hazy"), is, in fact, a well-known Russian folk love song. However, the contrast between the two characters goes beyond the genre that Shchedrin assigned to each of them. The age difference between the two women is predetermined by Shchedrin's assignment of voices. While Varvara Vasil'yevna is a mezzo-soprano, somewhat heavier and darker, and usually performs in a comfortable range, Natasha is a high lyric soprano, traditionally used for ingénue stock characters in art—young, endearing, and innocent. Shchedrin uses her high tessitura when she calls for Volodya throughout the opera; however, her high-pitched invocations do not necessarily sound hysterical, but rather more ethereal. Despite the apprehension to showcase the age gap between Varvara and the kolkhoz members on stage, the difference was still audible, not only in Shchedrin's deliberate usage of contrasting musical idioms but also in the choice of singing voices and the ways he decided to employ them.

Volodya's easygoingness and pompousness are continually highlighted throughout the entire opera, often serving as a catalyst for fights between him and the kolkhoz men who can see through his pretense. For instance, during the village festivity, he criticizes the local orchestra and insists on

performing a song himself, much to the delight of the girls and the chagrin of the men. The whole scene is a wonderful example of Shchedrin's sense of humor, as the orchestra is intentionally written to sound out of tune, while Volodya's singing is condemned as "muddle instead of music,"[556] a poignant reference to infamous 1936 article that denounced Shostakovich's operatic masterpiece, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*.

Once Varvara Vasil'yevna unexpectedly joins the festivity, again followed by her melancholy theme, we witness a prime example of Shchedrin's coquetting with cinematic techniques. While dancing with his fiancée Natasha, Volodya Gavrilov engages in what appears to be a superficial conversation about dance preferences and, amusingly enough, pigeons. In the subsequent number, Volodya invites Varvara to dance, and intriguingly enough, he asks her the exact same set of questions he posed to Natasha earlier. This repeated conversational pattern serves to underscore his boredom and his inability to engage in a meaningful conversation without a sarcastic undertone. However, Varvara, unlike Natasha, readily engages in the conversation and responds with laughter.

> Volodya Gavrilov: Do you like fast dances?
> Varvara Vasil'yevna: No, I like the slow ones.
> Volodya Gavrilov: And did you ever dance *tsïganochka*?
> Varvara Vasil'yevna: No, I never danced *tsïganochka*.
> Volodya Gavrilov: Of course, it is optional... Does anybody breed pigeons around here?
> Varvara Vasil'yevna: No, we don't have pigeons around here.
> Volodya Gavrilov: Pity. An interesting bird. They can be controlled from a distance.
> Varvara Vasil'yevna: Ha, ha, ha! To control the pigeons.
> Volodya Gavrilov: And why not control them?
> Varvara Vasil'yevna: Ha, ha, ha, ha! From the distance... Ha, ha, ha! You made me laugh![557]

By this point, it becomes evident that part of Varvara's attraction to Volodya stems from her genuine appreciation of his sarcastic and often humorous responses and comments, finding them both charming and entertaining.

556 Ibid., p. 120. Original Russian text: Сумбур вместо музыки!

557 Ibid., pp. 136–140. Original Russian text: Володя Гаврилов: Вы любите быстрые танцы? Варвара Васильевна: Нет, медленные. Володя Гаврилов: А цыганочку танцевали когда? Варвара Васильевна: Нет, цыганочку не танцевала. Володя Гаврилов: Конечно, необязательно... Здесь у вас голубей разводят? Варвара Васильевна: Нет, голубей у нас нету. Володя Гаврилов: Жаль. Интересная птица. Можно управлять на расстоянии. Варвара Васильевна: Ха, ха, ха! Управлять голубами. Ха, ха, ха! На расстоянии... Ха, ха, ха! Вот насмешли!

Interestingly, she does not perceive them as offensive or provoking, making her likely the only person in the kolkhoz who feels this way. This perception may arise from the fact that Volodya is the only person in her surroundings who treats her as an equal rather than his superior. On the other hand, according to Vorob'yov, the reason Varvara feels attraction to Volodya is because perhaps in him she sees her ex-lover, whom she probably lost to the war, claiming that "in Volodya Varvara is searching for her past."[558]

The finale of the second act begins with Varvara Vasil'yevna reflecting on her perplexing emotions when suddenly she is once again interrupted by Volodya Gavrilov. Her brief reflective detour is abruptly halted by his arrival, pulling Varvara back into her stable, authoritarian recitative style, which starkly contrasts with Volodya's melodic line. The ensuing conversation about the weather and rain appears lackluster and tedious, with even the melodic lines of Volodya and Varvara feeling rigid. However, it is the orchestra that truly tells the story of what is transpiring within the characters, with its frantic expressiveness and ever-growing crescendo. Volodya hints at his intention by nonchalantly starting to sing a verse from the chastushka he previously serenaded Natasha with during the gathering. Through the cheeky and audacious lyrics, he expresses his desire to kiss Varvara, already confident in her acceptance: "So now I'll kiss you, you're lying, you won't leave."[559] The scene reaches its dramatic peak when Varvara casually comments on the song, coinciding with the orchestra's soaring heights and the repetition of Varvara's musical theme (Fig. 31). The rhythmic diminution of the motif combined with its high range signifies the inner stress and urgency concealed within Varvara, the mounting tension she strives to hide from the outside world while maintaining composure.

However, after the kiss and Fedot Petrovich's interruption, the two arrange a secret rendezvous disguised as Varvara showing him what needs fixing in a secluded barn. While waiting for him at their meeting spot, Varvara begins to reflect on the impending encounter and realizes that she is fully aware of the situation and far from innocent. She confronts herself, saying, "Whom are you trying to fool, comrade chairman? Yourself?! You came for a rendezvous, admit it!"[560] Anyutka's diatonic melody sung in thirds with her lover happening simultaneously to Varvara's inner monologue emphasizes the dissonance in Varvara's musical part and her

558 Igor' Vorob'ëv, "Peterburgskie prem'ery opery 'Ne tol'ko li͡ubov'" R. K. Shchedrina: Problema finala," in: *Muzykal'nai͡a akademii͡a* 4 (2017), pp. 8–11, here p. 9. Original Russian text: Вспомним: в Володе Варвара ищет именно своё прошлое.

559 Shchedrin, *Ne tol'ko li͡ubov'*, p. 163. Original Russian text: Вот и зацелую, врешь ты, не уйдешь.

560 Ibid., pp. 186–187. Original Russian text: Кого ты хочешь обмануть, товарищ председатель? Себя?! Пришла на свиданье — так и говори!

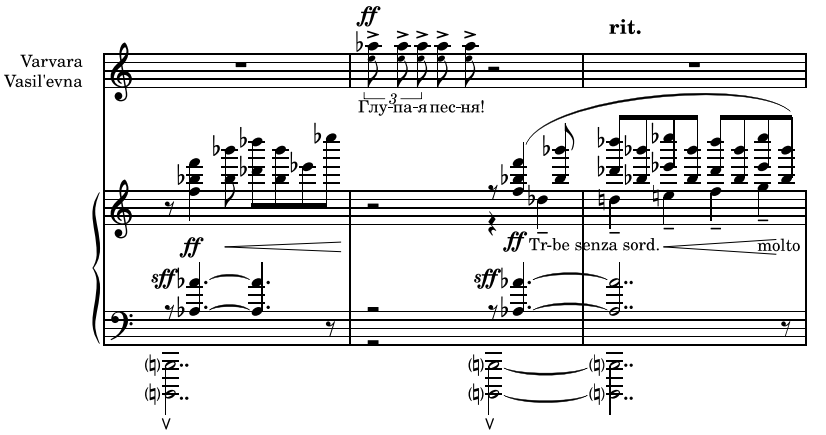

Figure 31. *Not Love Alone*, Act II, No. 20, "Finale of the Second Act," rehearsal mark 242, p. 165.

Translation: Varvara Vasil'yevna: Stupid song!

thoughts. Additionally, The Girl with a High-Pitched Voice sings: "Oh, how quiet is the night, not far from sin: give me someone else's fiancé as an escort."[561] After greeting everyone, Varvara's decision to resist her urge is already deeply entrenched. She expresses her anguish in her monologue "How to Live Without Happiness," which is the only instance in the entire opera, aside from her arioso in the first act, where Shchedrin employs a classical operatic style in painting his characters (Fig. 32).

In the first part of the monologue, starting with an aching proclamation "How to continue living without happiness? But also without sorrow?," Varvara contemplates about love and passion. As her introspection continues, she delves deeper into her dilemmas and fears, this time concerning her position, duties, and responsibilities toward the kolkhoz:

> They put you here to think of people. You are responsible for everything here: for the farm, for the people. People will not praise you for getting your hands on somebody else's fiancé... (desperately) What about me?! When will it happen to me?! But what about me, when will it happen to me?! What if there is really no love in the world?! Or only to me...? Only to me alone...? Only to me it was denied?![562]

561 Ibid., pp. 189–190. Original Russian text: Ой, уж как ночь тиха, недалеко до греха: дайте в провожатые чужого жениха.

562 Ibid., pp. 202–206. Original Russian text: Ведь тебя здесь поставили о людях думать. Ты за все здесь в ответе: за хозяйство, за людей. Не похвалит тебя люди, что чужого жениха к рукам прибрала... (с отчаяньем) Я-то как?! Мне

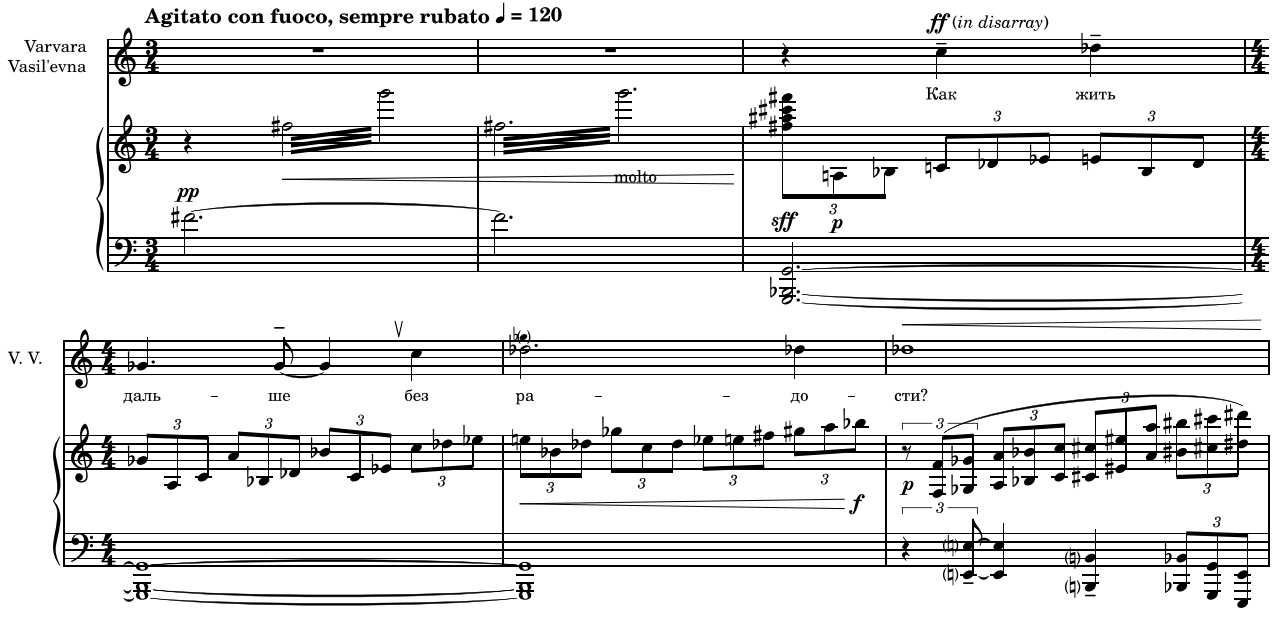

Figure 32. *Not Love Alone*, Act III, No. 23, "Varvara Vasil'yevna's Monologue," rehearsal mark 284, p. 194.
Translation: Varvara Vasil'yevna: How to continue living without happiness?

The choir behind the scene, with a remark "quasi e[c]ho,"[563] only reinforces her inner dilemmas, pushing her deeper into despair. Their perpetuating and perhaps even menacing "yes" answers the desperate invocations that conclude her aria. When Volodya finally arrives, Varvara, who has already made up her mind at this point, greets him and nonchalantly assigns him tasks around the barn. However, it is her melodic line that reveals there is more beneath the surface. Instead of her usual strict recitative, she sings with a developed, melodic line marked "con passione, amoroso."[564] Eventually, Natasha returns from her errand, and Varvara directs her to join Volodya's side.

The original epilogue to the opera containing new music material, as printed in the 1965 music score, confirms that life has moved on after the dramatic and unfulfilled love story. The rain has stopped, and the workers have returned to their tasks, accompanied by joyful songs. Eventually, Varvara Vasil'yevna greets the workers and joins them. The sequence of events and the focus on the stage convey two things. Firstly, it reinforces the already elaborated fact that her tragedy is a minuscule drop in the life of the kolkhoz. The life continues to move forward, and so does the procession of kolkhoz members, unaware and unaffected by her inner drama. Secondly, her decision to join the workers, calmly and neutrally, indicates that her choice to refrain from pursuing the affair was driven not only by guilt towards Natasha but also by a sense of responsibility towards the kolkhoz. It is through her participation in the workers' procession that the opera concludes and the peripeteia is resolved. The alternative ending based on the initial chastushka conveys a similar meaning. Life returns to normal, as it was before Volodya's arrival, and Varvara, whether she has made the right choice or not, has made a decision in favor of the collective welfare. Varvara literally and symbolically chooses to join the moving procession of workers, as if nothing had ever happened, definitively selecting the path she wishes to continue on.

Although she is not a mother, nor does she directly state her desire to fulfill that role, Varvara Vasil'yevna shares many similarities with the archetypal mother. It is as if she is a mother to the entire kolkhoz. Like the primordial nurturer archetype, she is caring and selfless, fostering everyone around her. We can easily draw a parallel between Varvara and Khrennikov's Pelageya Nilovna, who is not a titular mother because she has a son whom she supports on his own revolutionary path, but because she

когда?! А как же я, мне-то когда?! Что же в самом деле нет на свете, нет любви?! Или только мне?.. Только мне одной?.. Мне одной лишь отказано?!

563 Ibid., p. 207.

564 Ibid., p. 211.

is, in fact, on her own path to becoming the ultimate mother of the Revolution. However, there is a significant difference between the two characters. While both Pelageya and Varvara represent Soviet women successfully performing their socialist duties and confidently entering the traditionally male domain, only one of them is portrayed as a revolutionary Soviet icon.

In the early decades of Soviet art and narrative construction, a character like Pelageya Nilovna and her revolutionary activities were perceived as extraordinary and inspiring, showcasing how women can and must support the Soviet Revolution. On the other hand, Varvara holds a high position in the kolkhoz and performs her duties immaculately, earning respect from everyone around her. Shchedrin, however, does not emphasize this aspect. The reason for this does not solely lie in the fact that the moment has passed for Varvara's duty to be seen as something extraordinary; quite the opposite. She is the only heroine in the Soviet operatic canon who, being a chairman, represents this particular consequence of post-war demographics. Varvara's introspective moments in the form of her arioso and aria are crucial elements in conveying her dual suffering: firstly, she suffers from not experiencing the love and happiness that accompanies it, despising the emotional monotony of her life, and secondly, she continually questions herself in the position of chairman and criticizes the behavior she needs to adopt in order to fulfill the role adequately. It is Shchedrin's deliberate choice to focus on her tragedy, not only in relation to her unfulfilled romantic intentions but also on the weight of her position and the complex array of emotions a woman holding such a position might experience and confront.

Unlike Pelageya Nilovna, Varvara Vasil'yevna does not encounter external obstacles in fulfilling her duty—the entire conflict arises from within and remains invisible to the characters around her. While the revolutionary and common-good activities, closely tied to symbolic and metaphorical motherhood, provide Pelageya with a sense of fulfillment and purpose in serving the community, Varvara constantly questions and even despises her role to some extent. Moreover, the text implies that it is precisely her position that partially obstructs her from fulfilling her internal needs and achieving self-actualization. This craving for selfhood is also supported by the incorporation of contrasting musical idioms. While everyone around her is portrayed through the folk idiom, which signals the notion of collectiveness, Varvara reaches for the academic operatic musical idiom to express her true self. Although this 'deviation' might portray her as an imperfect Soviet heroine, it also adds depth, solidity, and humanity to her character. However, like all Soviet operatic heroes, she ultimately finds vindication at the end of the opera by making the right choice and prioritizing the collective well-being over her own. Despite her moral lapses, she

finds her own path back, as a strong sense of duty and ethics are deeply ingrained within her.

3.3.4 *Not Love Alone* as a Political Satire?

Although the artistic production of the Thaw mirrored the rapidly changing Soviet society, and the new operas, suddenly less schematic and inhabited by more complex and imperfect voices, it still does not mean that the Thaw permeated every aspect of Soviet music production. The unfortunate fate of Shchedrin's opera *Not Love Alone* serves as a prime example of the unwavering control of the political apparatus and the continued influence of Socialist Realist dogma. The opera's criticism, which predominantly revolved around two aspects—the provocative love affair between an older woman and a younger man, and the portrayal of the Soviet kolkhoz—serves as evidence that Soviet opera was not yet ready for imperfect and sexualized heroines, nor for depicting the imperfect and devastated reality of the post-war kolkhoz. However, I would argue that it is not solely external factors that made Shchedrin's opera *political*, but rather that the politics are deliberately woven into its tissue. Indeed, as the title already suggests, *Not Love Alone* is more than just an opera about love. While it may be tempting to be captivated by the striking contrast between two extremes—Varvara representing the weight of age, duty, and tragedy on one hand, and the kolkhoz symbolizing youth, love, and joy on the other hand, with the musical idioms emphasizing this contrast even further—the dichotomy runs much deeper. In fact, after an extended period of working on Shchedrin's opera, it becomes difficult to shake off the impression that *Not Love Alone* is, in fact, an intricate guise for a potent and astute political message, a political allegory, if not a political satire. Should one, in addition to analyzing Shchedrin's operatic language, also consider his political language? In other words, does *Not Love Alone* exemplify the use of Aesopian language,[565] continuing the longstanding tradition of Russian political satire and infiltrating the Soviet operatic stage? In this case, Shchedrin's previously mentioned reference to *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* suddenly gains new relevance, and imbues his opera with an undeniable gravitas—not only he

565 For more on the topic of Aesopian language in Russian and Soviet literature see Lev Loseff, *On the Beneficence of Censorship: Aesopian Language in Modern Russian Literature* (= Arbeiten und Texte zur Slavistik 31), Munich 1984; Irina Sandomirskaia, "*Bez stali i leni*: Aesopian Language and Legitimacy," in: Per-Arne Bodin, Stefan Hedlund, and Elena Namli (eds.), *Power and Legitimacy: Challenges from Russia*, London 2013, pp. 188–198; Andrew Kahn et al., *A History of Russian Literature*, Oxford 2018, pp. 549–554.

connects Varvara Vasil'yevna to the quintessential Soviet operatic heroine, both silenced due to the burden of Stalinism and Stalinist legacy, but he also in a way predicts the destiny of his own opera.

Varvara Vasil'yevna is a deeply suffering and tragic persona—an adult woman whose fate is shaped by the World War II demographic catastrophe, finding herself in a position she despises, which hinders her from fulfilling her deepest urges and desires. She exists as a tragic and complex character against a starkly contrasting backdrop—a picturesque and idyllic pastoral kolkhoz, where everyone is young and blissfully happy, yet lacking depth, dimension, or any critical stance. Furthermore, her surroundings, the 'gingerbread kolkhoz,' are not merely the backdrop to her suffering but also a direct cause of it. As the new operatic heroine of the Thaw period, she no longer fits in, and Shchedrin made this evident in both the libretto and the music. She becomes somewhat of a foreign presence in the Stalinist pastoral, symbolizing the sweeping changes not only in Soviet opera but in Soviet culture as a whole. Following on this notion and the previously elaborated interpretation of the whole opera, one could easily interpret Varvara as an emblem of the Thaw and the kolkhoz as a symbol of the lingering past and the prevailing influence of both Stalinist and Socialist Realist worldviews. In this context, the conflict between Varvara and the kolkhoz may represent the ambiguity of the political climate after Stalin's passing, while Varvara's eventual compliance could be read as Shchedrin's pessimistic prediction of the imminent end of the Thaw, the impossibility to ultimately set the Soviet culture free from the wreckages of Stalinism.

According to Julian Connolly, Aesopian language is "a method of circumventing censorship by expressing observations through complex, allegorical images that can only be deciphered by a sophisticated reader."[566] Indeed, while witnessing the unfolding of Shchedrin's operatic world on stage, one cannot help but notice the pervasive atmosphere of borderline grotesque. Shchedrin's meticulously polished post-war kolkhoz, untouched by the scars of war, appears more like a puppet theater than an accurate reflection of the realities depicted in historical literature. It seems to be a performance for outsiders, perpetuating the myth that the post-war Soviet rural areas are far more 'cheerful' than they truly are. Shchedrin's deliberately hyper-idealized and distorted portrayal of the kolkhoz serves to emphasize the 'realness' of Varvara, who, fully aware of the unsettling performativity, finds herself completely powerless to intervene. Her quiet denials to serve as a propagandistic tool to promote the idyllic kolkhoz life or the success of

566 Julian Connolly, "The Nineteenth Century: Between Realism and Modernism, 1880–95," in: Charles A. Moser (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature*, rev. ed., Cambridge 1992, pp. 333–386, here p. 351.

post-war recovery are left unfulfilled, and she nevertheless plays along to the best of her abilities, as evident in her performance of the chastushka in the second act, as well as in the finale of the third act, where she ultimately rejects her inner desires and chooses to join the workers as if nothing had ever happened. Nevertheless, Varvara sees beyond the facade, and through her, so do we. She becomes a guiding light for the audience, enabling them to decipher the perplexing and complex Soviet political and cultural language(s). In other words, she serves as an intertextual agent, offering a closer examination, exploration, and dissection of a highly politicized and ideologized operatic world. Merely through her presence, this world begins to crack before our eyes.

3.4 Sergey Slonimsky's *Virineya* (1967)

Sergey Slonimsky's path toward becoming one of the key figures of the new generation of Soviet composers is intriguing, to say the least. It would be shortsighted to conclude that his artistic path was exclusively generated by his experimental, eclectic, and severely individualistic musical nature, as he still partially relied on the old norms and dogmas prescribed in prior decades. However, he undoubtedly was a product of a new cultural and social milieu, significantly different from that experienced by his predecessors mentioned in the previous chapter.

Slonimsky gained reputation in the 1960s for his interest in the musical avant-garde and experimentation with previously impermissible musical genres and techniques, such as 12-note and aleatory techniques.[567] Although deeply interested in contemporary musical styles gradually entering the Soviet musical space, Slonimsky's oeuvre also reflects his affection for folklore, effortlessly combining popular and 'high' genres in his work. As noted by Dolinskaya, together with composers such as Georgy Sviridov (1915–1998), Ėdison Denisov (1929–1996), as well as Rodion Shchedrin and Yury Butsko, he became one of the pioneers of the New folklore wave that emerged at the beginning of the 1960s,[568] with his vocal cycle *Pesni vol'nitsï* (*Songs of the Runaway Serfs*, 1960), but also his his opera *Virineya* (1967). As a matter of fact, the most significant part of Slonimsky's oeuvre is dedicated to vocal music, or more precisely, to opera. After *Virineya* in 1967, which was, in fact, his first opera, Slonimsky composed seven more in the period

567 See Laurel Fay, "Slonimsky, Sergey Mikhaylovich (opera)," in: *Grove Music Online*, print publication 1992, published online 2002, ‹https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.O007871›.

568 Dolinskaĭa, "Russkaĭa muzykal'naĭa kul'tura," p. 25.

between 1970 and 2006, with his interest in deep human tragedy serving as the connecting thread between all of them.[569] As argued by musicologist Mariya Ignatova, "the movement toward disaster" is the essence of all operas by Slonimsky.[570]

Slonimsky's *Virineya*, with a libretto by already mentioned Sergey Tsenin, based on an eponymous story by Lidiya Seyfullina (1889–1954) from 1924, was a tremendous success right from its premiere in 1967. Not only was it praised as one of the best works commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the 1917 Revolution,[571] but it was also immediately recognized as a crucial moment in the formation of the new phase of Soviet music. As stated in *Sovetskaya muzïka*,

> And if two or three years ago, the works of young composers from Leningrad and Moscow that delighted us did not yet seem to belong to a unified artistic movement, *Virineya* already allows us to synthesize a number of phenomena as features of the emerging "new Russian music school" before our eyes. […] *Virineya* and the path of its author speak of something else as well—Russian music is so powerful that it is unafraid of foreign influences. It will assimilate everything, melting it down in the crucible of its realistic national traditions, enriching it with new life, and dedicating it to the ideals of Soviet modernity.[572]

Although the "foreign influences" and the overarching notion of the modernity of the musical language within the context of Slonimsky's opera are

569 Already the titles of the operas reveal about Slonimsky's affinities toward tragedy. After *Master i Margarita* (The Master and Margarita) written in the early 1970s, in the following decades Slonimsky also wrote *Mariya Styuart*, *Gamlet*, *Tsar' Iksion*, *Ivan Grozniy* (*Ivan the Terrible*), *Korol' Lir* (King Lear), and *Antigona*. See Fay, "Slonimsky, Sergey Mikhaylovich (opera)."

570 Mariı̂a Ignatova, "Muzykal'nyĭ teatr S. Slonimskogo: Dvizhenie ot istorii k mifu," in: *I͡Uzhno-Rossiĭskiĭ muzykal'nyĭ al'manakh* 1 (2011), pp. 21–28, here p. 26. Original Russian text: [Симптоматично, что все оперы С. Слонимского, так или иначе, опираются на единую драматургическую модель, суть которой состоит в] движении к катастрофе.

571 Fay, "Slonimsky, Sergey Mikhaylovich (opera)."

572 "God 1968-y...," in: *Sovetskai͡a muzyka* 1 (1968), pp. 4–7, here p. 6. Original Russian text: И если еще два-три года назад радовавшие нас произведения молодых ленинградских и московских композиторов еще, казалось, не выявляли единого целостного движения, то «Виринея» уже позволяет обобщить ряд явлений как черты складывающейся у нас на глазах «новой русской музыкальной школы». […] Кстати, «Виринея» и путь ее автора говорят еще об одном — о том, что русская музыка так могуча, что ей не странны никакие чужеродные влияния. Она все перекует, переплавит в горниле своих реалистических национальных традиций, обогащенных новой жизнью, и поставит на службу идеалам советской современности.

highly debatable, it still does not negate the occurrence of a certain change in trends. The spirit of novelty and the rapidly shifting artistic interest from the exterior to the interior sphere of the Soviet man was visible right from the start to the musicologists observing the newly emerging operatic trends in the Soviet Union. As stated in the same article:

> We consider composer's intentions of fundamental importance. It strongly supports the view that talented young people are reworking their technique not so much for the sake of externally renewing the language, but primarily and above all—in the name of the deepest and most accurate expression of the spiritual values of the human being, of people in the new society, united by mutual understanding, brotherhood, and friendship […] From this comes the aspiration toward major themes of life—themes of the revolution, the historical past of our Motherland, a passion for great literature and poetry; from this also comes the intense experimental work, the interest in images of at times exceptional psychological complexity, and a gravitation toward original forms and genres.[573]

Apropos of the "original forms and genres," *Virineya* quickly became a topic of heated discussion among Soviet musicologists due to its genre uniqueness. Contemporary Soviet critics assigned various genre labels to Slonimsky's opera, including lyric-historical opera, folk-historic opera, folk-music drama, even scenic cantata, just to name a few.[574] There was even a suggestion that the opera should be viewed as a 'skaz,' leading to the proposal that *Skaz about Virineya* would make a better fitting title for Slonimsky's piece.[575] Present-day musicologists also appear to be puzzled by the genre classification of *Virineya*. Bayeva, for instance, highlights *Virineya*'s structural resemblance to an oratorio,[576] whereas Ignatova proposes that *Virineya* could be classified as a 'mysterium,' as it can be interpreted as a magical ritual that

573 Ibid., p. 7. Original Russian text: Нам представляется принципиально важной мысль композитора. Она веско говорит в пользу того, что талантливая молодежь перевооружает свою технику не столько с целью внешнего обновления языка, а главным образом и прежде всего — во имя наиболее глубокого и верного рыскрытия духовных ценностей человека, людей нового общества, связанных взаимопониманием, братством, дружбой… Отсюда и стремление к большим жизненным темам, темам революции, исторического прошлого нашей Родины, увлеченность высокой литературой и поэзией, отсюда и напряженная экспериментальная работа, интерес к образам порой исключительной психологической сложности, тяготение к своеобычным формам и жанрам.

574 See David Rabinovich et al., "Na obsuzhdenii 'Virinei' S. Slominskogo," in: *Sovetskaīa muzyka* 4 (1968), pp. 31–57.

575 Ibid., p. 39.

576 Baeva, "Opera," p. 195.

brings together the performers and the audience.[577] Although Slonimsky himself characterized *Virineya* as a 'music drama,' this classification raised doubts among experts, who were not entirely satisfied with the purported breadth and vagueness of this etiquette.

According to musicologist Barry Millington, 'music drama' is a "term used frequently throughout the history of music for a dramatic work with music, and particularly one in which the music plays a primary role. [...] The term has been found convenient by composers and others anxious to escape the more specific term 'opera'."[578] If that is the case, where does Slonimsky's "anxiety" in characterizing his piece simply as an opera stem from? It would be narrow-minded to attribute this hesitation solely to Slonimsky, as he was not the only Soviet composer at the time who avoided using the term 'opera' to classify his work. For instance, Andrey Petrov's *Pyotr Pervïy* (*Peter the Great*, 1975) is coded as 'musical-dramatic frescoes,' Rodion Shchedrin's *Myortvïye dushi* (*Dead Souls*, 1977) as 'operatic scenes,' and Ėdison Denisov's *L'écume des jours* (*The Foam of Days*, 1981) as a 'lyrical drama.' Even within Slonimsky's own body of work, the question of genre affiliation extends beyond *Virineya*. For example, *Mariya Styuart* (1981) is labeled as a 'ballad opera,' *Gamlet* (1993) as '*dramma per musica*,' and *Ivan Groznïy* (*Ivan the Terrible*, 1998) as a 'Russian tragedy.'

The departure from old norms and genre conventions is a characteristic shared by the entire generation of post-Stalin composers, and Slonimsky was not alone in his exploration of the boundaries of the operatic medium. It is possible that by using the term 'music drama,' he aimed to emphasize the significance of dramatic action or simply the *drama* conveyed in his work, drawing inspiration from the Wagnerian concept of music drama. Furthermore, if we focus solely on the narrative classification of his piece, *Virineya*'s plot can be best described as a hybrid between a social drama and a psychological-lyrical drama. It directly addresses the rapid changes in political systems and the complex and almost schizophrenic embrace of revolutionary ideas by ordinary villagers. Simultaneously, it delves into the profound complexities of individual human destiny portrayed in the foreground.

The shift in artistic focus and the shared endeavor to enrich the musical language did not mean a complete break from the traditions of Stalinist opera. While both the Soviet and present-day musicologists acknowledge a certain degree of deconstruction of the classical operatic genre in Slonimsky's opera, Bayeva asserts that *Virineya*, along with contemporary

577 Ignatova, "Muzykal'nyĭ teatr S. Slonimskogo," p. 22.

578 Barry Millington, "Music Drama," in: *Grove Music Online*, print publication 2001, published online 2001, ‹https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.19436›.

operas like Petrov's *Pyotr Pervïy* or Rubin's *Iyul'skoye voskresen'ye*, nevertheless belongs to the tradition of the so-called "grand patriotic opera" (*bol'shaya otechestvennaya opera*), which persisted as one of the main subgenres in the post-Stalinist operatic scene.[579] This label, however, is more vague and indefinite than the aforementioned ones and does not reveal much about the inner structure of Slonimsky's piece. However, it does shed light on its ideological alignment and affiliation with well-established paths of Soviet opera. As further asserted by Bayeva, although certain composers seemingly followed the settled trail of operas from previous decades, it soon became evident that they were also actively seeking new ways to approach the prescribed musical idiom and canonical themes.[580]

When comparing *Virineya* to Stalin-era operas that depict the 1917 Revolution, such as Khrennikov's *Into the Storm* or perhaps Prokofiev's *Semyon Kotko*, it becomes evident that Slonimsky's approach to historicity is significantly different from that of his predecessors. For Khrennikov and Prokofiev, historicity plays a crucial role in their operas, using real historical conflicts not only as a backdrop but also as a dominant driving force that permeates the thoughts, decisions, and actions of the characters. They appear as expendable pawns, existing on stage solely to revive the grand Soviet victory before the audience's eyes. In contrast, Slonimsky treats historicity with a lighter touch, and, according to Bayeva, intentionally blurs the contours of time.[581] In his opera, Slonimsky was not in fact portraying the Revolution, but the *apocalypse*, the end of the world known. His primary focus is on the inner world of Virineya and the society surrounding her during a complete collapse of societal pillars and values in a time of political turmoil. He does not offer a new perspective on grand Soviet history but rather reduces it to background noise. Unlike earlier operas addressing the same topic, his opera does not unfold the Revolution from its hostile birth to a glorious finale. Slonimsky freezes it at its direful dramatic peak, allowing the collective anxiety to penetrate every pore of his characters, revealing their deep, dark, and corrupted aspects to the spectator. In *Virineya*, the great Bolshevik victory remains undisclosed as it holds no narrative or didactic significance. As questioned by Bayeva: "Where can one find vital, moral, and spiritual support when everything around is collapsing?"[582]

579 Baeva, "Opera," p. 194.
580 Ibid.
581 Ibid., p. 196.
582 Ibid. Original Russian text: Где искать опоры — жизненные, нравственные, духовные, когда ружится все вокруг?

3.4.1 Virineya as the New Soviet Woman?

The action takes place in an alienated Russian village called Nizhnyaya Akgïrovka amid the 1917 Revolutions. The plot starts with villagers gathering in confusion and complete despair, unable to comprehend the upheavals in their country and the conflicting claims about Tsar Nicholas II abdicating. Against Virineya's (dramatic soprano) wishes, Engineer (baritone) sends her frail common-law husband, Vasily (tenor), to the city to bring a letter. Immediately after meeting Virineya, the Engineer falls for her beauty, and his arrogant façade begins to loosen. Virineya is left alone with Vasily's mother, Mokeikha (mezzo-soprano or contralto), who does not hide her hatred for her son's unwedded bride. Not only does Virineya live in an extramarital union with Vasily, but she is also an atheist coming from a family of Old Believers, which draws negative attention to her from both Mokeikha and the entire village. After Vasily's return, the tension between all three family members finally reaches a breaking point, and Virineya, irritated by Vasily's greed and apathy on one side and Mokeikha's constant aggressive reproaches on the other, runs away and finds shelter at her friend Aksin'ya's (high soprano) home. Vasily tries to persuade Virineya to return, but after their argument, she gives in with indifference to the persistent advances of the Engineer. The drunken and enraged village priest Magara (bass) is convinced by the jealous Vasily to murder the Engineer. After the Engineer's death and the arrest of both Magara and Vasily, Virineya finds herself in an even greater state of despair. She is labeled as a promiscuous fallen woman, and the villagers' resentment toward her grows even stronger. However, passionate Bolshevik Pavel (low bass-baritone) shows understanding for her position and invites her to move in with him and take care of his household. In the final act, the villagers vote in favor of the Bolsheviks. Virineya and Pavel declare their love for each other; however, their happiness is short-lived. News reaches Pavel that kulaks are fighting the Bolsheviks in the next village, prompting him to decide to depart and join his comrades. Kulaks surround Virineya and demand to know where he has gone. When Virineya refuses to answer, they kill her.[583]

We should ask ourselves, who is Virineya and what kind of character does she present on stage? Moreover, how does such an unusual and complex female persona fit within the Soviet operatic canon? Virineya is a character brought to life by Seyfullina, and the libretto draws heavily from her

583 See Sergeĭ Slonimskiĭ, *Virineĭa͡. Muzykal'naĭa͡ drama v trekh chastĭa͡kh. Libretto S. T͡Senina po motivam povesti L. Seĭfullinoĭ. Perelozhenie dlĭa͡ peniĭa͡ s fortepiano*, Moscow 1969.

1924 story, albeit with some minor differences.[584] In comparison to Seyfullina's original template, Slonimsky significantly reduces the emphasis on the Revolution, diminishes the elaboration of Magara's storyline, and simplifies supporting characters like Aksin'ya, Engineer, and Vasily, who appears much more timid and meek in the original text. Additionally, Slonimsky's portrayal of Virineya is more reflective and introspective than the heroine in Seyfullina's version, making her more relatable and her agency more comprehensible by the audience. While these differences may stem from the inherent limitations of the operatic medium, which often restricts the exploration of complex narratives, they could also be indicative of shifting Soviet subjectivity and evolving artistic interests. These changes allowed Slonimsky to delve deeper into Virineya's character and explore the intricacies of her personality.

Although Seyfullina was already a relatively well-established name in the literary canon of early post-Revolutionary fiction at the time of Slonimsky's work on his first opera,[585] his turn towards 1920s and specifically Seyfullina in search of a compelling literary template nevertheless makes for a strong statement. Seyfullina's text encapsulates her era's interest in themes of female self-actualization as well as expression of sexual freedom, soon to become obsolete during Stalinism, as exemplified by the destiny of Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth*. Furthermore, Slonimsky was not alone in his exploration of early Soviet literature: according to historian Geoffrey Hosking, the period of the Thaw (with an awareness that *Virineya* does not temporarily belong to the Thaw tradition) was marked by a renewed interest in the modernist traditions of the 1920s,[586] but also by an artistic urge to reexamine the past, as written by literary scholar Deming Brown.[587] Parallel statement is also expressed by twentieth-century Russian theater scholar Jesse Gardiner, who similarly asserts that the Thaw-era theater was marked by "a nostalgic return to pre-Stalinist styles and genres and as a forward-looking impulse that sought to invent forms that would speak to a new generation."[588] Furthermore, the conflict between the individual and society, or more precisely, the clash between an individual and ongoing historical processes, is an overarching topic present in Soviet and world literature throughout the twentieth century,[589] which

584 For the whole text of Seifullina's story, see Lidiĭa Seĭfullina, *Virineĭa. Povesti i rasskazy*, Ufa 1981.

585 See Struve, *Soviet Russian Literature*, p. 145.

586 Geoffrey Hosking, "The Twentieth Century: In Search of New Ways, 1953–80," in: Charles A. Moser, *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature*, rev. ed., Cambridge 1992, pp. 520–594, here p. 521.

587 Deming Brown, *Soviet Russian Literature Since Stalin*, New York 1978, p. 253.

588 Jesse Gardiner, *Soviet Theatre During the Thaw: Aesthetics, Politics and Performance*, London 2023, p. 10.

589 Kahn et al., *A History of Russian Literature*, p. 644.

could also explain Slonimsky's interest in Seyfullina's text and her exploration of rather universal questions of human existence. Another significant connection between Soviet literature and the artistic focus of the 1920s and 1960s, and specifically in this case, is the birth and subsequent rebirth of female prose and the representation of female lives and perspectives in Soviet literature, a tradition that was cut short during the Stalinist era and the dominance of Socialist Realism.[590] Of course, it was also Khrennikov who drew inspiration for his *Mother* in pre-Stalinist discourse, also for the purposes of commemorating the 1917 Revolution. However, their respective choices of literary templates to portray the Revolution distinctly reflect the fluctuating cultural and ideological dynamics of just a decade of Soviet post-Stalin history. Virineya is not Pelageya Nilovna, nor is Slonimsky's vision of the Revolution akin to Khrennikov's—while *Mother* is almost like a victory ode honoring the Revolution, *Virineya* is a tragedy, a notion that will be further explored in the text.

Although these assumptions partially explain Slonimsky's interest in the early-Soviet literary canon, they still do not fully answer the question of why he specifically chose Virineya as the protagonist of his debut opera. Perhaps Slonimsky's captivation with Seyfullina's heroine lies precisely in her moral and 'Soviet' ambiguity. Is she a symbol of the new era or a relic of the old? Is she a devoted Soviet citizen or someone with conflicting loyalties? Is she a courageous figure or even an anti-hero?

According to musicologist Marina Rïtsareva, Virineya is "modern and heroic."[591] While she may initially give that impression, we are undoubtedly dealing with a complex character open to various interpretations, particularly when considering the historical and social context. Rïtsareva interprets her as a tragic heroine burdened by the dark aspects of rural Russia, yet simultaneously fighting against it with unwavering determination until her demise.

> The stunning inner purity of this woman birthed her intransigence to everything that did not suit her. Virineya is one against all. Hence the complete insecurity and doom. Being an atheist from a family of Old Believers, she evokes double hatred in the "peasant" community. Her sacrificial love (but without a ring) for a sick and flawed husband—a kind of protest against hypocrisy—is incomprehensible, suspicious, hostile. Her subtle class instinct, complete alienation, and independence from the enemy class are perceived as foolishness.[592]

590 Ibid., p. 678.

591 Marina Ryt͡sareva, *Kompozitor Sergeĭ Slonimskiĭ*, Leningrad 1991, p. 85. Original Russian text: Личность современная и героическая, [она нашла свое alter ego в сходной натуре революционера Павла.]

592 Ibid. Original Russian text: Потрясающая внутренняя чистота этой жинщины породила ее непримиримость ко всему, что не отвечало ей. Виринея одна

As Rïtsareva suggested, the dramatic tension in Slonimsky's opera indeed occurs in various domains, the first being the interaction between Virineya herself and her surroundings. Specifically, Virineya challenges the established norms of the village, creating tension on multiple levels: ethnic, religious, social, and political.[593] As mentioned earlier, Virineya is a *kerzhachka*, a member of an ethnic-confessional group called the Old Believers, known for preserving the liturgical and ritual practices of the Russian Orthodox Church prior to the reforms of Patriarch Nikon in the seventeenth century. Although she does not practice religion and could be classified as an atheist, her background is consistently highlighted and used derogatorily by other characters in the opera, as she lives among post-reform Orthodox Christian practitioners. Another source of tension arising from her mere existence is her nonconformity and unsuitability for adhering to the traditional rural lifestyle and mindset, especially the traditional role of women in rural communities. She bears the burden of the 'darkness' and backwardness associated with Russian peasantry, a myth that originated in the early days of the Socialist era and persisted through the following decades. Amidst the distrusting, cautious, impressionable, and docile mass that surrounds her, she shines on the stage like a beam of light, constantly battling callous insults, standing her ground firmly, and challenging the collective bigotry that

против всех. Отсюда полная незащищенность и обреченность. Атеистка из семьи староверов — она вызывает двойную ненависть в «хрестьянской» общине. Ее жертвенная (но без венца) любовь к больному и ущербному мужу — своего рода протест против ханжества — непонятна, подозрительна, враждебна. Ее тончайшее классовое чутье, полная отчужденность и независимость от враждебного класса воспринимаются как юродство.

593 We could draw a rather perplexing parallel here with a study by Anthony Anemone, scholar in the fields of Russian literature and cinema, who analyzed the film roles by famous Soviet actress Tat'yana Samoylova (1934–2004) from the late 1950s to the late 1960s. He writes as follows: "Rather than a straightforward tale of emerging female empowerment in the post-Stalin age, Samoilova's career suggests a continuing tragic element in the experience of modern Russia women. […] Despite their individual differences, Samoilova's characters all share a common situation and fate: each is a woman who comes into conflict with a hostile world and is ultimately defeated or destroyed by a stronger external force conceived, variously, as war (history), nature (sexuality), or society (patriarchy)." Anthony Anemone, "Tatiana Samoilova and the Search for a New Soviet Woman," in: Marina Rojavin and Tim Harte (ed.), *Women in Soviet Film: The Thaw and Post-Thaw Periods*, Oxford and New York 2018, pp. 13–27, here p. 23. Anemone's research perhaps suggests a broader cultural tendency toward tragedy and tragic female characters, to which we could also add Virineya. Interestingly enough, the cinematic version of Seyfullina's text, directed by Vladimir Fetin (1925–1981), premiered in 1968, around the same time as the opera.

envelops her. In a tradition where women were expected to be submissive and voiceless, Virineya is strong and razor-sharp.

Although Virineya had already faced criticism from her society for living with Vasily without being married to him, the hostility became even more pronounced once she made the decision to leave. It is important to highlight that in the 1920s, the Soviet Union was already embracing feminist ideas and sexual liberation, accompanied by new laws and perspectives on family and marriage. However, Virineya's freedom is not portrayed as empowering or revolutionary, neither by Seyfullina nor Slonimsky. On the contrary, her sexual emancipation coincides with her downfall. Nevertheless, despite this seemingly regressive portrayal, Virineya cannot be simply characterized as a reactionary figure. She possesses a profound critical understanding of the female position in her society and is unafraid to question gender expectations and norms, as evident in her aria from the first act: "Why do men like to command? They will pity the working cattle, but not utter a single affectionate word to a woman! She was accepted into the household for labor, not for affection... She was harnessed—and now she must suffer! And what if I can no longer endure?"[594] Her conscious decision to leave a loveless and hostile environment in which she felt unfairly exploited as free labor was an act of emancipation that was heavily frowned upon by other villagers. However, her destiny was not an isolated case, as women were traditionally bound to their families and felt trapped in their circumstances despite the hardships they endured. As explained by Evans Clements, being a single woman on her own disrupted the village status quo and was particularly dangerous, as single women experienced extreme vulnerability.[595]

In addition, Virineya discovers her purpose and passion in the Revolution and strongly aligns with the Bolshevik goals, which further raises eyebrows among her peers. As discussed in the chapter on Khrennikov's *Mother*, women were seen as inherently disconnected from the Revolution, especially those from rural areas. As explained by Evans Clements, only a small number of women embraced the Bolshevik cause, as most preferred to maintain the existing conditions and uphold the patriarchal structures of village life and family.[596] Women who chose to participate in meetings and rallies often faced ostracism from their communities, which

594 Slonimskiĭ, *Virineīa*, pp. 39–40. Original Russian text: Почему мужики любят командовать? Скотину на работе пожалеют, а уж бабе слово с лаской не скажут! Потому что для работы в дом принята, а не для ласковости... Ваялась за гуж — так терпи! А если терпежу больше нет?

595 Evans Clements, "Working-Class and Peasant Women," pp. 223–224.

596 Ibid., p. 216.

was disheartening, especially considering that some provinces even barred women from speaking at commune meetings.[597] Virineya, refusing to remain voiceless, finds herself at the crossroads between the old and the new, caught between the archaic village society and the emerging revolutionary one. Furthermore, the tension between contrasting lifestyles, beliefs, and worldviews is also reflected and masterfully blended in Slonimsky's music as well.

While we can interpret Virineya as a harbinger of change, particularly given the striking contrast between her and her surroundings, we should not overlook her ambiguous and often unclear motivations, especially regarding her revolutionary fervor. Is Virineya truly a trailblazing Soviet woman, a collateral damage paving the way for future heroines? Gasiorowska acknowledges literary Virineya's enigmatic nature and susceptibility to multiple interpretations. However, this ambiguity is not surprising given Virineya's placement within the early post-Revolutionary fiction. Technically, she does not yet belong to the generation of 'liberated Soviet women,' as she is written in the context of the tumultuous 1917 era. As stated by Gasiorowska: "Actually, the 'much-enduring peasant wife' proved exceedingly difficult to liberate. The reasons were practical and psychological. A peasant woman could not suddenly leave her hut and step outside that proverbial door."[598] If anything, we can consider Virineya as a pioneer or a precursor to the New Soviet woman, but Gasiorowska maintains a cautious stance when assigning such labels to Seyfullina's protagonist.

> In a sense, Virineya's story could still be termed an awakening, a former slave's sudden realization of her rights and duties in bringing about a new social order, if only it resembled less the traditional bourgeois story of a fallen woman rehabilitated through love. Soviet critics have done their best to have Virineya accepted as a New Woman. […] Still, the question of her ideological spontaneity, of whether she came to love Pavel because he represented Communism or vice versa, has remained controversial, and thus no later kolkhoz heroine came from the same mold as Virineya.[599]

Gasiorowska emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between the authentic female revolutionary fighting for progress and independence on one hand, and a mere rebellious individual pursuing personal happiness, placing Virineya in the latter category.[600] Although Virineya's operatic revival would have been somewhat shocking if it had occurred during

597 Ibid., p. 222.
598 Gasiorowska, *Women in Soviet Fiction*, p. 33.
599 Ibid., p. 39.
600 Ibid.

the 1930s or 1940s, in the context of the Thaw, she becomes less of a burdensome (anti-)heroine. Slonimsky does not require her to dismantle old conventions as a political act or to fulfill any promotional or didactic role. What pre-revolutionary fiction and Thaw-era fiction have in common is the focus on the individual's troubled destiny and emotional experiences. That it is precisely this aspect that makes Seyfullina's protagonist novel and refreshing compared to the heroines of Stalin-era operas, perhaps capturing Slonimsky's interest in extent.

3.4.2 The Ending of the Society Known

The second tension-filled interrelationship at the core of *Virineya*'s dramaturgy is the one between the common villagers and the rapid social changes unfolding before their eyes, seemingly beyond their control. As previously argued, the composer's focus was not on the historical accuracy of the subject, but rather on capturing the ominous ambience of apocalyptic and society-shattering turmoil. According to Ignatova: "The conceptual model of *Virineya* unfolds in the key of an apocalyptic myth—in a grim atmosphere from the prophecies of the world's demise to their fulfillment."[601]

Although to a spectator acquainted with Russian history and aware of the references to the 1917 Revolutions, the timeline of *Virineya* might seem unambiguous, it is never explicitly stated that those are, in fact, the February and October Revolutions depicted in Slonimsky's opera. The opera does not rely on historical veracity but rather aims to portray the chaos of conflicting ideologies. The whole first act of the opera has a singular function of painting the times of great perturbation and destruction of the world standing on three pillars, tsarship, family, and faith, with each one of those three paradigms presenting a conceptual dominant of one tableau at a time. Slonimsky and Tsenin's intention is clear simply from reading the titles of the first act tableaux: "The Ending of the Rule," "The Ending of the Family," and "The Ending of the Faith." It is hard to overlook the similarity between the triad proposed here by Slonimsky and the one by Sergey Uvarov (1786–1855), the minister of education under Tsar Nicholas I (1796–1855). As explained by historian Theodore Weeks, specifically, Uvarov's formula "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality" became the ultimate motto for the elaborate Russifying tendencies during Tsar Nicholas' reign. This highlights that

601 Ignatova, "Muzykal'nyĭ teatr S. Slonimskogo," p. 22. Original Russian text: Концептуальная модель «Виринеи» в целом разворачивается в ключе апокалиптического мифа – в мрачной атмосфере от пророчеств гибели мира до их свершения.

Russian 'nationality' (*narodnost'*) firmly rests on the foundations of tsarist rule and the Orthodox religion.[602]

In the first tableau of the first act, when the respective Man with the Glasses, portrayed by a marchlike musical idiom, comes to the village and proclaims that the tsar has abducted his throne, he causes mass hysteria among the worried villagers: "Oh, why did you abandon us? The end of the world is coming! Clear sun got blackened by smoke, it has waned!"[603] The frenzy reaches its peak when the enraged mass attacks the Man with the Glasses. The first tableau ends with a fast, modal, bruscamento choral entr'acte "Blizzard," with the blizzard motif symbolizing the chaotic and tumultuous political and social situation, but also the February Revolution itself. The orchestra paints the brisk atmosphere of a snowstorm through continuous rhythmical movement in the deep register, pizzicato strings, and also the usage of bells, whereas the appearances of horns and trumpets strengthen the revolutionary connotation. In the following excerpt (Fig. 33) we see the instruction to the tenors and basses, who double the melody of the female voices, to whistle, suggestively drawing the musical image of a whistling wind.

The second tableau, "The Ending of the Family," begins with Virineya's confrontation with Mokeikha, Vasily's mother, creating an atmosphere filled with tension among all three members of the household. Shortly after the Engineer is introduced to the audience, he is captivated by Virineya's beauty and begins to express his romantic intentions towards her. Following a heated argument between Mokeikha, Vasily, and Virineya, the scene reaches its climax as Virineya decides to leave, despite Vasily's desperate plea for her to stay. The tableau concludes with another choral entr'acte called "Trepak," performed exclusively by female voices (Fig. 34).[604] While Slonimsky's version of the dance is stylized and evokes the essence of nineteenth-century trepak traditions,[605] it is worth noting that his incorporation of various folklore idioms may stem from his understanding of the

602 Theodore R. Weeks, "Managing Empire: Tsarist Nationality Policies," in: Dominic Lieven (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Russia*, vol. 2 (Imperial Russia, 1689–1917), New York 2006, pp. 27–44, here p. 34.

603 Slonimskiĭ, *Virineĭa*, pp. 19–20. Original Russian text: Ах, зачем ты нас оставил? Конец света наступает! Ясно солнышко зачадило, зачадило, закатилось, закатилось, закатилось!

604 Trepak is a traditional Russian and Ukrainian dance known for its fast tempo and 2/4 time signature, typically accompanied by alternating chords of the tonic and dominant.

605 It was composers like Musorgsky (*Songs and Dances of Death*, 1875–1877), Tchaikovsky (*The Nutcracker*, 1892), and Rimsky-Korsakov (*Sadko*, 1897), who contributed to the artistic recognition of trepak.

Figure 33. *Virineya*, Act I, Tableau 1 (“The Ending of the Rule”), Choral entr’acte (“Blizzard”), rehearsal mark 67, p. 57.

Translation: Choir: Oh, the blizzard! It had let the sleeves down!

Figure 34. *Virineya*, Act I, Tableau 2 (“The Ending of the Family”), Choral entr’acte (“Trepak”), rehearsal mark 73, p. 109.

Translation: Choir: Stamps, stamps, stamps, stamp, fell into the snowdrift with my head first! I drank a little bit, but not for joy!

Figure 35. *Virineya*, Act I, Tableau 3 ("The Ending of the Faith"), Scene 2 ("Departure Prayer"), rehearsal mark 3, p. 126.

Translation: The night is deadly, gloomy, and moonless.

spirit and modes de vie in Soviet villages, as he, as stated by Rïtsareva, actively participated in folklore expeditions.[606]

The third tableau, "The Ending of the Faith," focuses on the local priest Magara, who is convinced of his impending death and ascension after a divine vision. The "Departure Prayer," performed by the gathered congregation, resembles a traditional monophonic a cappella sacred chant, with voices harmonizing in octaves and a measured sostenuto beat, accompanied by the sound of bells (Fig. 35).

However, once it becomes evident that Magara is not dying or ascending, he becomes the target of ridicule from the gathered congregation. Enraged by their reaction, he starts berating and attacking them.

It is enough to superficially glance over the first act to conclude that Slonimsky deliberately reached for a variety of different musical idioms to convey the atmosphere of a world of harsh social and cultural differences. He managed to create a coherent mixture of disparate musical expressions, reaching for folk melos, liturgical chant, revolutionary march,[607] but also urban musical idioms.[608] The fast switch from one idiom to another, but

606 Rytsareva, *Kompozitor Sergeĭ Slonimskiĭ*, p. 86.

607 For instance, in the second scene ("Gathering") and sixth scene ("Continuation of the Gathering") of the first act (Tableau 1).

608 As can be seen in the fourth scene ("Romance Letter of Aksin'ya and Her Scene with Virineya") in the first act (Tableau 2), which will be discussed later in the

also their simultaneous coexistence, provides an excellent vehicle for portraying not only the colorful village atmosphere but also a turbulent and heterogeneous social climate in the midst of great societal and political changes.

3.4.3 Virineya as a Tragic Heroine

According to American literary scholar Rufus Mathewson already in 1953, during Socialist Realism, "the figure of the emblematically virtuous protagonist has become the major structural device of Soviet literature, and the 'correctness' of his image has become the most important single standard of value in making literary judgments."[609] If Vririneya is to be evaluated following the Stalinistic literature's paradigm, she would be condemned as a morally troubled character, as she is manifestly imperfect and 'incorrect.' Even her redemption, in form of acceptance of the Revolution, is ambiguous, to say the least. It can be argued that her rehabilitation is primarily triggered by her love for Pavel, not by her adoration of the revolutionary cause. She is not the perfect hero, yet she is not the villain either—she exists outside of this strict dichotomy. Going a step further, can she even be considered a real Socialist Realist heroine when she does not even exist in the typical Socialist Realist world?

According to Gasiorowska, the Socialist Realist world is "inhabited by ideal citizens (with just enough nonideal citizens to set off the virtuous bulk of the population), it is a world of heroic goals, heroic effort, and heroic achievements—a world of heroes, superheroes and occasional villains."[610] The balance of Slonimsky's world is diametrically opposite to what Gasiorowska suggests. Nobody in Slonimsky's world can be characterized as perfect, except perhaps Pavel, a passionate Bolshevik serving as a mere appendix, perhaps a rudimentary reminder of the typical literary convention where a Bolshevik cannot possibly be villainous or substantially flawed. Furthermore, as concluded earlier, Virineya does not represent a quintessential exemplary new Soviet woman. Naturally, by approaching Virineya against the backdrop of Socialist Realist and Stalinist narrative paradigms, one disregards her primary context within the early post-Revolutionary canon, as well as Slonimsky's role as a composer of the Thaw period. However, this only serves

text, but also in the introductory scene ("Songs on the railroad") at the beginning of the second act (Tableau 4).

609 Rufus W. Mathewson, "The Soviet Hero and the Literary Heritage," in: *American Slavic and East European Review* 12/4 (1953), pp. 506–523, here p. 506.

610 Gasiorowska, *Women in Soviet Fiction*, p. 14.

to strengthen the notion that Slonimsky's heroine represents a distinct departure from the old norms. Slonimsky does not need Virineya to be morally right or wrong, good or bad—his heroine is a complex tragic persona.

Another possible way of approaching the intricate character of Virineya is by using the paradigms of Ancient Greek tragedy. Indeed, Slonimsky's inclination toward tragedy and tragic literary templates is evident merely by glancing over the titles of his operas and has been more extensively analyzed by musicologists like Ignatova, but also Ol'ga Devyatova.[611] Like the classic hero of Aristotelian tragedy, Virineya is virtuous but flawed, making her neither eminently good nor bad. While morally grounded, she makes mistakes that lead to her tragic ending. Herein lies the inner irony of both Virineya and a typical tragic hero—she possesses highly admirable virtues that ironically contribute to her tragic circumstances. In the terminology of Greek tragedy, this mistake or flaw of character that leads to a tragic downfall is referred to as hamartia. So, we can ask ourselves, what is Virineya's hamartia that leads to her tragic end? Although her affair with the Engineer after leaving Vasily may seem like an obvious answer, the roots of her downfall run much deeper.

Specialist in Greek tragedy, Barbara Goff, explains that female characters in Greek tragedies are commonly represented outdoors and are given distinct voices, asserting the "hyper-articulacy [...] of figures who are otherwise socially muted."[612] She elucidates the prominence of female characters in the landscape of Greek tragedy in various ways, ranging from their theatrical value rising from their unexpectedness to the suggestion by some scholars that "the representation of female characters helps the society to work through various changes, including that of rebalancing the claims of public and private."[613] When elaborating on certain narrative patterns, Goff, drawing on the study by scholar of Greek tragedy and culture Edith Hall,[614] suggests that tragedy often unfolds with women "who are temporarily without proper guardianship, and who consequently have unusual freedom of action."[615] Another narrative pattern Goff highlights involves female

611 See Ol'ga Devi͡atova, "Tragicheskie kollizii istorii Rossii v operakh Sergei͡a Slonimskogo," in: *Izvestii͡a Ural'skogo federal'nogo universiteta* 31 (2004), pp. 230–241.

612 Barbara Goff, "Female Characters in Greek Tragedy," in: Hanna M. Roisman (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Greek Tragedy*, Oxford 2014, pp. 1–3, here p. 1, ‹https://www.academia.edu/23961460/Female_Characters_in_Gr._Tragedy› 16 July 2026.

613 Ibid.

614 See Edith Hall, "The Sociology of Athenian Tragedy," in: Patricia Elizabeth Easterling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge 1997, pp. 93–126.

615 Goff, "Female Characters in Greek Tragedy," p. 1.

characters "voicing a loyalty to the civic order" and getting into "conflict with men whose misguided actions tend to undermine it."[616]

If we examine the canon of female Greek heroines, we can observe a pattern where their tragedies are often tightly connected to the male mistreatment, or, as classical scholar Sheila Murnaghan phrased it, "tragic women come forward, often reluctantly, under painful circumstances created by men's absence or mismanagement."[617] In other words, their tragedy is already predetermined by their gender. Indeed, Virineya not only suffers under the 'mismanagement' of the surrounding male characters, starting with Vasily and the Engineer, but also the entire mass of male villagers. Furthermore, it is Pavel's absence and her love for him that trigger her sacrificial ending. Indeed, on one hand, her burden and downfall are specific to her gender. On the other hand, and more specifically, part of her downfall lies in her poor adherence to expected gender norms. She lives in an extra-marital union, does not practice religion, and more generally, dares to leave and live her life outside the confines of the prevailing norms. Although Virineya foreshadows future cultural and societal changes and the 'new norm' of Bolshevism, her current position is fundamentally a stalemate, trapped between the old and the new, ultimately leading to her tragic ending.

However, while the approach to Virineya as a classical tragic character may seem somewhat far-fetched, there are also certain formal similarities between Slonimsky's opera and classical Greek tragedy that support this interpretation.[618] Similar to a tragedy, the opera begins with an introductory scene, "Virineya's Song with the Choir," serving as a prologue that provides background to the action and introduces the audience to the main dramatic conflict. Following the prologue, there is typically a parodos, the entry of the mass or choir, which also occurs in Virineya with the scene "The Alarm Bell." In classical tragedy, the dramatic action unfolds through a series of episodes, separated by choral stasima, often suggesting a dance rhythm.[619] Such choral interludes, the already mentioned "Blizzard" and "Trepak," are also incorporated by Slonimsky. Finally, the tragedy concludes with the

616 Ibid., p. 2.

617 Sheila Murnaghan, "Women in Greek Tragedy," in: Rebecca Bushnell (ed.), *A Companion to Tragedy*, Malden 2005, pp. 234–250, here p. 235.

618 Of course, it is impossible to ignore the fact that the history of opera goes hand in hand with Greek tragedy, and that the earliest reconstructions of Greek tragedy in the sixteenth century are woven into the Western operatic tradition. However, I would argue that the similarity here is more pronounced than it is with other Soviet operas discussed within the scope of this study.

619 See Denise Davidson Greaves, "Tragōidia," in: *Grove Music Online*, print publication 2001, published online 2001, ‹https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.40642›.

exodus, which brings the story to a close. In *Virineya*, this is portrayed in the final scene of the third act, "Farewell to Virineya."

We are first introduced to Virineya in "Virineya's song with the choir" at the beginning of the first act. In this scene, she describes her suffering and seemingly hopeless situation, marked by judgment and ridicule from those around her, as well as her loveless marriage to Vasily. The song reaches its dramatic climax when she questions the purpose of her existence. Furthermore, her aria, also from the first act, combines elements of both folk and classical operatic styles, and revisits the same thematic motifs introduced in her song with the choir (Fig. 36). Once again, Virineya reflects on her unfulfilling and elusive union with Vasily, as well as the meaning of her life. However, the aria also deepens her character and offers the audience a fresh perspective on her. Indeed, if we remove these moments of introspection and focus solely on her interactions with other characters on stage, Virineya would appear markedly different to the audience.

Although her aria is inherently 'operatic' in terms of technical difficulty and vocal range, it also reflects certain folk music paradigms. In the provided excerpt, we observe that the musical sentence spans six bars instead of the classical norm of four or eight. Furthermore, Slonimsky employs alternating time signatures of 4/4 and 3/4, contributing to a sense of irregularity. Other structural characteristics aligned with the folk idiom include the repetition of the first two-bar phrase and the melodic sequence in the final phrase of the presented excerpt. In this particular segment presented below, Virineya observes and admires the nature surrounding her. This sets her apart from the other characters in Slonimsky's opera, who lack introspective moments or artistic digressions and exist only as two-dimensional caricatures. They do not perceive the world as Virineya does, nor do they enter the transcendent realms of their existence. These lyrical digressions play a crucial role in understanding Slonimsky's view on Virineya, as they reveal her genuine and authentic persona.

Slonimsky reinforces the notion of Virineya as the sole pensive, contemplative, and deeply feeling character on the stage throughout the opera. In her second act scene "Virineya's Thought," for instance, she reflects on the fleeting nature of life. She expresses: "And livestock, and grass, and people, everything on earth is born to die! Well, at least they don't bother with thinking... But a person thinks about everything, strives to be strong, and endures for a long time. But you yourself aren't around for long… […] A human's lifespan is short! And we continue to shorten it further! We inflict pain upon our hearts in vain!"[620]

620 Slonimskiĭ, *Virineĭa*, pp. 230–232. Original Russian text: И скот, и люди, и трава — все на земле на смерть родится! Ну те хоть думой не маются... А человек

Figure 36. *Virineya*, Act I, Tableau 1 (“The Ending of the Rule”), Scene 5 (“Virineya’s Aria”), rehearsal mark 38, p. 41.
Translation: Virineya: And spring is on the doorstep! The cheerful and frantic wind flies from the field ...

Interestingly enough, in the final scene of the opera, "Farewell to Virineya," the female choir reintroduces the same musical material from the opening scene, "Virineya's Song with the Choir." This creates a connection, both literal and metaphorical, between the framing elements of the opera, the choral prologue and epilogue. According to Ignatova, this symbolism represents "a circle, a natural cycle, a turn of history, human life."[621]

If we approach *Virineya* as a tragedy, the role of the choir, particularly the female choir, becomes even more intriguing. Reminiscent of Greek tragedy, where the chorus traditionally consisted of the same gender as the main protagonist, Virineya is often accompanied by an anonymous and de-individualized female choir that exists in the extradiegetic level of the narrative. This choir serves as a narrator, offering insights into Virineya's inner struggles and thoughts. For instance, in the choral entr'acte "Trepak," the female choir simultaneously comments on the events taking place on stage and reveals Virineya's growing resentment: "Do not wonder, the blue-eyed one, that I am weeping—it is the flayed heart bleeding! I used to be affectionate, but now I'm angry... I used to be a brunette, but now I'm gray-haired!"[622] Additionally, it is the female choir that alludes to the impending death of the Engineer in the same segment, while also implying Virineya's motivations for embarking on the affair: "We are not fearing grief! We wash ourselves in blood! To spite everybody, so it would be merry!"[623] Considering that the trepak is traditionally a cheerful and celebratory dance, this entire scene takes on an almost tragicomic tone. Not only does the choir discuss the plot and foreshadow future events, but it also explores the broader tragedy of female destiny in general.

> The wind howls, the wind moans, pitying us... It buries a girl's short life under snowdrifts. Oh, you girl's fate, woman's lot... Well, it mocks you to its heart's content! They beat you drunk, they beat you sober, quick with the fist, quick with the rein!

обо всем думает, старается, чтобы крепко и надолго. А долго ты-то и нет… […] Короток живой час у человека! А мы еще сами его укорачиваем! Попусту сердце травим!

621 Ignatova, "Muzykal'nyĭ teatr S. Slonimskogo," p. 22. Original Russian text: [Таким образом, образуется гигантская образно-смысловая арка,] символизирующая круг, природный цикл, виток истории, человеческую жизнь.

622 Slonimskiĭ, *Virineĭa*, pp. 119–120. Original Russian text: Не дивись, синеглазый, что зареванная,— это сердце кровоточит освежеванное! Была ласковая, стала злая… Числилась в брюнеточках, а теперь седая!

623 Ibid., p. 122. Original Russian text: Горя не пугаемся! Кровью умываемся! Всем назло, чтобы было весело!

> They beat you with boots, because that hurts more for sure, they beat you in the heart, beat you in the stomach, and why—no one knows! [624]

3.4.4 One Against Them All

Virineya's hopeless and isolating position, as well as her sensitive and deeply suffering persona, are highlighted through the juxtaposition with the hostile ensemble of characters surrounding her. Taking a closer look at other prominent female characters in the opera, specifically Aksin'ya and Vasily's mother Mokeikha, it becomes evident that through them Slonimsky conveys the overarching themes of falsity and hypocrisy. In the scene "Mokeikha's prayer" (Act I, Tableau 2), her serene prayer to the Virgin Mary quickly escalates into a harsh tirade against Virineya, blaming her for ruining her son Vasily and leading him astray. Throughout the opera, Mokeikha is portrayed as deeply religious, yet filled with hatred and pure fury towards Virineya, making her one of the key figures contributing to her murder. Furthermore, Aksin'ya persistently falsely presents herself as the ideal wife. She does not hesitate to mock and criticize Virineya for not fulfilling her social role properly, while she herself cheats on her husband while he is away fighting on the front lines. Illiterate, Aksin'ya asks Virineya to write a letter to her husband in the scene "Romance letter of Aksin'ya and her scene with Virineya." However, Virineya eventually infuriates Aksin'ya by refusing to participate further in writing deceitful words to her husband. The music in the scene heavily relies on the style of an urban romance accompanied by a guitar, its tender quality starkly contrasting with the preceding and succeeding musical idiom (Fig. 37). Nevertheless, Virineya sees through the grotesque.

Naturally, there are numerous other female characters in *Virineya*, albeit deindividualized and nameless, who deserve a mention. Although this kind of portrayal is not exclusive to women in *Virineya*, Slonimsky places great emphasis on the herd mentality of female characters throughout the opera, highlighting the sense of lostness and fear that women experienced during times of significant societal change. An example of this can be seen in the voting scene (Tableau 6, "Gatherings and Rallies") at the beginning of the third act. Illiterate and afraid to assert themselves in voting, as they consider it outside of women's sphere, the women are eventually inspired

624 Ibid., pp. 111–113. Original Russian text: Ветер воет, ветер стонет, нас жалеючи... Под сугробами хоронит век недолгий девичий. Ой ты, девичья судьба, бабья доля... Ну и тешится она над тобою вволю! Бьют и пьяные, бьют и трезвые, на кулак, на вожжу больно резвые! Сапогами бьют, как больней заведомо, бьют под сердце, бьют под вздох, а за что — неведомо!

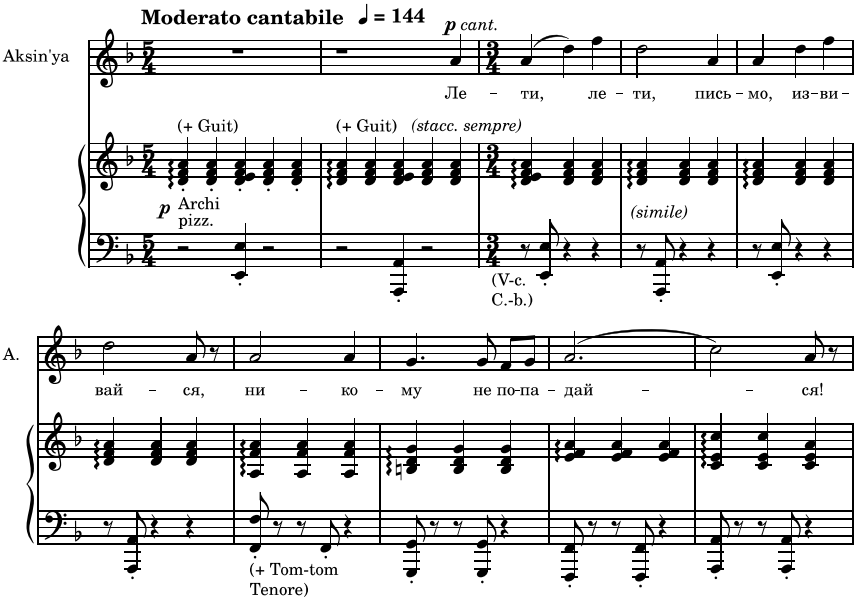

Figure 37. *Virineya*, Act I, Tableau 2 ("The Ending of the Family"), Scene 4 ("Romance Letter of Aksin'ya and Her Scene with Virineya"), rehearsal mark 22, p. 82.

Translation: Aksin'ya: Fly, letter, coil, don't give in to anyone!

by Virineya, who continues to proclaim encouragement even when threatened by the masses calling for her to be stoned.

When we examine the male characters in the opera, it becomes evident that these figures are also portrayed in a two-dimensional and caricature-like manner, wearing a mask of 'properness' or virtue, only for it to crack and reveal the inferior, even dire, substance. Vasily, despite his obedience and poor health, is far from being a successful leader of the household, despite his desperate claims. In the "Family scene" of the first act, when Virineya pleads with the ill and weakened Vasily not to leave for the city to fulfill his errand, he frantically repeats: "I am the master of this household! I am the master! I am the master!"[625] Though he desperately tries to project strength and dominance as the head of the family, Virineya recognizes his limitations and powerlessness, seeing through his shattered facade. Nevertheless, beneath his harmless exterior, he displays aggression, as seen in the second scene of the fourth act, where blinded by jealousy and possessiveness, he physically attacks Virineya. Similar to Vasily, Virineya also sees through the Engineer's arrogant exterior and decides to use this observation to her advantage. In the scene "Trio and scene with

625 Ibid., p. 99. Original Russian text: Я в доме этом хозяин! Я хозяин! Я хозяин!

the Engineer" of the first act, the Engineer pompously enters the household without bothering to greet anyone, immediately condescendingly handing in Vasily's task. The second time he arrives, in the scene "Arrival of the Engineer" in the same act, he is already enchanted by Virineya's beauty. His entire demeanor changes when he stands vulnerable in front of her, and without her even asking, he opens up about his humble background and loneliness. The pattern is clear—Virineya serves as a sort of litmus test, revealing the hypocrisy and dishonesty of the characters around her. However, Pavel stands out. Although he is portrayed with a march-like, *con forza* melos throughout the opera, somewhat hinting at the caricature-like quality seen in other supporting characters, he is the only character who remains stable and immutable.

Pavel is deeply pragmatic character. Even his decision to pursue Virineya arises from his role as a single father, seeking a wife to care for his child and help him lead the household. Their complementarity plays out on a Jungian level of Logos and Eros, where Pavel represents the logical principle and Virineya, whose motivations and actions derive from her emotions, represents the emotional one. For them to achieve fulfillment and ultimate happiness, the emotional and the logical principles must be combined. This notion is particularly emphasized in Pavel's aria. Namely, Pavel is the only character besides Virineya to have an introspective moment through his aria in the third act. However, unlike Virineya, who uses those moments for philosophical reflections on life's purpose, Pavel reflects on the poor harvest, bad weather conditions, and famine. To further emphasize the notion of complementarity between the two characters, Slonimsky reuses the same spring motifs that earlier appeared in Virineya's aria. While Virineya's 'spring' is used metaphorically to signify the forthcoming changes in her life, contrasting with the 'winter' of her life or the loveless and sorrowful union with Vasily, Pavel thinks of spring in a particularly industrious manner.

> Spring! Spring! The scent of decay is delicate, resembling wine, stretching as far as the eye can see—the earth, a thousand miles away, is warm, as if pulsating with life... Take it in the palm of your hand—it crumbles, longing for grains. Now's the time for a peasant to plow and plow, plow and plow again! But what for? What's the point of plowing, of plowing, if there's nothing to sow?[626]

626 Ibid., pp. 331–333. Original Russian text: Весна! Весна! Дух од прели легкий, винный, куда глазом ни кинь — верст на тыщу земля теплая, как живая... На ладонь возьми — расыпается, по зерну тоскует. Нонче бы мужику пахать да пахать, пахать да пахать! А к чему пахать? А к чему пахать, пахать, коль засевать нечем?

In their mutual scene in the last act, Virineya's transformation is finalized. Suddenly, the reflections from her earlier scene, "Virineya's Thought," where she contemplates death and mortality, are completely reversed:

> Pavel: Everything on earth is born for happiness.
> Virineya: Both cattle and people, and grass!
> Pavel: Everyone lacks happiness.
> Virineya: Everyone is searching for a place under the sun.[627]

Virineya ends up opening up and revealing her true self in front of Pavel, just as everyone had been revealing their deeply hidden selves in front of her. However, what does this relationship actually convey? Does it suggest that Virineya, in fact, needed a strong, level-headed male authority figure to tame her? Or is it Pavel's communist idealism and her eventual revolutionary realization that 'fixes' her? Could Virineya be seen as the superfluous woman of the early revolutionary canon, in need of re-education or even cruel elimination? Although following the literary template relatively faithfully, Slonimsky, unlike Seyfullina, places greater emphasis on the tragedy of Virineya's situation, even hinting at it on a formal level within the opera, as discussed previously. Her tragic ending is apparent right from the beginning of the opera. However, she is not killed off because she is too flawed; she is executed precisely because she is too pure for the grotesque and repugnant society in which she exists.

Unlike Prokofiev's Ol'ga and Sof'ya, or Khrennikov's Natasha, who epitomize female virtue and the ideal love interest within the Stalinist operatic canon, Virineya, as discussed previously, clearly deviates from the norm. While I hesitate to hastily align her with these specific female characters who are primarily shaped through their relationships with the male protagonist, it is difficult to deny the fact that Virineya, despite being more complex and nuanced than her predecessors, is still profoundly influenced by her romantic relationships and thus predominantly molded by them. The first notable attribute that sets her apart from Khrennikov's and Prokofiev's heroines is her sexual and physical awareness, which were labeled as promiscuity within the opera's narrative. Gasiorowska explains that "her bitter enjoyment of the power which her sultry beauty held over men's senses had enough decadent flavor to exclude Virineya from the premises of sound proletarian art."[628] However, as continued by Gasiorowska, although she is

627 Ibid., pp. 343–344. Original Russian text: Павел: Все на земле для счастья родится. Виринея: И скот и люди, и трава! Павел: Каждому счастья не хватает. Виринея: Каждый под солнышком места ищет.

628 Gasiorowska, *Women in Soviet Fiction*, p. 38.

aware of the power she possesses over men due to her beauty and sexuality, she is neither dissolute nor a great literary "grande amoureuse," quite the opposite. She adopts the persona of a promiscuous fallen woman solely out of defiance against her surroundings.[629]

If we refer to concepts from ancient Greek philosophy, the love Virineya experiences from Vasily or the Engineer can best be described as eros, rooted in physical and sexual desire. However, Pavel's love for Virineya is sacrificial, pure, and charitable, and as such can be best described by the term agape. He is dedicated to Virineya's well-being, unlike Vasily or the Engineer, and treats her with utmost kindness and understanding. This notion may seem far-fetched, but could Pavel's and Virineya's acceptance of each other be reminiscent of the biblical agape shared between Jesus and the prostitute Mary Magdalene? According to Gospel accounts, Jesus cleansed her of seven demons, forgave her sins, and accepted her into his cause, fostering a close spiritual relationship until his end. However, in the context of Seyfullina and Slonimsky, agape is not tied to the acceptance of God and Christianity but to embracing the communist and revolutionary dogma. In this microcosm, Pavel embodies divine attributes, as he is ideal and correct precisely because he has embraced the Revolution, making him somewhat teleological at his core. Whether Virineya's acceptance of the revolutionary agenda stems from a place of political emancipation or love for Pavel, it is undeniable that her path of redemption and self-actualization aligns with her understanding and immersion in the new ideology, similar to biblical Mary Magdalene. Perhaps, drawing a parallel to Khrennikov's Pelageya, we can consider Virineya as another peripheral figure in someone else's hagiography. However, similarly to Pelageya, she is once again brought into the spotlight and becomes an object of Slonimsky's artistic interest more than the saint himself.

3.5 Kirill Molchanov's *The Dawns Here Are Quiet* (1973)

Kirill Molchanov, one of the most fruitful Soviet composers of the second half of the twentieth century, nowadays seems to be largely overlooked and known to a restricted audience in the West. In addition to being a prolific composer of theater music, Molchanov also played a rather political role in the musical life of the Soviet Union, serving as secretary of the Union of Composers USSR from 1951 to 1956, shortly after his graduation in 1949. Another significant post that left an imprint on his career was the directorship of the Bolshoi Theater between 1973 and 1975. Although he gained

629 Ibid., p. 39.

great popularity with his songs, Molchanov dedicated a substantial part of his oeuvre to film and stage music. A significant portion of Molchanov's operatic work is dedicated to 'Soviet' topics, with his opera *Zarya* (*The Dawn*, 1956) dealing with the October Revolution, and his three last operas, *Neizvestnïy soldat* (*The Unknown Soldier*, 1967), *Russkaya zhenshchina* (*Russian Woman*, 1969), and *Zori zdes' tikhiye* (*The Dawns Here Are Quiet*, 1973), with the Second World War.[630]

Possibly his most well-known opera, *The Dawns Here Are Quiet* from 1973, written to his own libretto after the eponymous 1969 novel by writer Boris Vasil'yev (1924–2013), follows a squad consisting of young female anti-aircraft gunners and their sergeant Major Fedot Yevgrafovich Vaskov (bass) in 1942, amid the World War II. The diegesis starts to unfold once the junior sergeant Rita Osyanina (mezzo-soprano) comes across two German soldiers in the forest. After cautioning the squad about the immediate danger, Vaskov selects four volunteers to take on a mission to eliminate the threat—the aforementioned Rita, Zhen'ka Komel'kova (mezzo-soprano), Liza Brichkina (soprano), and Sonya Gurvich (soprano). As it soon becomes apparent, the German troop is larger than initially expected, and in a series of formidable events, all four girls lose their lives, with Vaskov being the only one to leave the forest alive.[631]

It is no surprise that World War II immediately became one of the most prominent topics of Soviet art. However, although the great popularity of World War II fiction did not seem to cease even after Stalin's death, the artistic approach to dealing with the immediate past did substantially change, and the new generation of authors, influenced by the spirit of the Thaw, suddenly adopted a rather critical lens when dissecting this almost dogmatic topic. As explained by Gasiorowska: "Arrests of excellent officers and devoted Communists on trumped-up charges, scenes of unfair trials and deportations, unnecessary carnage on the front, the atmosphere of suspicion and frustration corroding the Army—these became the prevailing themes."[632] By merely glancing superficially at the opera and its melodramatic narrative, supported by a highly accessible musical idiom relying on quotations of the most beloved and famous Soviet tunes, it becomes clear that Molchanov does not employ the same highly critical lens when dealing with World War II. From a narrative point of view, the overarching flavor

630 See Alla Grigor'yeva, "Molchanov, Kirill Vladimirovich," in: *Grove Music Online*, print publication 2001, published online 2001, ‹https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.18872›.

631 See Kirill Molchanov, *Zori zdes' tikhie... Opera v dvukh chastɪ̈akh. Libretto K. Molchanova po povesti B. Vasil'eva "A zori zdes' tikhie..." Klavir*, Moscow 1978.

632 Gasiorowska, *Women in Soviet Fiction*, p. 168.

of Soviet patriotism makes this opera closer to the Stalinist operas than to those of the Thaw.

The process of de-Stalinization during the Thaw encountered strong opposition, however, not only in the political narrative, but also in the realm of art. The resurgence of Stalinist clichés in the art can be captured by the term neo-Stalinism, and I would argue that this etiquette best describes the alignment of Molchanov's opera. As discussed by Clark, neo-Stalinist authors have deliberately selected subject matters for their literary works that aim to restore a feeling of national pride, and the portrayal of World War II was among their favored themes.[633] Specifically, these somewhat elaborate but still watered-down individual fates presented in Molchanov's opera are used almost as a means of manipulation, a way to strengthen the emotional effect on the spectator while praising the recent Soviet past and the Great Patriotic War. Although this particular combat portrayed in Molchanov's opera ends in tragedy, the sense of the approaching grand victory is woven into the audience, emphasizing the notion of collective struggle and heroism even more. Unlike in the operas of the Thaw, where the grand moments of the Soviet past were placed in the background, here the sense of patriotism takes the forefront, with the four women serving merely as pawns in achieving a very specific emotional effect on the audience. *The Dawns Here Are Quiet* is not an opera about four young women—it is an idealized tale of the unbreakable and heroic Soviet nation.

Although it was Stalin and Khrushchev who established the importance of World War II memory in post-war Soviet society, Hoffmann asserts that it was during the Brezhnev era that the process of World War II commemoration reached truly monumental proportions.[634] As explained by historian Yana Prymachenko, in a ceremonial meeting at the Kremlin on May 8, 1965 dedicated to the twentieth anniversary of the USSR's victory in the Second World War, Brezhnev delivered a speech that laid the foundation for a new narrative of World War II and the basis for a new Soviet mythology, heavily reliant on the concepts of the "Great Victory" and the "Victorious Nation."[635] However, these narrative components are not the only ones present in the Soviet myth-building during Brezhnev's administration. Another widely propagated myth that supported the ideologically appropriate

633 Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, pp. 236–237.

634 David L. Hoffmann, "Introduction: The Politics of Commemoration in the Soviet Union and Contemporary Russia," in: David L. Hoffmann (ed.), *The Memory of the Second World War in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, London and New York 2022, pp. 1–14, here p. 2.

635 Yana Prymachenko, "The Soviet Foundations of Russia's Great Patriotic War Myth," ‹https://euromaidanpress.com/2017/05/09/the-soviet-foundations-of-russias-great-patriotic-war-myth/› 16 July 2026.

interpretation of World War II was the "myth of suffering."[636] Specifically, as explained by Hoffmann, during the Brezhnev era's process of World War II commemoration, the official narrative placed particular emphasis on the victims of the war, resulting in war memory encompassing both mourning for the deceased and celebration of the victory.[637] It is precisely the combination of suffering and eventual victory that is intended to evoke a sense of the greatness of both the Soviet country and its people. These myths serve as the foundational pillars upon which *The Dawns Here Are Quiet* is constructed.

3.5.1 The Precarious Portrayal of a Female World War II Soldier

Western critics expressed strong disapproval of the opera, with Richard Taruskin and Thomas DeLio describing Molchanov's work as "so determinedly orthodox as to seem retrogressive and hence disturbing even within the context of Soviet aesthetics."[638] The harsh depiction arises from what the authors refer to as its "primitive dramaturgy and accessibility of the musical idiom."[639] In contrast, Soviet critics did not judge Molchanov's musical idiom for its overt accessibility, as accessibility and clear comprehension are fundamental pillars supporting the aesthetic of Socialist Realism and thus highly desirable. The technique of collage, which received scrutiny from Western critics, was also poorly received by Soviet critics, albeit for different reasons. As we can read in reports published in *Sovetskaya muzïka*, for instance, musicologist Irina Shekhonina disapproved of Molchanov's use of contemporary and popular musical quotations, questioning their compatibility with the romantic and heroic genre of the opera and finding the opening "Song of the Tourists," written in the then-popular bard style, "dubious from the point of view of musical taste."[640] On

636 Oleksii Polegkyj, "Soviet Mythology and Memory of WWII as Instruments of Russian Propaganda," in: *Warsaw East European Review* 6 (2016), pp. 77–93, here pp. 81–82. In his article, Polegkyi does not explicitly connect this term directly to the Brezhnev-era World War II myth-building but instead applies it to the wider concept of World War II myth-building within both the Soviet and contemporary Russian contexts. I opted for this term because I find it highly appropriate for this context as well.

637 Hoffmann, "Introduction," p. 3.

638 Richard Taruskin and Thomas DeLio, "Current Chronicle," in: *MQ* 62/1 (1976), pp. 105–118, here pp. 113–114.

639 Ibid., p. 113.

640 Irina Shekhonina, "Pamı͡atnik geroi͡am," in: *Sovetskai͡a muzyka* 12 (1974), pp. 66–70, here p. 70. Original Russian text: [Еще один пример: буквально

the other hand, Dora Romadinova does not criticize the mere usage of collage as a technique, nor does she disapprove of Molchanov's incorporation of contemporary popular music. Instead, she identifies the problem in Molchanov's *extensive* use of quotations and eclectic combinations of diverse musical material, attributing the potential lack of meaningful dialectical connections between its parts to the surplus of music material combined with the rapidly developing action.[641]

By relying on both Western and Soviet commentaries on *The Dawns Here Are Quiet*, one could perhaps hastily align Molchanov's collage-esque opera to the Schnittkean definition of polystylism.[642] Although this notion could perhaps profit from a more thorough examination, we certainly cannot align his opera to the avant-gardist branch of Soviet operatic development. While the technique of collage and the use of quotations in this particular manner introduce a certain novelty to Soviet opera at the time, Molchanov's musical idiom still heavily relies on the accessibility and conformity characteristic of the aesthetical preferences and dogmas of High Stalinism. His artistic allegiances become even more apparent when observing the characters and overall narrative trajectory of the opera. Although Molchanov's leads possess greater depth and dimension compared to those of the Stalinist opera project, they do not reach the level of complexity, reflection, and ambiguity seen in works of The Thaw period. Moreover, the narrative serves as another significant indicator that Molchanov's opera does not align with the works of composers like Shchedrin or Slonimsky elaborated previously. While those composers approach history in a broad and somewhat superficial manner, subordinating Soviet historical context and mythology to character development, Molchanov places the greatest Soviet tragedy, World War II, in the forefront, using it as the central guiding thread to reveal his characters. Although Molchanov explores the loss of four young lives during the war, the portrayal of tragedy is not his ultimate goal. Here, tragedy serves precisely as a means to bolster Soviet pride and patriotism, not through a grand victory as was common during the High

«выхваченный» из современного музыкального быта напев в сцене похода сегодняшних туристов. Мотив этот не только не несет в себе каких-либо положительных ассоциаций, но и кажется] сомнительным с точки зрения музыкального вкуса.

641 Dora Romadinova, "Poisk trudnyĭ, interesnyĭ," in: *Sovetskai͡a muzyka* 12 (1974), pp. 71–77, here p. 74.

642 For more on the discussion on Alfred Schnittke, polystylism, and collage through the lens of terminology, see Baiba Jaunslaviete, "The Theory of Polystylism as a Tool for Analysis of Contemporary Music in the Postsoviet Cultural Space: Some Terminological Aspects," in: *Rasprave: Časopis Instituta za hrvatski jezik i jezikoslovlje* 44/2 (2018), pp. 455–465.

Stalinism era, but through a minor defeat, by dissecting its casualties and making them more tangible and realistic.

Molchanov employs four very different female characters in his opera. Rita Osyanina holds the post of the junior sergeant of the troop and, as we learn early in the opera, she is a war widow. Every night she sneaks out of the barrack to visit her young son whom she left with her mother in the nearby town. Although she is possibly the most capable soldier out of the four girls, eventually she also allows herself to get led by her emotions instead of her ratio. She found a confidant in the beautiful and vivacious Zhen'ka Komel'kova, who always holds her back. Liza Brichkina, a young kolkhoz girl, is visibly more fragile and tender than Rita and Zhen'ka. We also learn that she is in love with Vaskov. Sonya Gurvich, an excellent university student from Minsk, got chosen to join Vaskov's troop because of her knowledge of the German language. She took her booklet of Blok's poems with her to the front, a present from her sweetheart, and keeps reading it to her comrades. We learn that she has lost her parents to war; as implied by her family name, she is Jewish.

When Vaskov and the girls realize the magnitude of the threat, Vaskov sends Liza back to the barracks to warn everyone and seek help. Unfortunately, caught in daydreaming, Liza becomes the first to perish, drowning in the mud. Sonya, despite Vaskov's pleas to stay and follow his orders, goes in search of his tobacco pouch and meets a similar fate. With the loss of Liza and no help arriving, Vaskov decides to continue alone, urging Rita and Zhen'ka to return to the barracks, a request they refuse. The three engage in a direct fight against Hitler's troops, and ultimately, the last two girls meet their demise.

During World War II, thousands of women, driven by their patriotic sentiments and a strong determination to protect their motherland, voluntarily joined the Soviet military forces, fighting alongside their male comrades. Some of their experiences, in a raw and unfiltered format, were collected by Artyom Drabkin and Bair Irincheyev in a book very symbolically, and quite fittingly, titled *A zori zdes' gromkiye* (*The Dawns Here Are Loud*) from 2012.[643] Although this notion is highly debatable, Drabkin and Irincheyev explain the female hardship on the front by women being "objectively psychologically and physiologically weaker than men," describing young girls entering the war as "timid, innocent, as if they have just arrived from

643 Artem Drabkin and Bair Irincheev, *"A zori zdes' gromkie." Zhenskoe lit͡so voĭny*, Moscow 2012. For more on the topic, see Svetlana Alexievich, *The Unwomanly Face of War: An Oral History of Women in World War II*, New York 2017, original edition: *U voĭny — ne zhenskoe lit͡so*, Moscow 1985.

their mother's embrace."[644] Although the authors' reasoning may appear conservative and regressive at times, they nonetheless managed to compile a truly remarkable collage of female experiences on the front, aiming to avoid excessive political or ideological alignments.

The spectrum of experiences and anecdotes shared by the interviewees is astonishing, ranging from particularly negative to truly heartwarming accounts. One soldier, Nina Kunitsina, bravely recalls instances of sexual harassment, which unfortunately were not uncommon for female soldiers on the front. Despite describing such incidents, her tone remains predominantly apologetic. She remarks: "It was very hard for the girls who chose to behave properly; there was a lot of harassment. We sympathized with the guys, naturally. Young men have their physiological needs, and that's why we forgave them everything: no punishments, no snitching."[645] However, some interviewees recall a more balanced and harmonious relationship between male and female soldiers. Irina Yavorskaya shares a touching memory: "The people at the front were very different. Some treated me like their little sister. Sometimes you'd see the scouts coming back from a mission. One of them rummages in his pocket and pulls out a piece of sugar, all covered in tobacco dust, but he had saved that sugar just for me."[646] Sergeant Nina Afanas'yeva also recounts instances where her role involved caring for the emotional well-being of the girls in her company. On one occasion, she organized a concert to lift their spirits and bring smiles to their faces.[647] Another time, when a girl admitted her fear of the dark, Afanas'yeva promised to stay awake beside her to provide a sense of security.[648]

Such matters as hygiene and uniforms may seem trivial compared to the previous ones, but they were nevertheless significant to the women on the front. Interestingly, almost every interviewee mentioned the moment when

644 Ibid., p. 8. Original Russian text: В этой ситуации слабым, а женщина объективно психологически и физиологически слабее мужчины, доставалось очень цильно. И вот на фронт прибывают девушки, как правило, робкие, невинные, только что от мамы.

645 Ibid., pp. 114–115. Original Russian text: Девушкам, которые вели себя прилично, нам было очень трудно — много было домогательств. Мы ребятам сочувствовали, конечно. Молодые ребята, такая у них физиологическая потребность, поэтому мы прощали все: никаких строгостей, никому не ябедничали.

646 Ibid., p. 108. Original Russian text: Люди же на фронте были очень разные. Некоторые считали меня будто своей младшей сестренкой. Иногда видишь — идут разведчики с задания, один шарит в кармане что-то и достает кусочек сахара, весь обсыпанный махоркой, но он этот сахар мне оставил специально.

647 Ibid., p. 281.

648 Ibid., p. 283.

their hair was cut short, primarily due to the lack of hygienic conditions. Another issue that arises is that of military uniforms, with nearly every soldier featured in the book expressing complaints about them. Women were required to wear men's clothing, which was often much larger than their actual size and did not fit properly. Additionally, the nature of female undergarments at the time made it difficult to wear the pants comfortably. Specialized female uniforms, including skirts or dresses, only became available towards the end of the war. While it was possible to alter the size of the clothes, boots presented a different challenge: "The girl wears a size 35, but her boots are size 40. Just imagine that! She walks, and her boots are flopping around, along with her greatcoat. Well, you can trim the greatcoat, but what can you do about the boots?"[649]

Molchanov's and Vasil'yev's portrayal of female warriors, while partially rooted in reality, presents a highly idealized and romanticized version of the actual female war experience, omitting many of the harsh realities and challenges they faced. They selectively chose fragments of truth, such as ill-fitting boots (which in fact led to one of the character's demise) and mutual support among young women, to evoke sympathy and compassion from the audience, rather than providing a comprehensive depiction of the full range of gender-specific hardships women encountered on the front lines. However, when viewed within the context of neo-Stalinism, this idealized and melodramatic portrayal of female soldiers cannot be surprising.

Another aspect that makes this work stand out is the general scarcity of similar depictions of female combatants in World War II fiction, as pointed out by Gasiorowska.[650] What is the reason for this sudden interest in the fate of women on the front lines? Furthermore, how do Vasil'yev's and Molchanov's portrayal of female soldiers align with the overall trends in post-war commemoration? According to Hoffmann, Soviet war memorials did not depict women as warriors but rather in traditional feminine roles such as mothers, nurses, and victims.[651] Moreover, Hoffmann argues that the commemorative process aimed to restore the traditional gender hierarchy and erase the presence of female fighters from official Soviet culture. Even when female fighters were represented in literature or film, they were often portrayed as "ineffective fighters due to their maternal nature."[652]

649 Ibid., p. 277. Original Russian text: Девушка носит 35-й размер, а сапог — 40-й. Вот так вот! Представьте: она идет, у нее сапоги болтаются и шинель. Ну, шинель можно и обрезать, а сапоги как?

650 Gasiorowska, *Women in Soviet Fiction*, p. 159.

651 David L. Hoffmann, "Representations of Gender in Soviet War Memorials," in: David L. Hoffmann (ed.), *The Memory of the Second World War in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, London and New York 2022, pp. 107–130, here p. 107.

652 Ibid., p. 109.

The portrayal of an "ineffective" and gender-specific struggle on the front lines, leading to eventual death at the hands of the enemy, presents a stark contrast to what one would expect to see on a Stalinist operatic stage, where the perfect Soviet hero possessed unmatched virtues in every aspect of their existence. However, this type of "ineffective" or "incapable" hero holds significant ideological charge and contributes to the myth of suffering even more than a supremely capable hero ever could. My intention to shed light on the position of the young women in *The Dawns Here Are Quiet* within the broader context of the Soviet cultural narrative of the Brezhnev era can be easily applied to all adaptations of the original novel, including also the novel, as well as the 1972 movie adaptation directed by Stanislav Rostotsky (1922–2001). However, what sets Molchanov's envisioning apart? Furthermore, in what ways does he enhance the original material, and what do these choices reveal about neo-Stalinism, the World War II myth of the Brezhnev era, and the perception of women and female soldiers in Soviet cultural narratives?

3.5.2 Molchanov's Literary Interventions and Change of the Focal Point

On the titular page of the 1978 partiture, it is indicated that opera's libretto is written after Vasil'yev's story. However, the composer did not blindly follow the original text.[653] Molchanov's interventions in Vasil'yev's novel are subtle and discreet, yet powerful enough to create a different portrayal of Vaskov and his group of anti-aircraft gunners. While the exclusion of one of the original soldiers, Galya Chetvertak, from the operatic version may appear as a significant difference, it is actually more of a superficial nature. One could argue that Galya, in comparison to the other young women, did not possess enough striking qualities, nor did she play a crucial role in the unfolding of the diegesis. Furthermore, the choice to remove Galya from the opera could likely be driven by the consideration that introducing another central figure on the stage would be excessive given the technical constraints of the operatic stage and medium. As Molchanov dedicated considerable effort to elaborate and deepen the existing characters, there was perhaps limited stage time and space to develop an additional figure without diluting the dramatic focus. This theory is not unrealistic, considering operatic conventions, as well as Molchanov's apparent intention to maintain a compact and concise composition, as evidenced by the means and techniques he employed. However, it is not the plot, the number of

653 For the whole text, see Boris Vasil'ev, *A zori zdes' tikhie...* Moscow 1977.

characters, the atmosphere, or the message that distinctly sets the libretto apart from the original text; rather, Molchanov's true alteration lies in the *balance*. He modifies measures and ratios, shifting the emphasis from one event to another, from one character trait to another, ultimately changing the focal point in his libretto. While the core story remains the same, it is presented to the audience through a different perspective.

Vasil'yev establishes Vaskov and his inner world as the focal point of the narrative. Not only is Vaskov the character we learn the most about throughout the novel, but we also gain insights into the other characters primarily through his personal interactions and experiences with them. Through Vaskov's inner monologues, evaluations, and interactions with his surroundings, readers are granted knowledge of the narrative world of the novel. As a result, the depiction of the girls is not presented in an 'objective' manner but, rather, as a version constructed by Vaskov himself, influenced by his initial preconceptions and prejudices that gradually unravel as the plot unfolds. At the outset of the novel, our understanding of the girls is primarily shaped by their behavior that irritates Vaskov. They come across as silly, capricious, and immature adolescents who are unfamiliar with military conduct, much to his chagrin. Additionally, he quickly develops a sense of discomfort and an almost irrational fear towards them.

> The soldiers turned out to be noisy and cocky maidens, and each second the foreman felt as if he was a visitor inside his own home: he was afraid to blurt out the wrong thing, do the wrong thing. Suddenly it was out of the question to enter somewhere without knocking, and if he happened to forget, the squealing signal immediately threw him back to his previous position. Most of all, Fedot Yevgrafich was afraid of hints and jokes about possible courtship, so he always walked with his gaze fixed on the ground, as if he had squandered his last month's salary.[654]

The dominance of Vaskov's perspective persists throughout the entire novel, making him the sole character with more extensive character development. As readers, we are granted access to his stream of consciousness, enabling us to delve into the spheres of his personality that remain hidden

654 Ibid., p. 10. Original Russian text: Зенитчицы оказались девахами шумными и задиристыми, и старшина ежесекундно чувствовал, что попал в гости в собственный дом: боялся ляпнуть не то, сделать не так, а уж о том, чтобы войти куда без стука, не могло теперь быть и речи, и если он забывал когда об этом, сигнальный визг немедленно отбрасывал его на прежние позиции. Пуще же всего Федот Евграфыч страшился намеков и шуточек насчет возможных ухаживаний и поэтому всегда ходил уставясь в землю, словно потерял денежное довольствие за последний месяц.

from the external world. This includes his insecurities, occasional irrational fixations, and perpetual pessimism.

> The fact that the Germans did not appear greatly puzzled Fedot Yevgrafich. After all, they might not show up here at all. They could be targeting another road, or they could have received a different order altogether, not the one he had predicted. They could have caused a lot of trouble, such as targeting an authority figure or attempting to blow up something important. Then, imagine trying to explain to the tribunal why instead of scouting the forest and catching the Germans off guard, you, damn it, went off to who knows where. Did you feel sorry for the fighters? Were you afraid to engage them in open battle? There is no excuse for not following orders. No, absolutely no excuse.[655]

Throughout the plot and a series of conversations that Vaskov has with the members of his troop, we can observe a gradual softening in his attitude towards them, displaying a certain sensitivity and a fatherly protectiveness. Is it because they gradually reveal different positive aspects of themselves, or were these qualities present from the beginning, but Vaskov didn't allow himself to notice because of his prejudice toward female soldiers? Vasil'yev's portrayal of the girls is largely two-dimensional and linear, lacking the same level of character development that is evident in Vaskov, which gives the story almost a puppet theater-like quality. Even in the face of immediate danger in the forest, the girls maintain their childlike nature, silliness, and naivety. It is not the girls themselves who change, but rather Vaskov's perception of them, as he gradually becomes more accepting of his female comrades. In other words, the shift towards a more positive depiction of the girls is not a result of their changing nature, but rather a change in Vaskov's perspective. Throughout the plot, we come to learn about Vaskov's anxious and insecure side, as well as his highly sensitive nature. The shared trauma they all experience further strengthens their bond, with Vaskov beginning to address them by their first names and slowly embracing their individual quirks.

However, Molchanov's libretto shows a shift towards a notably different perspective. It diminishes the importance of Vaskov's viewpoint by no longer making him the central figure driving the narrative. Furthermore, his

655 Ibid., p. 57. Original Russian text: То, что немцы не появлялись, сильно озадачивало Федота Евграфыча. Они ведь и вообще могли здесь не оказаться, могли в другом месте на дорогу нацелиться, могли какое-либо иное задание иметь, а совсем не то, которое он за них определил. Могли уже бед натворить уйму: стрельнуть кого из начальства или взорвать что важное. Поди тогда объясняй трибуналу, почему ты, вместо того чтобы лес прочесать да немцев прищучить, черт те куда попер. Бойцов пожалел? Испугался в открытый бой их кинуть? Это не оправдание, если приказ не выполнен. Нет, не оправдание.

role in the plot is significantly minimized compared to Vasil'yev's Vaskov. The first indication supporting this assertion is the plot structure itself. While Vasil'yev briefly interrupts the plot in the base and primarily focuses on the events in the forest, Molchanov takes a contrasting approach by allocating relatively equal importance to these two segments. The first act of the libretto delves into life at the station, the liminal space of transition from soldiers' pre-bellum lives and a battle yet to come, embodying both the civilian and martial atmosphere, while the second act explores the occurrences in the forest, and both sections are of similar length. Due to the rebalancing between the station and forest settings, the operatic audience spends more time with the initial depiction of Vaskov, solidifying the perception of him as a rigid, strict, and somewhat awkward leader of the troop. This sheds a different light on his qualities as a leader and educator, which are revealed in critical moments within the forest. Secondly, Molchanov introduces another alteration in his libretto, and that is the balance between the *material* and the *ethereal*. Interestingly, the libretto largely omits scenes of combat, action, and movement. Even if included, they are reduced to mere symbolic gestures, devoid of significant dramatic potential. Molchanov's libretto instead becomes a series of memories, reflections, dialogues, beliefs, and hopes, primarily focused on internal events. It possesses a transcendent quality when compared to Vasil'yev's original template, which relies heavily on the physicality of the body and space, essentially emphasizing the external. By conducting this significant change of the narrative structure, Molchanov's Vaskov lost the environment necessary for his growth and development, thus making his transformation less impactful, and him less of a striking character.

Although these interventions can be attributed to the inherent nature of the operatic medium, which operates differently from a novel in terms of narrative and storytelling techniques, I would argue that Molchanov's distinct portrayal of the same story is not accidental, nor solely a result of the limitations of the operatic medium. Molchanov demonstrates a keen interest in the internal struggles of his heroines, focusing on them to a greater extent than on Vaskov and offering multiple perspectives instead of the single male viewpoint from the original text. This tendency is also visible in their musical portrayals, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

3.5.3 Quotations as a Means of Supporting Remembrance

Although the term 'quotation' in musical literature often encompasses various borrowing practices, its fundamental definition refers to the incorporation of a segment of pre-existing music into another work. What sets

'quotation' apart from the broader term 'borrowing' is that 'quotation' involves incorporating the music in an almost unmodified form, whereas 'borrowing' carries a range of connotations related to specific works, historical periods, genres, and so on. As stated by musicologist J. Peter Burkholder, "quoting existing music is an act that conveys meaning through the text or associations carried by the quoted music and the implications aroused by the way the quoted material is presented or manipulated."[656] Although this technique received more negative than positive remarks in the context of Molchanov's opera, it is essential to recognize that quotations, both musical and textual, are intricately woven into his piece, serving as both a structural and semantic tool of great importance.

The intricate web of quotations (but also borrowings) infused by Molchanov into the opera undoubtedly warrants thorough examination, as it can shed new light on his artistic intentions and demonstrate that the use of quotations is not merely a symptom of a lack of novelty, but a deliberate and powerful practice employed to achieve specific effects on the audience. Considering the quantity and semantic significance of the musical and textual references Molchanov employs, it is most appropriate to view *The Dawns* as a collage. According to Burkholder, musical collage is "the juxtaposition of multiple quotations, styles, or textures in a way that each element maintains its individuality, and the elements are perceived as excerpted from many sources and arranged together, rather than sharing common origins."[657] The elements of a collage do not necessarily have to fit seamlessly together, nor do they need to derive from the same historical period, genre, or possess shared musical elements. It is precisely the act of *selection* from an endless pool of musical material that makes Molchanov's decision compelling.[658]

656 J. Peter Burkholder, "Quotation," in: *Grove Music Online*, print publication 2001, published online 2001, ‹https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.52854›.

657 J. Peter Burkholder, "Collage," in: *Grove Music Online*, print publication 2001, published online 2001, ‹https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.53083›.

658 It is noteworthy that Molchanov also wrote the music to the 1972 movie adaptation directed by Rostotsky. The film got nominated for an Oscar in the Best Foreign Language Film category. Furthermore, the music material written for the film is being reused for the opera, and so are certain quotations. However, in the environment of the film those quotations play a very discreet role and seem less striking and obvious compared to the opera. There are only two musical quotations which Molchanov employed in both the film and the opera, and those are the lullaby from the movie *Tsirk* and "The Song of the Tourists." The other quotations, such as Tino Rossi's (1907–1983) "Il pleut sur la route" (1935), the romance "Net, ne lyubil on" (Russian translation of an Italian romance "El mi diceva che avria sfidato..."), and legendary "Katyusha" (1938) with lyrics by Mikhail Isakovsky (1900–1973) and music by Matvey Blanter (1903–1990), did not reappear in the opera.

According to musicologist Gernot Gruber, quotation is ought to "stand out," and it is "an intentional phenomenon," meaning, "regardless of whether something quoted is recognized in the conspicuous element or not, the listener's attention is directed towards understanding a presumed intention."[659] It is clear from the outset of *The Dawns Here Are Quiet* that Molchanov's intention was to create an opera that explores different modes of memory and remembrance, but also actively serves in commemorating the World War II. Namely, the opera begins with a prologue following a group of young people by a lake, performing "The Song of the Tourists," allegedly written by bard Aleksandr Sukhanov (b. 1952).[660] Following the Soviet bard style, this song leads the audience to infer that the characters on stage are situated in the present time, many years after the war has ended. The serene leisure is interrupted by the arrival of a stranger dressed in military uniform adorned with a Red Star order on his chest. The mysterious newcomer is no other than Vaskov himself. It becomes evident that the group of young people were actually gathered at a memorial site, which Vaskov has come to visit. From that point on it is clear that the entire opera is framed as Vaskov's recollection of the events that transpired during World War II. His presence on this *lieu de mémoire*[661] evokes memories of his participation in World War II and conjures the phantoms of his fallen young comrades. Suddenly, four female figures dressed in military uniforms and armed with guns appear on the scene, and one of them, Rita, starts reciting 1945 poem "Moyo pokoleniye" ("My Generation") by poet Semyon Gudzenko (1922–1953), which resurfaces again at the end of the opera, propelling its circular narrative. Following the conclusion of Rita's recitation, the setting transitions to the barracks in 1942, followed by female choir performing "V nebe zori" ("The Dawns in the Sky"), written after a poem by famous Soviet actor and poet Mikhail Nozhkin (b. 1937),[662] drawing the audience into the atmosphere of the station.

659 Gernot Gruber, "Zitat," in: *MGG Online*, print publication 1998, published online 2016, ‹https://www.mgg-online.com/mgg/stable/44419› 16 July 2026.

660 It is not completely clear if it was Sukhanov or Molchanov himself who wrote "The Song of the Tourists." Although the 1978 version of the partiture, which I used for this analysis, neatly marks all the quotations with a footnote, there is none indicating that "Song of Tourists" it is a direct quotation. Various internet sources go in favor of Sukhanov, and his official website also suggests the song to be his own. See ‹https://www.aleksandr-suhanov.ru/pesenka_turistov.html› 16 July 2026. I tried to contact Sukhanov, who is still actively performing to this day, in a hope to clarify this conundrum, but without any success.

661 See Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," in: *Representations* 26 (1989), pp. 7–24.

662 The poem was specifically written for the 1972 movie adaptation, but ended up not being included. Therefore, it would be far-fetched to etiquette it as a quotation.

The choice to utilize Soviet literary material continues throughout the entire opera and serves as a means of strengthening the spatial and temporal relations of the occurrences on the stage. While composers such as Khrennikov, Shchedrin, and Slonimsky avoided Stalinist literature in their operas elaborated previously, instead drawing from early post-Revolutionary works or contemporary post-Stalinist fiction, Molchanov boldly immerses himself in Stalinist literature, cinema, and music—further cementing his opera's neo-Stalinist affiliation. Furthermore, quotations make it easier for the audience to follow the fragmented storyline, which often jumps into the past only to abruptly return to the present. Specifically, in addition to the opera being framed as Vaskov's memory, it also includes and explores the personal memories of the young soldiers. A good example of a quotation serving both the function of supporting personal memory and kindling the collective remembrance is "Lullaby" from the movie *Tsirk* (*Circus*, 1936) directed by Grigory Aleksandrov (1903–1983). Not only was the movie a great success, but the music composed by Isaak Dunayevsky (1900–1955), a famous Soviet composer known for his large-scale scenic musical forms such as operetta, ballet, and film scores, including popular songs, made him one of the symbols of the Soviet music scene in the 1930s.[663] Coincidentally or not, it was actually Kirill Molchanov himself who finished his operetta *Belaya akatsiya* (*The White Acacia*) based on the sketches Dunayevsky left after his passing. Although it is hard to say whether quoting "Lullaby" is a homage to Dunayevsky's music or the composer himself, one thing is certain—it is a testament to a certain period of time, a formative moment in collective cultural imagination. The movie, loved by the Great Vozhd himself, along with Dunayevsky's film score, which includes some of the most beloved and popular Soviet melodies, undoubtedly played a significant role in Soviet popular culture and resonated in the collective consciousness for generations.

Specifically, Molchanov's "Lullaby" (Fig. 38) serves as a backdrop to Rita's recollection of her family life before it was affected by the war, making it a substantial part of the scene "Rita's reminiscence," the first in a series of flashbacks experienced by Molchanov's heroines throughout the plot. These detours into the recent past offer the audience glimpses into their lives before they ended up on the front. Rita's flashback is triggered by a fight she has with Sergeant Kir'yanova, who reveals in front of the entire unit that Rita has been leaving the station every night to visit her son in the nearby

663 See Ekaterina Ganskaĭa, "Sovetskaĭa massovaĭa pesnĭa kak forma ideologii," in: *Litera* 2 (2019), pp. 251–261, here p. 257; Genrikh Orlov, "Dunayevsky, Isaak Iosifovich," in: *Grove Music Online*, print publication 2001, published online 2001, ‹https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.08320›.

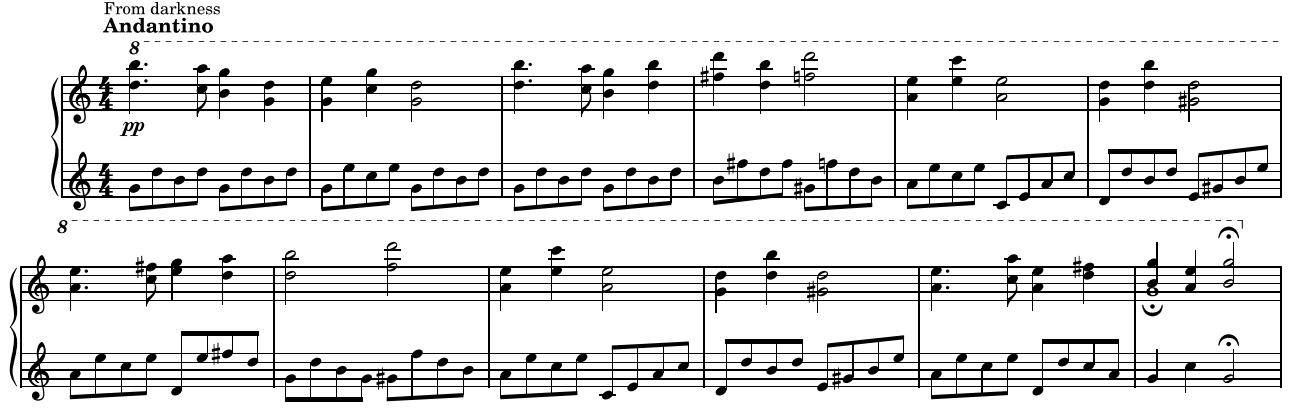

Figure 38. *The Dawns Here Are Quiet*, Act I, "Rita's Reminiscence," rehearsal mark 1, p. 34.

town. Shortly after, Sonya begins reciting a poem, accompanied by a female choir performing "V nebe zori" in the background. The then-introduced "Lullaby" is soft, subtle, and strikingly simple, reminiscent of a tune from an antique music box. This effect is achieved through the sound of celesta, but also the use of the Alberti bass accompanying the main melody.

Molchanov not only adapted the famous lullaby to accompany Rita's flashback of her young son, evoking the warm everyday family life that was abruptly disrupted by the war, but seemingly also to serve as a reminder, almost like a historical artifact, connecting the listener to the time, space, and ordinary life of that period. This makes Rita feel more tangible and real, as if she had truly existed and watched *Circus* just a few years prior to being on the front lines. The effect was likely even stronger on the older audience who witnessed the first performances of the opera in the 1970s when the memory of Dunayevsky's tunes still lingered vividly in the collective consciousness of the Soviet people.

After the main theme is introduced and harmonically resolved, the atmosphere undergoes a sudden change, and the piano begins playing a two-part romance in C minor, contrasting the juvenile atmosphere of "Lullaby" in G major. The somber theme suggests Rita's loss of her husband to war and her separation from her son. However, these conflicting memories intertwine and alternate in the foreground, as the "Lullaby" motif sporadically reappears and emerges through the romance theme. Its final appearance concludes without harmonic or melodic resolution, symbolizing Rita's abrupt return to the reality of the military station, where Sonya continues reciting the same poem and the female choir still sings "V nebe zori." What Molchanov achieved here, using a dissolve-like transition from one musical picture to another, is an almost cinematic flashback effect, employing distinct and contrasting musical codes and genres, and intertwining them in a polyphonic relationship. The end of the scene reveals that the choir never stopped singing, nor did Sonya cease reciting, but Rita's reminiscence, represented by the fragmented interplay between "Lullaby" and the romance theme, pulled the audience from the reality of the military station into her past, and then back again.

To enhance the audience's remembrance, Molchanov incorporates diegetic or source music in *The Dawns*, which primarily functions as a sound, creating a background ambiance. Once again, Molchanov brings a famous tune by Dunayevsky into the opera, specifically in "The Scene and Romance of Zhen'ka" (Act I), but this time through a gramophone brought by one of the soldiers. The song played on the gramophone is "Serdtse" ("Heart"), a great hit during the 1930s featured in the movie *Vesyolïye rebyata* (*Jolly Fellows*, 1934), another highly successful Soviet film with a musical score composed by Dunayevsky. This widely renowned song was originally

written for Leonid Utyosov (1895–1982) even before he ended up playing the leading role in the movie. Interestingly, Molchanov even specified in the score that the version of the song played on the gramophone should be the exact rendition performed by the distinguished artist,[664] who reached the pinnacle of his popularity in the 1930s. As explained by culturologist Kseniya Politkovskaya, Utyosov was undeniably one of the pioneers and visionaries shaping the new music scene of the 1930s, drawing from jazz and other Western musical influences, and capitalizing on the newfound openness, enthusiasm, and modern artistic impulses that emerged during the NEP era of the 1920s.[665] Inna Fakhretdinova writes that Utyosov's popularity soared even further due to his visits to the front-line areas during the Second World War, where he went to entertain and uplift the spirits of the fighting troops.[666]

However, compared to the previous quotation that followed Rita's reminiscence of a once joyous past, this particular quotation has a significantly reduced narrative impact. One might naturally question, given the criticism the opera received for using popular quotations like this one, whether it was truly necessary. Couldn't Molchanov have composed an original music score for such a minor scene? Nevertheless, Molchanov's choice of incorporating a brief fragment of the popular 1930s tune was not without purpose and effect in the opera's world-building and overall narrative context. It allowed him to reconstruct the world of Soviet youth during the decade preceding the war, as the melody serves to strengthen spatial and temporal relations. Merely using the musical style of the era and composing a song following the norms and rules of the genre would not have portrayed the *true* essence of Soviet youth. Perhaps the distorted musical reproduction, in fact, only has the potential to create a distorted representation of a generation, which does not seem to align with the composer's intention. Molchanov manipulates the audience to establish a direct connection with the characters through a shared experience and a set of memories associated with the music he quotes. The utilization of a culturally familiar musical language inevitably fosters emotional identification. However, apart from worldmaking, Molchanov also employs "Heart" as a means of worldbreaking. The military station, amidst the Great War with its connotations of death, terror, and suffering, is juxtaposed with a depiction of young and joyful soldiers dancing to a popular, cheerful, and lively tune symbolizing love, youth, and

664 Molchanov, *Zori zdes' tikhie*, p. 41.

665 Kseniia Politkovskaia, "Tea-dzhaz v khudozhestvennoĭ kul'ture SSSR 1920–1930-kh gg.," in: *Vestnik SPBGIK* 2 (2018), pp. 65–70, here p. 65.

666 Inna Fakhretdinova, "Frontovye kon͡sertnye brigady v gody Velikoĭ Otechestvennoĭ voĭny," in: *Colloquium-journal* 8 (2020), pp. 64–65, here p. 65.

the carefree life they once shared. Simultaneously, the audience can hear the music of life and sense the proximity of death.

The subsequent quotation is also an example of diegetic music, albeit with a slightly different narrative status compared to "Heart." Within the same scene, following their dance to the gramophone, the girls encourage Zhen'ka to sing. She takes the guitar and begins performing "Zhdi menya" ("Wait for Me") (Fig. 39), possibly one of the most famous moments in *The Dawns*. It is no mere coincidence that Molchanov specifically selected this song, and even less coincidental that he chose Zhen'ka to perform it, as we know that there is nobody, in fact, waiting for her—she lost her whole family to the war.

The poet behind this poem, Konstantin Simonov (1915–1979), was a Soviet author and war correspondent. While he wrote numerous literary works during the war years, he achieved fame with his poem "Zhdi menya," which has become one of the most renowned and cherished poems in Russian literature. Simonov dedicated the poem to his future wife, actress Valentina Serova (1917–1975), expressing his plea for her to wait for his return from the front. The poem swiftly became a cultural phenomenon, symbolizing love and loyalty for millions of people during the War. Literary scholar, but also a World War II veteran, Boris Losev writes that "it was learned by heart, sent in letters to the front and from the front to the rear, it was found in the pockets of military smocks, pierced by bullets. […] The poem does not 'poison' the soul, but, on the contrary, it sharpens the heart with courage, instills faith and hope that lovers will preserve their feelings even in the years of difficult ordeals."[667] Simonov transformed the perception of love and bestowed upon it an almost divine attribute. As written by philologist Inessa Korzhova, female love became a salvatory force that nurtures the hope of survival and the longing for a return from the front. The mere thought of a loving and waiting woman instills a prophetic confidence in one's eventual homecoming.[668] Shortly after the poem's release, it received a musical arrangement. In 1942, the renowned Soviet composer Matvey Blanter (1903–1990), widely celebrated for songs like "Katyusha," composed

667 Boris Losev, "Talisman vernosti (Stikhotvorenie K. Simonova 'Zhdi menя͡' v vospriя͡tiĭ frontovikov)," in: *Filologicheskiĭ klass* 23 (2010), pp. 7–8, here p. 7–8. Original Russian text: Его заучивали наизусть, посылали в письмах на фронт и с фронта в тыл, его находили в карманах гимнастерок, пробитых пулями. […] Стихотворение не «растравляет» душу, а, наоборот, заостряет сердце мужеством, вселяет веру, надежду в то, что влюбленные и в годы тяжких испытанний сохранят свое чувство.

668 Inessa Korzhova, "Khudozhestvennaя͡ retse͡pt͡siя͡ stikhotvoreniя͡ K. Simonova 'Zhdi menя͡' v poezii 1940–1950-kh godov," in: *Vestnik MGLU* 6 (2019), pp. 221–235, here p. 226.

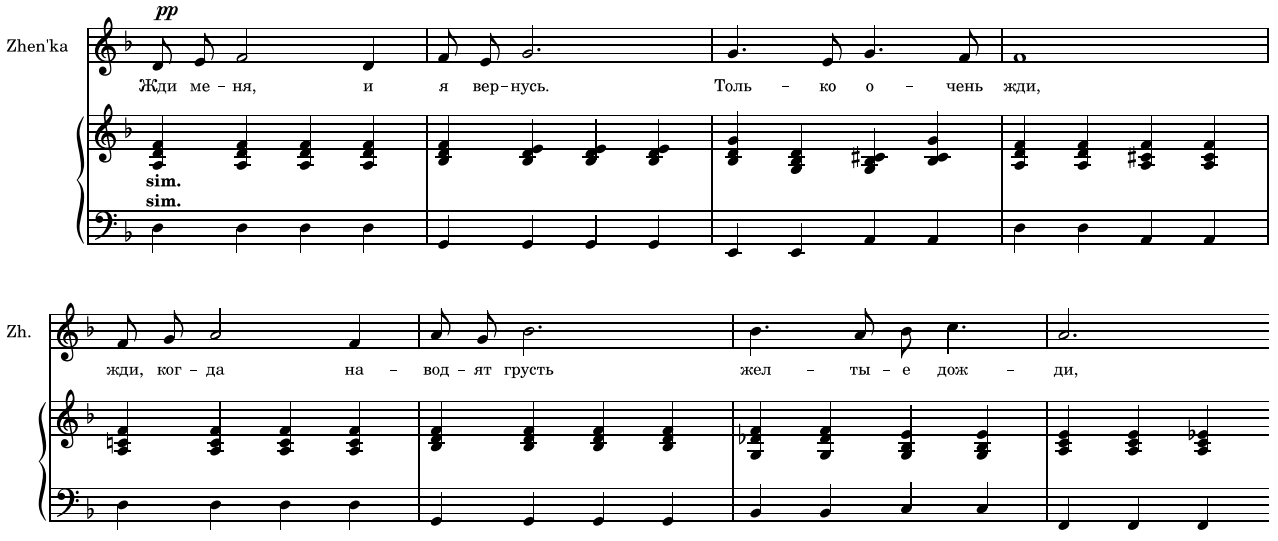

Figure 39. *The Dawns Here Are Quiet*, Act I, "The Scene and Romance of Zhen'ka," rehearsal mark 7, p. 45.
Translation: Zhen'ka: Wait for me, and I'll return. Only wait strongly, wait when the yellow rains are bringing sorrow.

the music to accompany the already well-known poem, further contributing to its popularity. Therefore, within the diegesis, Zhen'ka sings a contemporary popular song, another musical catalyst of temporal signification, akin to the preceding example of a quotation.

However, the main distinction between the two quotations lies in how Molchanov incorporated them into the opera. Unlike "Heart," which was mediated through a gramophone, "Zhdi menya" is performed by one of the characters on stage.[669] The second difference lies in the narrative role Molchanov predestined for both quotations. While "Heart" predominately functions as a stage sound, "Zhdi menya" plays a more complex role. This scene can even be interpreted as polysemous, as it conveys two simultaneous meanings. Zhen'ka's expression of her heartfelt emotions and her oath to her lover go unnoticed by the other girls, who view her singing purely as entertainment. Furthermore, "Zhdi menya" serves as a prelude to the scene "Zhen'ka's Reminiscence," triggering the memories of her love affair before joining the army. The "Zhdi menya" motif also appears in her flashback scene and, coincidentally or not, this time in B flat minor, traditionally considered to symbolize darkness, pessimism, and death. Similar to "Rita's Reminiscence," Molchanov employs discreet and inconspicuous motivic saturation in the last bars of the scene, supporting her contemplative and reflective state of mind.

Another interesting aspect of this scene is that the song "Zhdi menya" was performed by a female character. Traditionally perceived as a plea from all soldiers to be waited for and not forgotten, a symbol of salvatory female love providing strength and solace even from distant places, the fact that it is sung by a female performer adds a unique dimension to its interpretation. While this is not an isolated occurrence (for example, in the 1943 movie of the same name directed by Aleksandr Stolper (1907–1979) and Boris Ivanov (1908–1964), Serova herself performs the song), it does not diminish its impact. The twist of gender roles, showcased through a female soldier singing a traditionally 'male' song, underscores the complexity of the girls whose destinies we are following. They are more than just carefree and headstrong adolescents as they initially appeared. This song, with its expression of controlled, measured emotions encompassing fear of death and oblivion, provides a fresh perspective on the girls, revealing that female suffering was not fundamentally different from male suffering. Both genders carried the same emotional burden and held onto the same hope of returning home when the war finally ended.

669 It is indicated in the stage instructions that Zhen'ka performs the song with a guitar. Molchanov, *Zori zdes' tikhie*, p. 45.

Simultaneously with the quotations supporting memory and remembrance, chosen from the contemporary Soviet musical and textual repertoire, Molchanov also incorporates material outside from that narrow pool and assigns it a completely different function. Namely, the poet who acquired a special place inside Molchanov's opera, and whose poems became a crucial tool in characterization and subtle narrative amplification is the Russian symbolist Aleksandr Blok (1880–1921). Vasil'yev's novel, which served as a basis for the libretto, did in fact have a mention of Blok—we learn that Sonya, one of the soldiers in Vaskov's squad, carried a booklet of his poems with her to the front. However, that fact was presented as a brief statement, a superficial *curiosum* that served as a discrete means of her character development. Blok was scarcely mentioned throughout the novel, and only one quotation of Blok's verses was included, however, lacking any deeper integration into the narrative environment. Vasil'yev seemingly used Blok and the reference to the poem "Rozhdyonnïe v goda glukhiye" ("Those Born in the Deaf Years") as mere decoration or crude textual filler, serving only to establish that Sonya is studious and enjoys reading, while also implying the burden of being part of the war generation, which poem elaborates on. On the other hand, Molchanov utilizes Blok's verses not only as a means of character development but also as the foundation for an entire system of parallel meanings. The composer quotes four of Blok's poems and shapes them into a dominant means of Sonya's expression.[670] This decision raises questions about Molchanov's intentions: Why did the composer choose to expand this motif? In what ways does this choice influence Sonya's character development and the overall meaning of the opera?

When examining the tradition of Russian and Soviet composers utilizing Blok's verses as a textual foundation for musical compositions, a notable shift becomes evident. The composers' inclination to incorporate Blok's poetry underwent a significant change over the decades. It is unsurprising that Blok's works were highly popular among composers during the 1920s, considering his temporal position and the widespread fame he attained. A whole array of composers used Blok's poetry for their songs, often tailored for more intimate settings and smaller ensembles, typically with voice and piano accompaniment, although larger musical forms can be

670 The importance of Blok's quotations became evident already in the 1972 film adaptation, so it would be narrow-sighted to state that this choice was completely original and not influenced by Molchanov's work on the film. The movie employs three Blok quotations, "Na pole Kulikovom" ("On the Kulikovo Field"), "I vnov' — porïvï yunïkh let..." ("Once again the elan of the youth..."), and lastly "Rozhdyonnïe v goda glukhiye..." ("Born in the deaf years"). The latter two quotations do not appear in the operatic version of *The Dawns*.

found as well.[671] However, as the subsequent decades unfolded and Socialist Realism came to dominate the Soviet artistic scene, Blok's popularity in musical circles waned during Stalin's rule.[672] The renewal of interest in Blok's poetry did not occur until the 1960s,[673] serving as an interlude to the 1970s and 1980s, which can be characterized as Blok's ultimate revival.[674] During this period, Blok experienced a renewed surge in popularity among Soviet composers, surpassing even the acclaim he received in the 1920s.

It is safe to say that, from a political standpoint, Blok was a very unproblematic choice for both Vasil'yev and Molchanov, especially considering his nearly unblemished reputation, which managed to withstand the changes of political regimes. As explained by the literary scholar Olga Sobolev, the proletarian movement and the new Soviet state viewed symbolism as a vestige of decadent bourgeois culture—aesthetically subversive and ideologically incompatible.[675] However, interestingly enough, Blok was the only symbol-

671 To name a few composers who used Blok's poetry as a base for small-scale compositions during the 1920s: Sergey Rakhmaninov (1873–1943), Nikolay Roslavets (1881–1944), Nikolay Myaskovsky, Aleksandr Mosolov (1900–1973), but also Dmitry Kabalevsky. Other noteworthy compositions are Vladimir Kryukov's (1902–1960) symphonic prologue "Neznakomka" ("The Unknown Woman") from 1923 or his opera *Korol' na ploshchadi* (*The King on the Square*) from 1925.

672 The name which definitely stands out for extensive usage of Blok's verses during the Stalinist era is Yury Shaporin, who in 1939 completed both his symphony-cantata *Na pole Kulikovom* (*On the Field of Kulikovo*), a song cycle for a voice and piano *Dalyokaya yunost'* (*Faraway Youth*), and an oratorio *Dokole korshunu kruzhit'?* (*How long shall the kite soar?*) in 1947. Another distinctive composer of the era worth mentioning is Mieczysław Weinberg and his song cycle for voice and piano from 1943.

673 The 1960s brought on the first signs of Blok's musical revival, with composers like Dmitry Shostakovich, Georgy Sviridov, Ėdison Denisov, and Yury Butsko writing song cycles for various smaller ensembles. Furthermore, Sergey Slonimsky completed a cantata *Golos iz khora* (*A Voice from the Choir*) in 1963.

674 Composers like Belarusian composer Wladzimir Darokhin (1948), Dmitry Smirnov (1948–2020), Elena Firsova (1950), Vladimir Dovgan' (1953), and Vladimir Tarnopol'sky (1955), amongst others, wrote song cycles using Blok's verses, however, again, other musical forms are to be found. For example, Nikita Bogoslovsky (1913–2004) completed two lyrical dramas, *Neznakomka* (*The Unknown Woman*) in 1972 and *Balaganchik* (*The Little Booth-Show*) in 1976, Yevgeny Teregulov (1950–2011) wrote "Preludes and Fugues" for voice and piano in 1972, Aleksandr Lokshin (1920–1987) wrote his Symphony no. 6 in 1971 and Georgy Dmitriyev (1942–2016) composed his Symphony no. 2 titled "Na pole Kulikovom" ("On the Kulikovo Field") in 1979.

675 Olga Sobolev, "The Symbol of the Symbolists: Aleksandr Blok in the Changing Russian Literary Canon," in: Katharine Hodgson, Joanne Shelton and Alexandra Smith (eds.), *Twentieth-Century Russian Poetry. Reinventing the Canon*, Cambridge 2017, pp. 123–156, here p. 126.

ist poet accepted into the Soviet literary canon, despite his waning enthusiasm for the Bolshevik cause towards the end of his life. Naturally, one might question how a poet with such a profile managed to enter the Soviet literary sanctorale. According to Sobolev, there are two possible reasons for this. Firstly, Blok's poetry was somewhat less esoteric and mystical compared to that of some other symbolist authors. Secondly, Blok embodied the ideal of a transitional poet—a figure transitioning from the decay of nineteenth-century Tsarist society to a poet of the people and the Revolution.[676] However, despite Blok's inclusion in the Soviet artistic canon, he remained a symbolist poet and thus stood apart from the Socialist Realist dogma, with its overtly mystical, introspective, and highly subjective nature. It is likely the combination of mystical poeticism and political appropriateness that made Blok a fitting choice for both Vasil'yev and, by extension, Molchanov.

Blok's poems in the opera are manifested exclusively through the character of Sonya Gurvich. To the front, she brought a slim book of Blok's poems, which she got as a present from her university colleague, with whom she shared a brief adolescent romance that abruptly ended with his departure to the army. Blok's verses get introduced to the plot for the first time in the "Choir and scene of the girls and Vaskov" (Act I), when Sonya, in an attempt to calm the argument between Rita and Kir'yanova, the assistant platoon commander, offers to recite the poem "Moy lyubimïy, moy knyaz', moy zhenikh" ("My Beloved, My Prince, My Bridegroom"). The poem, gentle and intimate confession of the young poet, is, interestingly enough, written from a female perspective—Blok's lyrical consciousness is anchored in the perspective of his wife Lyuba Mendeleyeva (1881–1939),[677] whom he married in 1903, a year before writing this poem. Its meaning gets completely transformed once introduced to the context of war and the base where the girls are stationed. Suddenly the poem is not exploring the emotional distance between the newlyweds, but a physical one, elaborating on the pain of a woman kept away from her loved one. Sonya's eolic cantilena expresses the tender tranquility and the placid pain of Blok's verses, triggering Rita's reminiscence of her husband who died at the front, and the gentle memories of the antebellum family life they once shared.

The second Blok quotation is introduced at the very beginning of the second act, which starts with Vaskov and soldiers leaving the station and approaching a lake where they form an improvised base. Sonya, seemingly without any particular motivation, starts reciting verses of "Na pole Kulikovom" ("On the Kulikovo Field"). The famous Battle of Kulikovo

676 Ibid., pp. 131–132.

677 See Avril Pyman (ed.), *Alexander Blok: Selected Poems*, Oxford and New York 1972, pp. 205–206.

(September 8, 1380) took place on the Kulikovo Field near the Don River and was fought between the Mongol khan Mamai and prince Dmitry of Moscow, who, after winning the battle, became also known as Donskoy ("of the Don"). Although the victory did not end Mongol domination, it was the first decisive Russian triumph since 1237 and signaled the weakening of Mongol influence. According to literary scholar Avril Pyman, Blok's poem continues the stream of literary works elaborating on this historic tale, sparked by his belief that the battle of Kulikovo was a symbolic event in Russian history, fated to repeat itself.[678] Indeed, with this enthralling and powerful prophecy, recited almost immediately as the squad embarked on their mission, Sonya foretold the bloody yet victorious end of the impending battle with Hitler's troops. Moreover, it appears as if she possessed an almost mystical awareness of its significance within the grand scheme of events. After all, it was just one among numerous preceding and subsequent victories on the path towards the final one.

In the "Scene of Vaskov and Sonya" (Act II), Vaskov interrupts Sonya while reading "V goluboy dalyokoy spalenke" ("In a Far-Away Blue Nursery"), probably the most enigmatic of all the poems Molchanov quoted in *The Dawns*. This daunting and mysterious poem has been subjected to various interpretations and has raised many questions due to its elusive nature. However, many experts, including Pyman, would agree that the poem can likely be interpreted as a story about the death, or even a murder, of a child.[679] This poem, eerie and wrapped into the dream-like ambiguity, or even a nightmare, is juxtaposed with the rather childlike musical accompaniment featuring glockenspiel motifs and Alberti bass performed on a harp. By creating an almost grotesque effect, Molchanov adds another layer to Sonya's character, emphasizing the lush lyricism of her soul and childlike naïveté, while also hinting at the depth of her persona—vast, unknown, unclear, and other-worldly.

However, the subsequent conversation between Sonya and Vaskov reveals that the choice to quote this poem was not accidental. After inquiring about Sonya's parents and displaying a parental concern for her (commenting on her reading in the dark, "You'll spoil your eyes..."[680] and placing his coat under her so she would not get cold sitting on the rocks), Sonya remarks, "What are you doing, you're treating me like a child..." Vaskov's

678 Ibid., pp. 258–259.

679 Ibid., p. 215.

680 Molchanov, *Zori zdes' tikhie*, pp. 119. Original Russian text: Васков: Глаза портишь...

response, "You indeed are a child,"[681] takes on an ominous tone when contextualized through the lens of Blok's poem. It is possible that Molchanov selected those verses solely because of the motif of childhood, thereby reinforcing the notion that Sonya and all the other girls are merely children who ended up at the front. Associating these young women with children carries a potent semiotic charge. It not only underscores their 'incompetence' and lack of readiness for engaging in military activities but also amplifies the emotional impact on the audience. However, considering that Sonya and the other girls will meet their demise, Molchanov may have been aware of the somewhat morbid interpretations of the poem and chose to use it for that very reason.

The final Blok quotation, "Zhizn' bez nachala i kontsa" ("Life Is Without a Beginning or an End") from the scene "Sonya's reminiscence" (Act II), serves the same function as the first one, "My Beloved," this time putting Sonya's own reminiscence into motion. This poem represents the synthesis of the two main foci of Sonya's character development by Molchanov—Sonya as a poetic and gentle *dramatis persona* on the one hand, and a mystic prophetess, an oracle with a clear sight into the future, on the other. This poem, although expressing the transience and brevity of life and the inevitability of death, stands almost as a eulogy to artists and the purity of their worldview, which is above the earthly categories of life and death. Nonetheless, Blok's tone is neither dolorous nor grievous—he speaks of death in a manner of quiet and delicate dignity, edifying objectivity, even resembling optimism. The didactic tone continues in the second part of Sonya's recitation, with Blok instructing the reader to, with a firm sight, keep looking for the beauty in the world. It is an ode to Sonya's pure and poetic nature, which never allowed her to get petrified by lurking danger, or to perceive the occurrences in the forest as truly life-threatening. Sonya's act of reconciliation with mortality expressed through the poem once again turned out to be a fulfilled prophecy. Namely, Blok's poem served as a prediction of not only the outcomes of the coming battle or the War in general but also of Sonya's destiny. She was, knowingly or unknowingly, reading her own epitaph. Soon after Sonya initiates her arioso, the female choir behind the scene starts performing G. F. Händel's aria "Dignare" from the *Te Deum for the Victory at the Battle of Dettingen*, also known as *Dettingen Te Deum* written for two choirs and an orchestra in 1743 (Fig. 40).

Diving into the historical background of Händel's piece makes Molchanov's choice of quoting it even more perplexing. Namely, Händel, who was the composer to the Chapel Royal at the time, was commissioned to write a

681 Molchanov, *Zori zdes' tikhie*, pp. 121. Original Russian text: Соня: Что вы меня, как маленькую... Васков: Ребенок и есть...

Figure 40. *The Dawns Here Are Quiet*, Act II, "Sonya's Reminiscence," rehearsal mark 13, p. 127.

Translation: Sonya: With a fair judgment is it given you to measure all things that you here may see. And let your eye be single, firm and clear.

Te Deum to celebrate the victory of the British, Hanoverian, and Austrian troops commanded by George II over the French army at the Battle of Dettingen on June 27, 1743 during the War of the Austrian Succession.[682] It can be speculated that Molchanov chose this particular piece as a symbol or an omen of the eventual victory over Hitler's troops at the end of the opera, as well as a prophecy of the Soviet Union's triumphant victory in the Second World War. However, there are certainly other intertextual connections this quotation potentially generated worth looking into.

Although this particular Te Deum brings its own historical context into *The Dawns*, which, as mentioned earlier, could be seen as Molchanov's way of hinting the final victory of Vaskov and the Soviet triumph against Hitler's army, its text also has a significant role in building the deeper meaning of the entire scene. Specifically, one could propose that the prophetic message of Sonya's approaching demise is conveyed on two levels: both through Sonya's recitativo and the female choir performing Händel's aria. While "Te Deum laudamus" is essentially a hymn, the final part, "Dignare, Domine," functions as a prayer seeking the Lord's blessing, protection from sin, but also his mercy, which suddenly reads differently once knowing that Sonya is about to die. Molchanov effectively enhances the impact of the scene by employing two contrasting musical idioms. We can simultaneously hear Sonya's chromatic and rhythmically flexible arioso and the unisono female choir accompanied by the church organ, performing a majestic and serene, strongly tonal, Baroque counterpoint. Although the two musical idioms may seem contrasting, upon examining the score, we can observe that Sonya's melodic line is not entirely independent of the choral aria. Perhaps the complementary nature of the two musical parts symbolizes the correlation between the messages of Blok and Händel.

Through Sonya and Blok, Molchanov explores the realm of the transcendent, granting the audience access to both the past and the future. While both Vasil'yev's and Molchanov's Sonya are delicate, bright, and studious city girls, Molchanov goes a step further and adds another dimension to her character through the incorporation of Blok, transforming her into a mystical prophetess. By carefully selecting appropriate and fitting verses from Blok's works, Molchanov not only distinguishes Sonya from other characters but also endows her with ex Deo knowledge and consciousness, giving her a perspicuous mystical voice.

As evident from the presented quotations and this brief analysis of *The Dawns*, Molchanov displayed a peculiar affection, and perhaps even fascination, for cinematic techniques and tools, incorporating them into his opera to a significant extent. This could be attributed to the fact that Molchanov had

682 See Christopher Hogwood, *Handel*, London 1984, p. 84.

also composed the film score for the 1972 movie version prior to embarking on his operatic project. In *The Dawns*, Molchanov showcased an array of cinematic techniques, starting with the use of montage and dissolve, which are characteristic of the reminiscence scenes. He also employed the alternation between diegetic and non-diegetic music and utilized polyscenic narrative settings. Through these techniques, Molchanov managed to convey the plot in a more dynamic manner and, quite pragmatically, save time. Quotations possess the power to swiftly convey meaning through the associations carried by the quoted material, which is why this technique is often employed in music for films and television.[683] If an author aims to keep their opera accessible while deepening characterization as much as possible, quotations become a highly effective tool to utilize. The renowned musical quotations from the Soviet past evoke swift and unambiguous connotations in the audience, serving as both an emotional buildup and an imperative tool in constructing the background stories of our heroines, as seen in "Lullaby" and "Zhdi menya." Another effect achieved by Molchanov through the use of quotations is the incorporation of history into the opera. The Dawns becomes almost an artifact, a testament of its time, a genuine, humane, and unfeigned historical reminder of an equally genuine and humane experience. While the extensive use of quotations may be interpreted as a sign of 'laziness' or lack of imagination, I would argue that Molchanov's primary goal was to make the opera an *aide-mémoire*, assisting future generations of audiences in remembering times past.

3.5.4 A New Perspective on a Soviet Fighter?

In his opera, Molchanov introduces four very different characters, predominantly relying on the technique of quotation, both musical and textual. Rita Osyanina is a war widow and a mother, but she is also a serene, serious, and capable soldier. On the other hand, Zhen'ka Komel'kova is mostly characterized by her beauty, confidence, and pure *joie de vivre*. Liza Brichkina, a simple-minded and hardworking kolkhoz girl, is stuck in her daydreaming and filled with hopes of a happy future. While three of them are mentally anchored in either the past, the present, or the future, and operate in an extremely hazardous environment, both literally and metaphorically lost inside a dark forest, which triggers all of their anxieties and slowly brings them to the surface, Molchanov's Sonya, a bright university student of Jewish origin, does not comply with the rules of temporality and materiality—she is, in the full meaning of the word, transcendent.

683 Burkholder, "Quotation."

When superficially glancing over this brief characterization of the main four heroines, it is hard not to ask ourselves if Vasil'yev and Molchanov strove to illustrate that these young women actually represent different facets of one 'universal' woman. In that case, Rita could represent motherhood, Zhen'ka physicality or sexuality, Sonya the intellect, and Liza perhaps the sensitive and emotional side. Alternatively, if this notion seems too far-fetched, maybe these four characters, despite being distinctly different, are intended to illustrate the pluralism of various female experiences, all suddenly gathered and intertwined at the front. However, there are numerous similarities between them as well. The first connecting thread among all of them is the fact that they willingly joined the army and fought in the war, which cut short their youth, dreams, and desires. The second similarity is that they all contributed to the great victory of the Soviets over Hitler's army, making them heroic. The last connection, and no less important, is that they all lost their lives and were destined to die from the very beginning. Why is their death a crucial element of *The Dawns Here Are Quiet*?

One of the main contrasts on which Molchanov builds the tension in his opera is the one between the girls, which are portrayed as whimsical and frivolous, and Vaskov, who is orderly and serious. However, there is a whole array of other connotations that lie within this dichotomy. From the very beginning, the girls are depicted as not fitting into the war. Not only do they lack knowledge or willingness to participate in typical military conduct, except perhaps for Rita Osyanina to some degree, but they also fail to grasp the true danger of the quest they have embarked upon. And while Rita and Zhen'ka willingly and consciously engage in their final fight, unlike the other girls who lost their lives due to pure frivolity and impulsiveness, their deaths were necessary to convey the message of women being incompatible with war.

However, the message of women not fitting in the martial environment is not the dominant one Molchanov reinforces throughout *The Dawns*. It is merely a tool used to convey the ultimate essence of the opera, which is that Soviet women, despite their inherent 'incompetence,' contributed to the USSR's ultimate victory in World War II and were capable of heroism regardless of their gender. During the Stalin-era opera, the death of the main hero (typically male), the embodiment of outstanding virtues and superhuman capabilities, was practically unimaginable. The Stalinist hero, being the pinnacle version of Soviet existence, was not necessarily relatable, nor were his abilities attainable—he served as a paragon of virtue, a goal the audience was expected to strive towards. On the other hand, Molchanov's heroines, though highly stylized and idealized, are still more realistic and relatable, as is their tragic fate. Secondly, their deaths were also necessary to achieve catharsis, as the death of a young woman in war carries

a significant gravitas and has the potential to deeply impact the audience. One of the pivotal moments in the opera occurs when Vaskov brings Sonya's body from the forest and places her in front of Rita and Zhen'ka:

> Rita: She was an excellent student... Both in the school and at the university...
> Vaskov: And most importantly, she could've given birth to children. And those could've given birth to grandchildren and great-grandchildren... and the thread wouldn't break... And they reached for that thread with a knife...[684]

It is precisely that thread and the act of severing it that make the deaths of those four young girls depicted in this opera particularly distressing for the audience. Molchanov's message is clear: women, symbolizing life and birth, do not belong in the perilous environment of death and torture.

Through the use of quotations, Molchanov managed to create four relatively vivid female characters. However, I use the term 'relatively' because, despite Molchanov's potential efforts, these characters are still quite two-dimensional and stereotypical. This could be attributed to the constraints of the operatic format, which make it challenging to fully develop four well-rounded and three-dimensional characters within a single opera. Additionally, it may be influenced by the overarching notion of neo-Stalinist that was evident from the outset of the opera. Notably, there is no shortage of melodramatic patriotic references; in fact, they abound. The following dialogue occurs just before the final battle:

> Vaskov: Well, sisters, you already know it yourself, we have nowhere to go, in front, there are the Germans, and behind our back is mother Russia, our Motherland, simply put... We will hold the front... As long as there is strength, as long as at least one cartridge remains... We will grow into the ground, but we will keep standing... We stand to the death! For our Soviet Motherland...
> Rita and Zhen'ka: For our Soviet Motherland.[685]

684 Molchanov, *Zori zdes' tikhie*, pp. 167–168. Original Russian text: Рита: Круглая отличница была... в школе, и в институте... Васков: А главное, детишек могла нарожать. А те внуков и правнуков... и не оборвалась бы ниточка... А они по этой ниточке ножом...

685 Ibid., pp. 175–178. Original Russian text: Васков: Ну, вот, сестрички, сами всё знаете, отступать нам некуда, впереди немцы, а за спиной у нас Россия — матушка, Родина, проще говоря... Будем фронт держат... Пока силы есть, пока хоть один патрон останется... В землю врастем, а стоять будем... На смерть стоят! За нашу Советскую Родину... Женька и Рита: За нашу Советскую Родуниу.

Although Molchanov places a greater emphasis on the female characters compared to Vasil'yev in his novel, his primary goal is not to create truly palpable operatic heroines. Instead, they are developed to a sufficient extent to make them more relatable and therefore serve as a more effective tool in eliciting an emotional response from the audience. Furthermore, Molchanov's opera is not a psychological exploration characteristic of the Thaw period; it is exclusively a patriotic opera that glorifies Soviet victory and the heroic and selfless nature of the Soviet nation, showcasing how even women performed remarkable acts of bravery. Despite the constant reminders that they do not quite fit in, these women willingly participated in the defense of their homeland, thus perpetuating Brezhnev's myth of victorious, but also suffering Soviet nation, as mentioned earlier in the text.

Another key difference between Molchanov's opera and the ones of Shchedrin and Slonimsky is that, although we do predominantly follow the female protagonists and they serve as the focus of the narrative, it nevertheless ostensibly lacks the 'female gaze.' Not only is the whole narrative framed as Vaskov's recollection of the events that transpired, but there is even a 'musical' insinuation that we did, in fact, follow Vaskov's metamorphosis the whole time and that, although lacking in character-building and striking stage presence unlike the young women, it was him who held the whole narrative together. Namely, at the end of the scene "The Fight" (Act II), right before the epilogue which is transpiring in 'contemporary' times, Vaskov performs "V nebe zori," the female choir which opened the first act. Beyond reinforcing the cyclical nature of the narrative, this moment could also insinuate that Vaskov finally reached the final stage of his metamorphosis, embracing the 'feminine' ethos he was initially skeptical of, leaving the fight as a changed and 'better' man. Another reading of Molchanov's choice, and fitting to the nature of Brezhnev's World War II myth and memory politics, is also that, after losing their lives and being eternally muted and lost, it takes someone to speak for them and let them not be forgotten, and through the act of accepting the musical theme initially established as 'feminine,' it will be Vaskov who will remember and keep the memory alive.

Naturally, we should draw parallels between Molchanov's heroines and other female fighters in the Soviet operatic canon. The most evident connection is with Prokofiev's Ol'ga from *The Story of a Real Man*, who is also a soldier in World War II. While there are certain similarities in their portrayal, the differences are striking. Ol'ga plays a significant role on Aleksey's path, as the mere thought of her waiting serves as motivation for the main hero to endure his hardships. However, she remains only that—an ethereal *thought*, a nebulous memory residing in his consciousness. She embodies the archetype of the waiting woman, despite having joined the army and having her own life happening behind the stage. Yet, we never learn about

her experiences in the war. When she appears physically on stage for the first time, Aleksey comments on her enhanced beauty, now adorned in a military uniform with the Red Star order on her chest. She is entirely out of Prokofiev's focus, both literally and metaphorically, and her entire existence is reduced to a vague memory, serving solely as Aleksey's talisman of hope. Nevertheless, this lack of character development in Ol'ga reveals much about Stalinist ideology and artistic narratives. On the other hand, Molchanov's depiction of World War II soldiers, though stereotypical and idealized, is comparatively more realistic. Not only are they the central focus, but Molchanov also endeavors to infuse them with enough depth to make them feel as real as possible, for reasons of mostly ideological nature.

Unlike composers of the Stalinist period, Molchanov dares to scratch the surface of the 'imperfect,' which was largely avoided in operas by composers like Khrennikov, Prokofiev, and Kabalevsky. Molchanov's opera is patriotic, but in a tragic manner. He allows the audience to resonate with the bitter loss of four young female lives, in contrast to, for instance, Prokofiev's opera where Aleksey performs acts of extraordinary suffering, experiences unbelievable recovery, and eventually returns to battle unscathed, while Ol'ga remains as beautiful as ever, seemingly untouched by the tragedies of the front. However, the ultimate goal of both approaches is the same. Both the mentioned composers of the Stalinist era and Molchanov glorify Soviet success in the war, one through exceptional capability and the other, seemingly subversive, through the great 'incapability' of the Soviet soldier, who nonetheless display purity and self-sacrifice. Yet, is it truly subversive? In a sense, yes, at least when compared to the Stalinist operatic canon. Molchanov is not immune to the changing narratives of the Thaw era, nor to Brezhnev's contemporary narratives surrounding World War II and their influence on art. He takes a detour into imperfection, akin to the authors of the Thaw period, but his exploration of imperfection is not dangerous or potentially ideologically unacceptable. Instead, he offers a refreshed version of old narratives. Unlike Virineya or Varvara Vasil'yevna, these four young women never got the opportunity to be artistically dissected and portrayed as complex characters, as there is no need for it. They serve as tools, a means of emotional manipulation used to glorify the other side of the Stalinist coin—not the perfect and victorious, but the *imperfect* and *tragic* Soviet heroism.

3.6 Summary

The long Soviet sixties saw the erosion of the foundational pillars upholding the Stalinist opera project. Composers started subverting, altering, or even completely annihilating the concepts of martiality, historicity, and mythological heroism that had supported its construction. Suddenly, the sense of history was not necessarily in the foreground, the classical vision of heroism was either removed or reinvented, and the martial setting became a possibility rather than the norm.

While Khrennikov's *Mother* still adheres to the classical Stalinist construction of the operatic space, Shchedrin's opera represents a notable departure, as the depicted kolkhoz in his work is neither martial nor heroic. Although viewers are subtly led to conclude that they are witnessing a post-war kolkhoz, the shadows of war are entirely absent, as are the notions of history and Sovietness. Unlike the previous operas, this one possesses a certain timeless quality, blurring the boundaries of history and time, as well as historicity. It could theoretically be set in any agricultural and rural constellation outside the Soviet Union and still retain its coherence. Moreover, Shchedrin deliberately plays with the classic Stalinist operatic system, exaggerating it to the point of achieving an almost distorted quality. Given the overarching notion of a post-war travesty, one might expect the kolkhoz to reflect the grim realities of the time. However, Shchedrin subverts this expectation. His kolkhoz is so conspicuously happy and blissful that it borders on the grotesque, all while drawing our attention to the real tragedy, exemplified by chairman Varvara Vasil'yevna, unfolding in the periphery and drowned out by the sounds of youthful and cheerful chants.

Slonimsky's *Virineya* is set in the turbulent revolutionary times, but it employs the concepts of heroism, historicity, and martiality in a different way compared to its predecessors. While one might infer that the opera takes place in 1917, this is not explicitly stated, and the martial and political aspects, although present, cast only a faint shadow over the characters as they move chaotically across the stage. Not only are the lines of history blurred, but there is also an absence of the Stalinesque heroics unfolding on the operatic stage. In contrast to Stalinist opera, which invariably concludes with a victory, *Virineya* ends with the death of the protagonist, and victory is never declared because it holds no significance in the progression or conclusion of the plot, just further asserting that the opera never was about the Revolution and its grandiose triumph to start with. Slonimsky's portrayal of revolutionary history is a narrative of ruin, annihilation, and devastation, imbuing the world with chaos and collective anxiety. Molchanov's *The Dawns Here Are Quiet*, on the other hand, represents a certain return to the traditional interconnection between the notions of Sovietness and

martiality, but also to the understanding of the concept of historicity, albeit in a slightly altered form. Specifically, the concept of history is of paramount importance in constructing the world of Molchanov's opera, encompassing not only grand martial history but also the mundane, everyday, and average aspects of life.

If the post-Stalin era marked a transformation of the operatic environment, how can the perfect Stalinist Soviet hero of the former times function when his monolithic habitat has disappeared? What happens to the hero within the decline of heroics and the epic martial environment that once supported his endeavors? Indeed, did the Thaw mark the death of the hero? In a sense, yes. Similarly to the change of the landscape, the long sixties witnessed a noticeable change in the representation of the Soviet protagonist on the opera stage. While during the Stalinist era, protagonist and hero were synonymous terms, post-Stalin composers seemingly detached them from one another. Suddenly, the main protagonist was not necessarily heroic anymore. However, this shift did not mean the complete erasure of heroic qualities or the absence of political agency. An example of this claim can be found in Khrennikov's Pelageya Nilovna. While she experiences the clash between the individual and collective and her metamorphosis is closely linked to transcending personal needs, she does not fit the traditional hero archetype. She becomes proactive and adopts a political agenda, but only in the sense that she actively supports the 'male' heroic cause. The focus of the opera is not the grand clash between opposing forces, followed by the protagonist's acceptance of the new ideology and subsequent willingness to protect the regime—in Khrennikov's *Mother*, the act of the main character's metamorphosis takes center stage and holds the highest narrative importance. To support this transition, Khrennikov provides glimpses into Pelageya's tortured past, making her more palpable compared to the Stalinist heroes elaborated in previous section.

Shchedrin's Varvara Vasil'yevna represents a true novel Soviet operatic protagonist. What sets Varvara apart from the line of Stalinist protagonists is the intricacy of her character—she is not a two-dimensional hero of the past but a multifaceted, imperfect, and palpable human being. While she is, in a way, tied to the bygone Stalinist operatic system, she is not a hero but a regular and average Soviet citizen, detached from any martial activity, and devoid of any extra-human capabilities or characteristics. Although she holds the position of chairman in a Soviet kolkhoz, carrying a certain political connotation, it becomes clear that the Soviet duty she holds is also the one she despises, hindering her from achieving personal happiness. Shchedrin does not remove the conflict between the collective and the individual in his heroine; instead, he deepens and dissects it, essentially making it the foundation of the entire opera. Although Varvara's struggle is more

profound and pervasive than that of her male predecessors, she still ultimately makes the 'right' choice by prioritizing the collective needs over her personal ones. In contrast to the Stalinist heroes, in whom collective and individual needs always merge into a unified goal, in Varvara, but also in the subsequently elaborated heroines, the two remain separate. Choosing the collective, in case of Varvara, but also of Virineya and Molchanov's soldiers, leads to personal downfall, and in the case of the latter two, even death. Another innovation Varvara brings to the Soviet operatic context, applicable to future operas as well, is her tragic nature, though not on a grand mythological or epic scale, as her circumstances are rather nonthreatening and her tragedy of deeply personal nature.

Slonimsky's Virineya, much like Varvara, is reflective, pensive, but also tragic, suffering due to her circumstances, but also her environment. The question of the individual versus the collective also confronts Slonimsky's protagonist. Here, the individual is associated with her downfall and exclusion from the society, while it is the collective, or choosing Pavel and the communist goal, and ultimately sacrificing her life for Pavel, that leads to her redemption. While Varvara already represents an imperfect operatic protagonist, delving into the morally gray areas, the situation with Virineya is even more pronounced. Her intricacy and multifaceted nature make her arguably the most complex Soviet protagonist among all the operatic materials covered in this study. Furthermore, we can read Virineya as a true existentialist protagonist—she is aware of her power to create her own destiny and does not comply with the 'purpose' assigned to her from above (in this case, by her society; in Stalinist operas, the purpose is handed down by the state). Varvara, similarly, contemplates her existence and her purpose; however, she eventually complies with her assigned 'Soviet' role as the kolkhoz chairman.

Unlike Varvara or Virineya, who do not have a martial agency like the Stalinist heroes commonly did, Molchanov's protagonists in *The Dawns Here Are Quiet* are soldiers placed in a martial environment, a secluded small-scale battle in Karelia. Although this notion itself suggests similarity to Stalinist operatic narratives, Molchanov takes a different approach when developing his heroines. Despite being imperfect soldiers not prepared for the cruelty of the war, a theme completely unlikely during the Stalinist era where the protagonist managed the martial landscape with ease, and where heroes, despite facing formidable obstacles, invariably achieve grand victories, they are still portrayed as heroic, albeit in a different way. Their heroism stems from their genuine will to support the military cause, but also from the act of sacrificing themselves for their motherland.

The turn toward tragedy is also evident in Molchanov's work, but unlike in the previously mentioned operas, here, the tragedy serves a pronounced

political purpose. While all protagonists, beside from Vaskov, lose their lives in the fight, the tragic loss of these four young women is used to shape the World War II myth of the Brezhnev era, based on the great tragedy of the Soviet people. Unlike Varvara and Virineya, however, they are not perfectly intricate and multidimensional characters, but they are developed enough to evoke an emotional response from the audience. In other words, they are individualized enough to be striking and convincing while also being generalized enough to establish an emotional connection with the audience more easily and effectively.

The protagonist of the Stalinist opera had always been portrayed with a heroic quality that aligned with the heroic and mythological context of the time. However, this changed with the onset of the Thaw era. Suddenly, a new type of operatic lead emerged, offering a broader spectrum of heroism. Notably, the new vision of Sovietness ceased to revolve solely around extraordinary abilities and unwavering preparedness for political and military challenges. While the new protagonists still grappled with the conflict between collective and individual needs, this conflict started getting blurrier and of more allegorical nature. The new protagonists also exhibit varying degrees of personal and political agency. While Stalinist heroes actively engaged in political and martial arenas, the new heroes' roles in the Soviet political landscape became more ambiguous. Furthermore, not only has the new type of Sovietness portrayed on the stage stopped being the heroic one, it also obtained tragic undertones. All post-Stalin canon protagonists ultimately fall victim to the sweeping Soviet backdrop in one way or another. While in the case of Varvara, it ended up only with the abandonment of the private needs and personal happiness, in the case of Virineya and anti-aircraft gunners it ended up with their death. Moreover, the new protagonists emerge as multifaceted personas compared to their predecessors—more contemplative, reflective, and emotionally engaged. Their internal landscapes become of greater artistic interest than the external, physical one. This shift is evident with Pelageya Nilovna and becomes even more pronounced with subsequent protagonists. Varvara Vasil'yevna and Virineya critically view the landscape surrounding them, highlighting its grotesque aspects and unveiling it as flawed, illusory, and artificial, positioning themselves as beacons of reason and sentiment on the stage. While there is a noticeable gap between them and their surroundings, Molchanov's approach involves enriching his heroines' characters by adding historical layers, extending them longitudinally rather than vertically, almost merging them with the heroic Soviet landscape.

Although the heroines of the long sixties were still romantically or familially linked to men in their lives, and these relationships were utilized in various ways by composers to shape their decisions and destinies, these

relationships were not used as the central axis of their existence. The relationships between men and women portrayed on the stage, whether of a romantic nature as seen in the case of Varvara and Volodya Gavrilov, or Virineya and Pavel, or of a more friendly nature as observed in Vaskov and the anti-aircraft gunners, became vehicles for exploring the female characters, testing them and allowing us an entrance into the intricacies of their psyche. Moreover, they were no longer relegated to being merely the 'other' to their male counterparts—it was *them* and *their* inner lives that became central to the opera's narratives.

It is not only the dissolution of the heroic martial environment that allowed for greater flexibility in character portrayal and a focus on creating more palpable and individualized figures with psychological depth—it is also the dissolution of the Stalinist opera format and its emphasis on *song*, which inherently fostered generalization and deindividualization, that supported the development of new Soviet female protagonists. By moving away from song as the primary means of constructing musical portraits—a shift already evident in Khrennikov's *Mother*—composers embraced a classical approach to traditional operatic elements such as arias and arioso. These forms, as potent tools of character portrayal, enabled a more nuanced expression of individual identity. However, this does not mean that song completely ceased to exist from these operas—quite the contrary. Instead, it became a rudimentary reminder of Stalinist norms and conventions, deliberately reinforcing the stereotypification and generalization of characters on stage. This is particularly evident in Shchedrin's opera, where chastushki serve to create a cohort of deindividualized supporting characters who embody the bygone Stalinist narratives—figures that stand in contrast to Varvara, whose operatic idiom represents opposition to these conventions. Similarly, song remains a crucial element in Molchanov's opera, where it not only contributes to a simple and accessible musical texture but also functions as a literal evocation of the Stalinist era in his aide-mémoire opera.