

Crowd, Mob, and Nation in *Boris Godunov*: What Did Musorgsky Think, and Does It Matter?

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Russians, and we who study them, should not complain. The national question has been good to us. It was our ticket of admission into music history. It led at times to fads and crazes we could exploit. Nevertheless, one resists. Celebrations of nation, affirmations of self, declarations of solidarity with one's own kind, "playing the identity card," and suchlike exercises have led, on the whole, to more harm than good, and have often led musicology astray.¹

It is more than a dozen years now since I emitted my *cri de coeur*: "If 'How Russian is it?' is your critical question, then however the question is answered, and however the answer is valued, you have consigned Russian composers to a ghetto."² Isn't there something else of interest about

¹ The allusion within the quotation marks is to Susan McClary's "Playing the Identity Card: Of Grieg, Indians, and Women," *19th-Century Music* 31 (2008): 217–27. Like her article, which originated as a keynote address to a conference, "Music and Identity," that took place as part of the centennial celebration *Grieg 2007!* in Bergen, Norway, the present article originated as a keynote address to a conference, "Opera and Nation," that took place in Budapest in October 2010 as part of the celebrations marking the bicentennial of the birth of Ferenc Erkel and a new production at the Hungarian National Opera of his best-known work, *Bánk Bán*. Where McClary endorsed the spirit of the occasion in which she was invited to participate, I chose to challenge the premises under which the Budapest conference was convened. My essay was inspired in part as a reply to hers, and to what I take to be its regressive -romanticism.

² Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), xvii.

Russia besides how Russian she is? Something of interest about Grieg other than how Norwegian he was? And yet, protest though I may, there is nothing one can possibly say at a conference convened under the rubric “Opera and Nation” that will be construed in any other way. Thus framed, Russians, and we who study them, will always remain confined to the ghetto, resist though we may. To claim of Chaikovsky (who never insisted on it), or of Taneyev (who did), that they were “non-nationalists” is only to affirm that nationality is the standard against which all shall be measured, and that Chaikovsky and Taneyev have compounded the offense of living in a ghetto by being bad ghetto citizens.

No one escapes, not even poor Sergey Diaghilev, who thought that he could ride the crest of Russian exoticism (which is to say, Russian nationalism viewed from the outside) to world conquest and then, after the Great War, renounce or transcend it by putting Stravinsky to work on *Pulcinella*, or getting Poulenc to write *Les Biches*. When Poulenc ran into Diaghilev one evening in Monte Carlo and told the impresario that he was on his way to see *Petrouchka*, Diaghilev made a face and cried, “*Mais quel ennui!*”³ But of course the moral of the story is that he was still performing *Petrouchka* after the war—and *Firebird*, and *Sheherazade*, and *Le Festin*, and even a newly commissioned *Nuit sùr la Mont Chauve*—and needed to do so in order to keep his enterprise afloat.⁴

Well, what else is new? If it is true, according to everybody’s favorite Walter Benjamin quote, that “there is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism,” so there is no enabling factor that is not at the same time a constraint.⁵ But some paradoxes are reversible; and it is equally the case that there is no constraint that is not at the same time an enabler.

Thus, simultaneously enabled and constrained, I will take the opportunity neither merely to rail at the national question nor merely to exploit it, but to complicate it. Complication is what Susan McClary seems to rule out in her simple celebration of Grieg and his identity card, with which she strongly (and sentimentally) identifies, even claiming that the only alternative to simple celebration is “a fastidious refusal to raise the issue of Difference [that] leaves the mainstream unchallenged, its

³ Francis Poulenc, *My Friends and Myself*, trans. James Harding (London: Dennis Dobson, 1978), 127.

⁴ *Le Festin* was a choreographed miscellany of excerpts from familiar Russian scores first performed in 1909; *La Nuit sùr la Mont Chauve* was a postwar ballet, danced only in Monte Carlo, set to Musorgsky’s familiar *Noch’ na lĩsoy gore*, or *A Night on Bald Mountain*, in Rimsky-Korsakov’s redaction.

⁵ Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, ed. Marcus Bullocks and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 392.

hegemony unquestioned.”⁶ I think we can do better. The question that interests me is not whether opera is implicated in the construction of nationhood (answer: It is), or whether it can be divorced from the construction of nationhood (answer: Not unless it can be performed somewhere other than in a nation), but how that implication is played out over time. The relationship of opera—or of individual operas—and nation may be inevitable but it is also unstable, and I would like to pursue that inevitable instability with reference to an opera whose national significance has never been in the slightest doubt: Musorgsky’s *Boris Godunov*.

This is an opera that relates to nation even without reference to its own nation. As Joseph Kerman wrote long ago in *Opera and Drama*, a book that seems to have had as its purpose the elimination of as many famous operas from the canon as possible, *Boris* makes the grade because “unlike *Turandot*” by the ineffable Puccini, “*Boris Godunov* is really about something: kingship, the relation between ruler and the ruled.”⁷ Putting it a bit more abstractly, it is about legitimacy, which means that it was not only a historical drama but a drama that partook, like several other Russian operas of its time, of some of the most pressing historiographical questions of the time. Not that this is in any way surprising: in Russia, as everywhere else in Europe, the nineteenth century was the great century of historiography as well as the great century of nationalism. But that is merely two ways of making the same point, for the two were symbiotic. What is also unsurprising is that many of the foundational works of the Russian operatic repertory (including most of the serious historical operas) were written, or at least begun, during the reign of Tsar Alexander II, the emancipator tsar. (Musorgsky’s whole career, in fact, unfolded during his reign, for the composer died in the same year as the tsar, in fact only two weeks later.) During that relatively liberal time, the Russian literary scene blossomed forth as never before, and particularly its historiographical wing, because even the censor stood back briefly and let a hundred schools of historical thought contend.

Well, that was a slight exaggeration. There were three main contenders:

1. the old school of dynastic historians, established by Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin (1766–1826), the “Official Historiographer” appointed by Alexander I, whose monumental *History of the Russian*

⁶ McClary, “Playing the Identity Card,” 226.

⁷ Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 256.

State appeared in twelve volumes beginning in 1818 (the last published posthumously) and lay the foundations for the Official Nationalism proclaimed in 1835 on behalf of Alexander's younger brother and successor, Nikolai I, according to which nationhood (*narodnost*) rested on the twin pillars of orthodoxy (*pravoslaviye*) and autocracy (*samoderzhaviye*);⁸

2. a neo-Hegelian "statist" school, most prominently represented by Sergey Solovyov (1820–79), whose unfinished twenty-nine-volume *History of Russia from the Earliest Times*, the most comprehensive history of Russia ever attempted by a single author and a deliberate attempt to supersede Karamzin, began appearing in 1851 and had reached the year 1774 when it was interrupted by the author's death; its view of historical agency was as top-down as that of dynastic historians, but it was also rigorously teleological, a strong and centralized state being the goal toward which all progressive thought and action tended, the "great man . . . always and everywhere satisf[ying] the needs of the nation in a certain time";⁹

3. a short-lived "populist" school, which could only exist for the duration of the little window Alexander II's relaxed censorship had suffered to open, which promulgated a bottom-up theory of historical agency, and whose primary exponent was Nikolai Kostomarov (1817–85), who is known to all scholars of Russian music for having declared of *Boris Godunov* that it was an authentic "page of history."¹⁰

The historian's interest in contemporary opera was symptomatic of the time—and of the nation. *Boris Godunov*, based on a play by Pushkin that had until 1870 been banned from the stage (though not from publication), was also a product of that little window. The composer was an enthusiastic student of history, and in his next (unfinished) historical opera, *Khovanshchina*, he took the unprecedented step of fashioning a libretto directly from primary documentary sources rather than availing himself of a preexisting literary treatment. In that positivistic and optimistic moment in Russian intellectual history, operas could be taken quite seriously by the theatergoing public and its intellectual preceptors as contributions to the national historiography. The very first issue

⁸ See Nicholas Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I and Official Nationality in Russia, 1825–1855* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959).

⁹ Sergey Solovyov, *Istoriya Rossii s drevneyshikh vremen*, vol. 3 (containing the original vols. 5 and 6 [Moscow: K. Soldatenkov]) (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo Universiteta, 1963), 704. All uncredited translations are mine.

¹⁰ The remark appears twice in the writings of Vladimir Stasov, who overheard (or, possibly, elicited) it: first, in Stasov's 1881 obituary for Musorgsky (see Vladimir Vasil'yevich Stasov, *Izbranniye sochineniya: zhivopis', skul'ptura, muzika* [Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1952], 2:199), and, somewhat differently worded, in *Pamyati Musorgskogo*, an essay marking the fifth anniversary of the composer's death (Stasov, *Izbranniye sochineniya*, 3:34).

of the *European Courier*, one of the thickest of the famous Russian “thick journals” of historiography and liberal opinion, contained a learned exchange between Kostomarov and the arts publicist Vladimir Vasil’evich Stasov (a professional librarian) on the historical verisimilitude of an operatic production, that of *Rogneda*, an opera by Alexander Serov that was set in tenth-century Kiev. The editor of the journal, Mikhail Stasyulevich, gave their colloquy an introduction that could stand atop this essay as an epigraph:

Perhaps a few of our readers will be surprised that in our “Historical Chronicle” section we speak of the theater and of scenic productions, even though the journal is devoted specifically to historical scholarship. But such doubts will not visit those who, like us, think of the theater not as an idle amusement but accord it a high significance among the organs that motivate and develop the intellectual life of man, and, consequently, have an influence on the history of societies.¹¹

That’s so Russian! And indeed, all three of the historical schools in question had important operatic embodiments in the 1870s. Any opera that was based on a play by one of the many writers who used Karamzin as a source was willy-nilly a mouthpiece for the dynastic view. Chaikovsky’s early opera *The Oprichnik* (1870–72) is the classic example. It is based on a tragedy by Ivan Lazhechnikov (1792–1869) about a young nobleman who joins the *oprichniki*, Ivan the Terrible’s personal army, to avenge his mother, who then turns around and disowns him for what she takes to be his class perfidy; he then petitions for release in order to marry and thus dooms mother, bride, and self alike for having tempted Ivan’s arbitrary, bloodthirsty cruelty. The play, and consequently the opera, reflects Karamzin’s harsh judgment of Ivan (a verdict meant to reflect glory on the Romanov dynasty, the Official Historiographer’s employer, which had succeeded the tyrant):

Amid other sore trials of Fate, beyond the misfortune of the feudal system, beyond the Mongolian yoke, Russia had also to endure the terror of an Autocrat-Torturer. She withstood it with love for the autocracy, for she believed that God sends plagues, earthquakes, and tyrants alike; she did not break the iron scepter in Ivan’s hands but bore with her tormentor for twenty-four years, armed only with prayer and patience, in order to have, in better times, Peter the Great and Catherine the Second (History does not like to name the living).¹²

¹¹ *Vestnik Yevropi*, 1:1 (1866): 84.

¹² Nikolai Karamzin, *Istoriya gosudarstva rossiyskogo* (St. Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo Yevgeniya Yevdokimova, 1892), 9:273–74.

The statist view was embodied preeminently in Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *The Maid of Pskov* (1873), based on a play by the poet Lev Alexandrovich Mey (1822–62).¹³ In keeping with the positivist impulse of the age, the play had proposed an answer to an actual historical riddle: why had Ivan the Terrible, who destroyed the republican Hanseatic port of Novgorod to enforce the unification of Russia under his autocratic rule, nevertheless spared Pskov, Novgorod's republican sister city? In a series of soliloquies, Mey's Ivan, who seems to have read both Karamzin and Solovyov, ponders his various historiographical images. In one speech he summarizes the popular Karamzinian view of his character and reign: "A bloodthirsty blackguard, persecutor of the boyars and his zealous servants, a torturer, a killer, a monster!" But in another, a famous address to his son (quite obviously modeled on Boris Godunov's farewell to his son in Pushkin's play), which Rimsky-Korsakov turned into a monologue, he gives his reasons:

Only that kingdom is strong and great,
Where the people know they have
A single ruler, as in a single flock
There is a single shepherd. . . . Let the shepherd
Grant the herd boys their will—and the whole flock perishes!
Never mind the wolves; they themselves will do the killing
And lay the blame to the dogs. . . .
No! I would like to rule so that
Rus' will be bound by law, like armor.
But will God grant me the insight and the strength?¹⁴

"How comical is this Ivan Vasil'yevich, discoursing on his theories of government just like Mr. Solovyov, . . . almost a sweet and tender-hearted Ivan Vasil'yevich, this," was the assessment of Apollon Grigoryev, a rival poet and playwright.¹⁵ But Mey's embodiment of ongoing historiographical controversy was seen as progressive by progressives, including musical progressives like Rimsky-Korsakov and the roommate who shared his bachelor quarters at the time he was finishing *The Maid of Pskov*, and who was then at work on a historical—or rather, historiographical—opera of his own.

In the fall of 1871, Musorgsky was between versions of *Boris Godunov*. The opera as composed in 1869–70 had been submitted to the

¹³ Mey wrote three plays in all: two on episodes in the life of Ivan the Terrible—*The Tsar's Bride* (*Tsarskaya nevesta*, 1849), *The Maid of Pskov* (*Pskovityanka*, 1859)—and one, *Servilia* (1853), which takes place in ancient Rome. All three were turned into operas by Rimsky-Korsakov.

¹⁴ *Pskovityanka*, act 5, sc. 10 and act 5, sc. 1, in Lev Alexandrovich Mey, *Drami* (Moscow: Sovetskiy pisatel', 1961), 194.

¹⁵ *Sochineniya Ap. Grigor'yeva*, vol. 1 (St. Petersburg: Izd. N.N. Strakhova, 1876), 515.

Imperial Theaters directorate, whose opera committee notoriously rejected it in February 1871 on the grounds that it contained no prima donna role. But the changes that Musorgsky made in revising the opera went so much further than anything required by the committee that one can only conclude that the main impetus toward rethinking his opera lay elsewhere.¹⁶ One of the biggest changes that had nothing to do with the Imperial Theaters' demands was the substitution of one crowd scene by another. The change embodies far more than a musical or dramaturgical revision. It represents a 180-degree shift from Karamzin's top-down conception of history to the bottom-up view only lately propounded by Kostomarov. In effect, the two versions of *Boris* directly contend with one another in keeping with contemporaneous debates in the realm of historical scholarship—testimony to the uniqueness of the moment in Russian intellectual history.

The Karamzinian view had come to Musorgsky straight from Pushkin. The original version of the opera was composed at a time when the composer was entertaining very strict “realist” views as to the relationship between operatic and spoken theater. In the wake of a famous experiment by Alexander Dargomizhsky—that “great teacher of musical truth” as Musorgsky called him on two separate occasions—who set the text of Pushkin's *The Stone Guest* (one of four “little tragedies” of 1830) exactly as it stood, without any specially prepared libretto, Musorgsky had written an even more radically realistic opera, a setting of several scenes from the first act of Gogol's farce *Marriage*, subtitled an “experiment in dramatic music in prose” that would make absolutely no compromise with the criteria of spoken drama.

The original libretto of *Boris Godunov* was a non-libretto of this type. Very nearly all of its words came directly from Pushkin's original text—although because, unlike *The Stone Guest*, *Boris Godunov* was a full-length play, it had to be whittled down for musical treatment, musical tempos being generally so much slower than spoken ones. Musorgsky's solution, calculated on the presumed familiarity of the historical plot to his audience, was to cherry-pick. The two scenes that together made up the first act—the monastery “Cell Scene” that launches the career of the Pretender, or False Dmitry, and the “Scene at the Lithuanian Border”

¹⁶ A comprehensive treatment of the revision in all its overdetermined aspects is attempted in my essay “Musorgsky vs. Musorgsky: The Versions of *Boris Godunov*,” *19th-Century Music* 8, nos. 2–3 (1984–85): 91–118, and 245–72; repr. in Richard Taruskin, *Musorgsky: Eight Essays and an Epilogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 201–90; for a more comprehensive examination of the relationship between Russian historiography and Russian historical opera, see my “The Present in the Past: Russian Opera and Russian Historiography, circa 1870,” in *Russian and Soviet Music: Essays for Boris Schwarz*, ed. Malcolm H. Brown (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), 77–146; rpt. in *Musorgsky: Eight Essays and an Epilogue*, 123–200.

that shows its progress—were evidently chosen because they embodied a stark Shakespearean contrast that would give Musorgsky’s radical methods an ideal proving ground. The “Cell Scene” was famous for its lofty idealization and its beautiful iambic-pentameter verses, while the “Scene at the Lithuanian Border” was a comic scene in prose. The one could be set à la *The Stone Guest* and the other à la *Marriage*. Apart from the opening scene that shows the crowd in forced supplication to the Tsar-elect, conflating lines from the second and third scenes of Pushkin’s first act, for the rest Musorgsky simply threw out all the scenes in which the title character failed to appear, leaving a total of not twenty-three but only six from which to adapt his text. In this greatly reduced text Boris Godunov looms much larger than he did in Pushkin’s play, which chiefly concerns the progress of the Pretender (and thus belongs to a genre known to literary historians as the “Demetrius play,” descending from the Spanish and English theaters of the early seventeenth century).¹⁷

One (and only one) of these scenes brought Boris into confrontation with the crowd. Pushkin’s scene 17 (Square in Front of the Cathedral in Moscow) corresponds to the sixth (penultimate) scene of the opera in its 1869 version, designated “Square before the Shrine of the Blessed Basil,” i.e., Red Square. Pushkin had based it on a passage in Karamzin that concerned not the rise of the False Dmitry but rather the death of Boris’s own first-born son in 1588, ten years before he became tsar.

Godunov, . . . having at the time only one infant son, took him recklessly with him, though the boy was sick, to the church of St. Basil the Blessed, paying his doctors no heed. The infant died. At the time there was in Moscow a fool in God [*yurodiviĭ*], esteemed for his real or imaginary holiness. Walking naked through the streets in bitter cold, his hair hanging long and wild, he foretold calamities and solemnly calumniated Boris. But Boris held his peace and dared not do him the smallest harm, whether out of fear of the populace or because he believed in the man’s holiness. Such *yurodiviĭe*, or blessed simpletons, appeared frequently in the capital wearing chains of penance called *verigi*. They were privileged to reproach anyone, no matter how important, right in the eye, if their conduct was bad. And they could take whatever they wanted from shops without paying. The merchants would thank them for it as if for a great favor.¹⁸

¹⁷ Examples include Lope de Vega’s *El Gran Duque de Moscovia y Emperador Perseguido* and John Fletcher’s *The Loyal Subject*. See Ervin C. Brody, *The Demetrius Legend and Its Literary Treatment in the Age of the Baroque* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1972). A later example, contemporaneous with Pushkin but unknown to him, was Schiller’s unfinished *Demetrius*.

¹⁸ Karamzin, *Istoriya gosudarstva rossiyskogo*, 10:169.

As Pushkin adapted it, Boris orders a church service so as to pronounce an anathema on the Pretender. On his way out he is accosted by the *yurodiviĭ*, who complains to Boris that some boys have stolen a penny from him, and that the tsar should have them killed, the way he had had the lawful tsarevich killed. Boris asks the holy man to pray for him but is rebuffed. The scene opens with some mutterings from the crowd, which show them ignorant and apathetic:

A MAN IN THE CROWD: Will the Tsar be leaving the cathedral soon?
 A SECOND MAN: The mass has ended; and now the public prayers are taking place.
 FIRST MAN: Well, did they put a curse on *what's his name*?
 SECOND MAN: I was standing on the porch and heard the deacon cry out: Gríska Otrépev—anathema!
 FIRST MAN: Well, they can curse him if they like, but the Tsarévich has nothing to do with Otrépev.
 SECOND Man: Now they're singing a requiem for the dead Tsarévich.
 FIRST Man: A requiem for someone who's still alive! They'll pay for this one day, these godless blasphemers.
 A THIRD Man: Listen! There's some commotion . . . is it the Tsar?¹⁹

With some little modifications, Musorgsky set these lines as “realistic” choral recitative. Then comes the episode of the *yurodiviĭ* and the thieving boys, after which the crowd cries out, “The Tsar! The Tsar is coming.” As Boris and his entourage file out of the church, the crowd accompanies their procession with a few lines that Musorgsky cobbled himself:

Our provider, Little Father, give for Christ's sake!
 Our father, Lord, for Christ's sake!
 Tsar, our Lord, for Christ's sake!
 Our provider, Little Father, send aid for Christ's sake!
 Bread! Bread! Give to the hungry!
 Bread! Bread! Give us bread! Little Father, for Christ's sake!

Musorgsky set these plain lines beautifully, in a folkloric lyric style rather than as recitative, and in so doing emphasized that it was very much Karamzin's crowd that he was showing us: a submissive, passive, impotent lot, conscious only of its bodily needs and looking trustingly to their Tsar, their “Little Father” (*batyushka*), heaven's emissary, for salvation. They are shown in the act of withstanding adversity, as Karamzin would say, with love for the autocracy. The crowd does not participate in

¹⁹ Alexander Pushkin, *Boris Godunov and Other Dramatic Works*, trans. James E. Falen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 72.

the searing confrontation with the *yurodiviĭ*; on the contrary, when the holy fool accuses the “Tsar-Herod” of murder, the crowd—according to Musorgsky’s stage direction, not Pushkin’s—disperses in horror.

II

Before his departure from Petrograd I went to see him and experienced something extraordinary. This something is none other than a milestone in Korsinka’s talent. He has realized the dramatic essence of musical drama. He, that is Korsinka, has concocted some magnificent history with the choruses in the *veche*—just as it should be: I actually burst out laughing with delight.²⁰

Korsinka was Rimsky-Korsakov, and the *veche* was the scene in *The Maid of Pskov* that showed the Pskov republican council or *veche* in panicky session, attempting to cope with the prospect of Ivan the Terrible’s likely attack. The scene ends with an internal schism and the secession of a gang of rebels who (unlike the accommodating governors) will meet a violent fate. It was the internal dissension, and Rimsky-Korsakov’s success in finding a way of rendering it musically, that captured Musorgsky’s imagination. At the end of the scene, the rebels march off singing a genuine (transcribed) folk song; the governors implore them to reconsider in impassioned recitative, the town tocsin sounds an alarm, and the dread Tsar’s leitmotif looms overall. This contrapuntal tour-de-force, montaging three “natural” or life-drawn artifacts—virtually unretouched folk song, speech-mimicking recitative, and mimetic orchestral effect—was the very epitome of realist ideals as then conceived by the reform-minded composers of the New Russian School (known informally in English-speaking countries as the Mighty Five). César Cui, the member of the group whose music is most irretrievably forgotten but who was at the time its most famous member because he was a big tough critic as well as a composer, greeted Rimsky’s crowd scene with what for him was an orgy of praise:

You forget that before you is a stage, and on it choristers performing a more or less skillfully constructed crowd scene. Before you is reality, the living people, and all of it accompanied by matchless, meaty music from beginning to end. A crowd scene like this has never appeared in any existing opera. Even if everything else in *The Maid of Pskov* had been completely worthless, this *veche* scene alone would have been enough to give the opera significance in the history of art and a prominent place

²⁰ Musorgsky to Nadezhda and Alexandra Purgold, 18 June 1870, in Modest Musorgsky, *Literaturnoye naslediyе: pis'ma, biograficheskiye materialy i dokumenty*, vol. 1, ed. Alexandra Orlova and Mikhail Pekelis (Moscow: Muzika, 1971), 110.

among the most remarkable of operas, and its author a place among the best operatic composers.²¹

Musorgsky must have been fairly itching to emulate this scene and must have welcomed the rejection of the earlier version of *Boris Godunov* for the pretext it gave him to do so. He had a particularly bemusing experience with the St. Basil's scene in July 1870, a month after expressing his enthusiasm for Rimsky's *veche*. At a gathering at Stasov's dacha outside St. Petersburg, Musorgsky played the first version of the opera, then in limbo between completion and rejection, and found to his bewilderment that even such a sympathetic, hand-picked audience could mistake the opera's genre and tone, hence its meaning. "As regards the peasants in *Boris*," he wrote to Rimsky, "some found them to be *bouffe*(!), while others saw tragedy."²² Perceiving that in the eyes—or ears—of his audience the prose recitative of his choral scenes ineluctably spelled "comedy," its traditional medium, Musorgsky had to acknowledge a formerly unrecognized problem for realist art. From this moment, perhaps, and not from the eventual rejection, dated his first impulse to revise his opera. The needed revision was one that would clarify the opera's genre by making decisive the contrast between what was "*bouffe*" and what was not, and by elevating the tone of the opera to a level appropriate to tragedy.

In place of the realist, Pushkin-derived prose recitative in the St. Basil's scene, Musorgsky wrote himself a text that contained all the elements Rimsky had deployed in his *veche*: naturalistic recitative, to be sure (including choral recitative); but also sweeping orchestral music, some of it mimetic of the stage action, and choral folk song adapted from various genres including wedding songs and epic narratives or *bilinī*. Musorgsky also wrote verses for a "revolutionary" chorus (*Razgulyalas' udal' molodetskaya*, "Bold insolence runs wild") that would provide a more extended and developed continuous number than anything in Rimsky's setting. The whole would end with the Pretender's arrival on the scene, to be greeted by the crowd and followed offstage to victory, leaving the *yurodiviy* (salvaged from St. Basil's along with the little episode of kopeck-stealing) to lament the Time of Troubles.

The trouble was that Pushkin, who had no such conception of such collective popular agency, had not furnished material for such a scene. The closest to the sort of unruly crowd scene Mey had provided for Rimsky to set comes in Pushkin's penultimate scene, when the crowd, having been incited to riot by a tirade uttered by the poet's namesake,

²¹ César Antonovich Cui, *Izbranniye stat'i* (Leningrad: Muzgiz, 1952), 221.

²² Musorgsky, *Literaturnoye nasledīye*, 1:117.

the boyar Pushkin, rushes off toward the palace now occupied by Boris's helpless son, shouting, "Bind him, drown him! Hail Dmitry! Crush the race of Godunov!"—an episode that comes straight from Karamzin and could have gone straight into Musorgsky. A tiny hint of post-Karamzinian crowd behavior may also lurk in Pushkin's preceding scene 21, when the boyar Pushkin, conferring with the boyar Basmanov (a fellow defector to the Pretender's cause), confidently predicts victory:

You want to know, Basmánov, where we're strong?
 Not in our troops, not in our Polish allies,
 But in men's minds, in what the people prize!
 And surely you recall our easy conquests,
 The peaceful triumphs that Dimítiry's won;
 How everywhere, without a single shot,
 Whole towns and cities have surrendered meekly,
 Their leaders who resisted—bound and gagged.²³

But that is all one finds in Pushkin—just a hint, and no words on which to base a libretto. The first actual spark of the eventual scene that Musorgsky wrote to replace St. Basil's may have been touched off by a couple of lines on the Pretender's progress, which Musorgsky himself inserted into the text of that very scene: "He's already got as far as Kromy, they say.—He's coming with his troops to Moscow.—He's blasting Boris's troops to smithereens." Even this, however, is a long way from the eventual "Scene at Kromy" (*stsená pod Kromami*) or "revolution scene" on which Musorgsky embarked in November 1871, while sharing quarters with Rimsky-Korsakov (who was at that very moment orchestrating the *veche*, so that its strains were probably resounding on the communal piano every day). The inserted lines refer to the siege and pitched battle of 1605 described in detail by Karamzin, at which the False Dmitry's Polish troops were joined by several hundred Don Cossacks. It was these Cossacks who had bound and taken prisoner the boyar Khrushchev (whose name had to be omitted from Russian programs, whether of the play or of the opera, between 1956 and 1964 while his namesake ruled the Soviet Union), whom Boris had sent to lead them against the Pretender. They presented Khrushchev to Dmitry as a trophy at Kromy, a town near Oryol, about 220 miles south-southwest of Moscow. According to Karamzin, this was the turning point in the Pretender's campaign.

But was Karamzin's account Musorgsky's source? In his obituary, Stasov claimed it was, and that he and Musorgsky had planned the scene together. Indeed, there are a few footnote references to the Official Historiographer in the earliest printed libretto of Musorgsky's

²³ Pushkin, *Boris Godunov*, trans. James E. Falen, 87.

Kromy scene. But Alexandra Orlova and Maria Shneerson, who tried to run the citations down, concluded that they were fictitious references to mislead the censor and have reached the same conclusion as have I, after a thorough perusal of Karamzin, that “revolt is not even mentioned in [his] *History*”—as indeed one would not expect it to be.²⁴ The closest Karamzin ever comes to admitting that “the people” (*narod*) had any active role in the downfall of Godunov is a single caustic remark:

In the cities, the villages, and along the highways, proclamations of Dmitry to the inhabitants of Russia were circulated, containing news that he was alive and would soon be among them. The people were astonished, not knowing whether to believe it. But the tramps, the good-for-nothings, the robbers long since inhabiting the northern regions, rejoiced: their time was coming. Some came running to the Pretender in Galicia; others ran to Kiev, where . . . a banner had been set out to rally a militia.²⁵

Musorgsky surely read this passage and was impressed, for in his correspondence he always referred to the Kromy scene as “the tramps” (*brodyagi*). But Karamzin did nothing more than name them; his tramps were an anarchic element to be harshly judged and explicitly distinguished from “the people”:

It was not a host that assembled against Boris, but a scum. An entirely insignificant portion of the [Polish] nobility, in deference to their king, . . . or else flattering themselves with the thought of deeds of derring-do with the exiled tsarevich, showed up in Sambor and Lvov. Also there hurried thither all manner of tramps, hungry and half-naked, demanding arms not for victorious battle but for plunder and favors, which Mnieszek [the Pretender’s sponsor and father-in-law] granted generously in hopes for the future.²⁶

Musorgsky could not have drawn his inspiration from the riffraff Karamzin describes. Although he, too, harshly judged the revolting mob (which furnished, in its credulity, the revised opera’s tragic hero), he needed a historian who drew the kind of unambiguous connection that Karamzin was unwilling to draw between the famine-inspired lawlessness in the Russian countryside and the progress of the False Dmitry. In order to find a reliable historiographical sanction for a

²⁴ Alexandra Orlova and Maria Shneerson, “After Pushkin and Karamzin: Researching the Sources for the Libretto of *Boris Godunov*,” in *Musorgsky: In Memoriam 1881–1981*, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown, Russian Music Studies 3 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 253.

²⁵ Karamzin, *Istoriya gosudarstva rossiiskogo*, 11:85.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 84.

choral scene to match Rimsky's *veche*, Musorgsky needed a historian who viewed the people as an authentic agent in the events of the Time of Troubles between the Russian dynasties, not a mere reactor to them, as portrayed both by aristocratic historians like Karamzin and by "statists" like Solovoyov.

In short, he needed Kostomarov, and eventually he found his man. Kostomarov's idealization of the peasantry made it inevitable that he should specialize in the chronicling of popular uprisings. His first big success was *Stenka Razin's Revolt*, one of the first fruits of the liberalized censorship under Alexander II.²⁷ The book's popularity was phenomenal and made its author a hero. In the early sixties his lectures were so appealing to the students at St. Petersburg University who crowded his auditorium that more than once Kostomarov was carried out on their shoulders.²⁸

Kostomarov's magnum opus was *The Time of Troubles of the Russian State in the Beginning of the Seventeenth Century* (*Smutnoye vremya moskovskogo gosudarstva v nachale XVII-ogo stoletiya*), first published serially in the *European Courier* in 1866. It was the most recent authoritative word on the subject when Musorgsky came to revise *Boris*. Its narrative began at the year 1604, the year of the False Dmitry's victory over the forces of Boris Godunov. In the scene-setting introduction to the main account, Kostomarov wrote an extended paragraph that directly related the unrest caused by famine to the progress of the Pretender, thereby setting out the conceptual kernel of Musorgsky's Kromy scene:

If old-timers couldn't remember such a horrible famine in Russia, neither would they remember such vagrancy [*brodyazhnichestvo*] as then was rife. Lords had turned out their servants when it became excessively dear to feed them, and later, when the price of bread had fallen, wanted to get them back. But their former serfs, if they had managed to survive the famine, were living with other masters or else had developed a taste for wandering—and did not wish to turn themselves in. Lawsuits and prosecutions multiplied. Hunted fugitives gathered in gangs. To these tramps were added a multitude of serfs who had belonged to fallen boyars. Boris had forbidden taking them as serfs, and this had been just as hard on them as the prohibition on transfers had been on the peasants. Having been indentured to one master, it was a rare serf who wanted to leave the status of serf altogether; practically

²⁷ N. I. Kostomarov, *Bunt Sten'ki Razina* (St. Petersburg: Izdaniye knigoprodavtsa D. E. Kozhanchikova, 1859).

²⁸ Oblique testimony to Kostomarov's status can be found in Stasov's hysterical letter of 17 May 1863 to Balakirev on Serov's *Judith*, an opera by his worst enemy: "Immediately, from the very first note Serov became the idol of St. Petersburg, just such an idol as Kostomarov was recently"; see M. A. Balakirev and V. V. Stasov, *Perepiska*, vol. 1, ed. Anastasiya Liapunova (Moscow: Muzika, 1970), 199.

all ran away to find another place. These “fallen” serfs gathered at that time by the thousands. Deprived of the right to roam from court to court, they attached themselves to the robber gangs, which sprang up everywhere in varying numbers. Most serfs had no other way of feeding themselves. The only exceptions were those who knew some trade. There were a multitude of fugitives from noble courts, from monasteries, from outlying settlements. They ran wild during the famine, and later, when they were sought by their former masters, they couldn’t buy themselves off, especially since so many died in the famine. On the survivors a huge tax was declared before they could be free of their obligations. And so they ran, cursing the extortion, the injustice of the bailiffs and elders, the violent measures of their henchmen. Some ran off to Siberia, others to the Don, still others to the Dnepr. Many settled on the Ukrainian plains and there evaded their state-imposed obligations. The fact that the northern Ukraine had happily been spared the worst of the famine was the reason for an extreme concentration of people in that region. The government began to take measures for the return of the fugitives, and they for their part were prepared to resist. This whole fugitive population was naturally unhappy with the Moscow authorities. They were prepared to throw themselves with joy at whoever would lead them against Boris, at whoever would promise them an advantage. This was not a matter of aspiring to this or that political or social order; the huge crowd of sufferers easily attached itself to a new face in the hope that under a new regime things would be better than under the old.²⁹

Not a scum, then, but a mass of insulted and injured with whom one can (and the historian does) sympathize. As to the people as an active force that, when aroused, can threaten tsars, consider Kostomarov’s description of the gang of Khlopka Kosolap’iy (and substitute the name Khrushchev for Basmanov):

Khlopka did not limit himself to attacking travelers on the highway; with an enormous gang he went straight to Moscow, threatening to annihilate the throne, the boyars, and all that was sanctioned by authority, powerful, rich, and oppressive in Russia. In October 1603, Boris sent troops to destroy this gang, under the leadership of the *okol’nichiy* [tsar’s deputy] Ivan Fyodorovich Basmanov. They had not gotten far from Moscow when suddenly “thieves” fell upon Basmanov. They attacked the tsar’s troops on a path that cut through the underbrush. Basmanov was killed.³⁰

As for Khrushchev himself, the story of his capture by the Don Cossacks and his acceptance of the False Dmitry (which last is part of the

²⁹ N. I. Kostomarov, *Sobraniye sochinenii N. I. Kostomarova: istoricheskaya monografiya i issledovaniya*, vol. 3 (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya M. M. Stasyulevich, 1903), 42–43.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

action in Musorgsky's Kromy scene) is related by Kostomarov in much greater detail than by any previous historian:

Here [on the left bank of the Dnepr near Kiev], there came again to Dmitry emissaries from the Don Cossacks with representations of the willingness of the whole independent population of the Don basin to serve the miraculously spared tsarevich. As an earnest of their fidelity they lay at their feet the nobleman Pyotr Khrushchev, who had been sent by Boris to incite them against Dmitry. The prisoner, brought before him in shackles, no sooner caught sight of the Pretender than he fell at his feet and said, "Now I see that you are the natural-born, true tsarevich. Your face resembles that of your father, the sovereign Tsar Ivan Vasil'yevich [the Terrible]. Forgive us, Lord, and show us mercy. In our ignorance we served Boris, but when they see you, all will recognize you."³¹

Finally, Kostomarov narrates several incidents that furnished Musorgsky with the model for the chorus of mockery in his Kromy scene. They relate, actually, to the period immediately following Boris's death, when his son and family were routed from the palace. Here are two:

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Meanwhile, on the other side of the river there were still those who, having sworn loyalty to Boris's widow and son, wished to remain true to their vows and persuaded others in the name of church and duty not to turn traitor. They reviled Dmitry, proclaiming, "Long live the children of Boris Fyodorovich!" Then Korela shouted: "Beat them, beat them, not with swords, not with sticks, but with poles; beat them and say 'There you are, there you are! Don't you be picking fights with us!'" This appealed to the assembled troops, especially the ones from Ryazan. The Godunovites were turned loose, and the Dmitryites chased them with laughter and beat them, some with whips, some with sticks and some with fists.³²

[The supporters of Boris] were robbed and plundered without any mercy, from those marked by the people's hatred even the clothing was ripped, and many were seen that day—so eyewitnesses report—covering their nakedness as Adam did, with leaves. The mob, who had suffered long and much, who had been so long humiliated, rejoiced in this day, amused themselves at the expense of the noble and wealthy, paid them back for their former humiliation. Even those who had not sided with the Godunovs suffered on that day; it was enough to have been rich. And the general plunder and drunkenness continued until nightfall, when all slept like the dead.³³

So when Kostomarov said of Musorgsky's *Boris* that it was "a page of history," one understands what he meant—it was a page of *his* history.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

³² *Ibid.*, 117.

³³ *Ibid.*, 127–28.

That he was referring to Kromy, the scene that concluded the revised version in the original production, can go without saying. The difference between Kromy and the rest of the opera was precisely the difference between Karamzin and Kostomarov.

But was that difference indicative of Musorgsky's political views? One of his intimates, Alexandra Molas (née Purgold), Rimsky-Korsakov's sister-in-law and a singer to whom Musorgsky had dedicated several songs in the 1860s, much later told the young Boris Asafyev that "the Kromy Forest scene arose in connection with the fact that Musorgsky recast the denouement of his tragedy in keeping with the burgeoning populist [*narodnichestvenniye*] tendencies" of the time.³⁴ That much is true, but Asafyev, by then the sanctioned voice of the Soviet musicological establishment, added tendentiously that "precisely what Nikolai I's regime did not permit Pushkin to do was done here by Musorgsky."³⁵ Musorgsky's scene followed a historiographical line that did not so much as exist in Pushkin's time, nor indeed until the 1860s. Kostomarov's interpretation of events was as much a denial of Solov'yov's "statism" as the latter had been of Karamzin's absolutism, the source of Pushkin's view of the Time of Troubles, and, at first, of Musorgsky's as well.

Nevertheless, it would be facile to claim that the Kromy scene is a direct expression, or even evidence, of Musorgsky's own changed ideological commitment, however palatable to liberal opinion (to say nothing of Soviet opinion, asserted as dogma against occasional questioners).³⁶ When the conductor of the premiere production, Eduard Nápravník, cut the scene to ribbons in rehearsal, Musorgsky acquiesced and even thanked him. (Stasov railed to his daughter in a letter that he couldn't understand how the composer could have been "so cowardly, so shallow and small.")³⁷ Two and a half years later, in October 1876, the Maryinsky Theater dropped the scene from the opera altogether (without reinstating its predecessor, it goes without saying, which had never been rehearsed or put into production). Stasov shrieked in protest that the theater had "castrated" the opera, and in his obituary essay for the composer he would claim that the removal of the Kromy scene had mortally offended the composer and even

³⁴ Boris Asafyev, "'Boris Godunov' Musorgskogo, kak muzikal'niy spektakl' iz Pushkina," in Akademik Boris Vladimirovich Asafyev, *Izbranniye trudī*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1954), 132.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 137.

³⁶ See Yury Nikolayevich Tyulin, Alexey Ivanovich Kandinsky, et al., "K izucheniyu naslediya M. P. Musorgskogo: stsena 'pod Kromami' v dramaturgii 'Borisa Godunova,'" *Sovetskaya muzika*, no. 3 (1970): 90–114.

³⁷ Letter of 2 February 1874, in V. V. Stasov, *Pis'ma k rodnim*, vol. 1, part 2 (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1953), 209.

hastened his death.³⁸ Another close friend of the composer, Count Arseniy Golenishchev-Kutuzov, reported in his memoirs that, on the contrary, “Musorgsky not only approved this cut, he was particularly pleased with it.” Surprised at this, Golenishchev-Kutuzov argued in favor of the scene; whereupon Musorgsky “heatedly asserted that its complete omission was demanded not only by the plot of the drama and the demands of the stage but also by his author’s conscience.” “‘In this act,’ he went on, ‘and for the only time in my life, I lied about the Russian people. The people’s mockery of the boyar [Khrushchev]—that’s untrue, that is an un-Russian trait. An infuriated people may kill, may execute, but they do not mock their victim.’”³⁹

So which was it? Did Musorgsky agree with Kostomarov or with Karamzin? How did he himself regard the Time of Troubles or the question of Boris’s legitimacy? The evidence, which consists mostly of claims by rival memoirists, does not permit a conclusive answer. Indeed, the opera’s creative history, as I have already suggested, points toward a musical and a dramaturgical rather than a political stimulus toward revision. The substitution of the Kromy scene for the one at St. Basil was motivated less by any principled commitment to populism (unlikely, after all, in a member of the gentry class who had been impoverished by Alexander II’s emancipation of the serfs) than a wish to clarify the opera’s tragic genre and a keen admiration for Rimsky-Korsakov’s choral dramaturgy in that quintessentially “statist” opera *The Maid of Pskov*. In keeping with statist principles, Mey’s (and Rimsky’s) rebels had come to a bad end. Mob action comes (implicitly) to a bad end in *Boris Godunov* as well. After Kostomarov’s unruly crowd of rebels follow the Pretender and his Polish retinue offstage, Pushkin’s *yurodiviĭ*, transferred to Kromy from the discarded St. Basil’s scene, is left alone to croon his crazed prophecy of Russia’s downfall: “Gore, gore Rusi, / Plach’, plach’, russkiy lyud, / golodniy lyud! . . .” (Woe, woe to Rus’, / weep, weep, Russian folk, / hungry folk!)

III

By transferring the role of the *yurodiviĭ* from St. Basil’s to Kromy, Musorgsky made sure that the two scenes could not be performed in a single performance. One was definitely intended to replace the other. (In fact, they were both intended to occupy the same—penultimate—position

³⁸ V. V. Stasov, “Urezki v ‘Borise Godunove’ Musorgskogo (Pis’mo v redaktsiyu),” *Novoye vremya* 239 (27 Oct. 1876); repr. in V. V. Stasov, *Izbranniye sochineniya* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1952), 1:278–79; 2:199.

³⁹ *Muzikal’noye nasledstvo: Sbornik materialov po istorii muzikal’noy kul’turi v Rossii*, M. V. Ivanov-Boretsky (Moscow: Ogiz and Musgiz, 1935), 20.

in the sequence of scenes, before Boris's death, until Musorgsky—or rather, his historian friend Vladimir Nikolsky—had the inspired idea of ending the opera with Kromy and the *yurodiviy*'s heartbreaking lament.) Whatever his political or historiographical convictions, Musorgsky could not have been unaware that the two scenes were as incompatible ideologically as they were textually and musically redundant.

For a long time no one was tempted to conflate them, for the simple reason that the St. Basil's scene lay unpublished and forgotten in Musorgsky's archive at the St. Petersburg Imperial (later State) Public Library. Not counting an imprecise and ambiguous passing reference to it in Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's memoirs, first published (posthumously) in 1909,⁴⁰ the scene was first brought to public attention by Andrey Nikolayevich Rimsky-Korsakov, the composer's musicologist son, who had succeeded Stasov as curator of musical manuscripts at the Library, in an article that appeared in 1917 (not an auspicious year for Russian musicology) in a scholarly journal of small circulation that the younger Rimsky-Korsakov was then editing.⁴¹ Nine years later, in 1926, Oskar von Riesemann, an Estonian-born musicologist living in Germany, finally published the St. Basil's scene, in his own error-filled transcription, as an appendix to his biography of Musorgsky.⁴² Two years after that, the whole first version of the opera was published in Pavel Lamm's edition,⁴³ performed in Leningrad, and won for itself a cult following among Russian operatic cognoscenti.

Once it was possible to do so, it was only a matter of time until someone had the strange yet somehow inevitable idea of including both crowd scenes in a single production. The first such production, which included the first public performance of the scene at St. Basil's, was unveiled in Moscow on 18 January 1927, a little in advance of the resurrection of Musorgsky's unadulterated first version in Leningrad. At the instigation of the conductor Ariy Moiseyevich Pazovsky (1887–1953), the Moscow Bolshoy Theater was reviving *Boris* in a production that added the newly discovered scene to the Rimsky-Korsakov version of the opera, falsely billing it as having been “omitted earlier at the behest of the censor.” An orchestration of the scene in the brilliant style of Rimsky-Korsakov was commissioned from Mikhaïl Mikhailovich Ippolitov-Ivanov (1859–1935), a former pupil of Rimsky-Korsakov, who was then on the

⁴⁰ See Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, *My Musical Life*, trans. Judah A. Joffe (London: Eulenburg Books, 1974), 110.

⁴¹ See Andrey Nikolayevich Rimsky-Korsakov, “‘Boris Godunov’ M. P. Musorgskogo,” *Muzikal'niy sovmennik* 5–6 (Jan.–Feb. 1917): 108–67.

⁴² Oskar von Riesemann, *Modest Petrowitsch Mussorgski*, Monographien zur russischen Musik 2 (Munich: Drei Masken Verlag, 1926).

⁴³ *Boris Godunov: opera v četirekh deystviyakh s prologom*, ed. Pavel Lamm (Moscow: Muz. Sektor Gos. Izd-vo, 1928).

theater's conducting staff, after Alexander Glazunov (Rimsky-Korsakov's most eminent former pupil then still living in Russia) refused.⁴⁴ The next year, as Robert W. Oldani relates, "the Stanislavsky Opera Theater apparently rehearsed both the Kromy scene and the St. Basil scene for a single production, though so-called 'technical considerations' ultimately forced the omission of Kromy since an extended intermission before the work's end would have made the opera too long."⁴⁵

The familiar version with both scenes (St. Basil in Ippolitov-Ivanov's version) flanking the death of Boris became canonical in the USSR beginning in 1939, when a gala new production of *Boris Godunov* was mounted at the Bolshoy in honor of the composer's birth centennial. Positioning the two scenes on either side of what was originally to have been the opera's last scene somewhat mitigated their redundancy—but only somewhat. There is every reason to suppose that the decision to include both was motivated by a Stalinist view of the opera's role as a political commentary on the illegitimacy of tsarist rule, each scene contributing its mite to that propagandistic task. There was no way one could logically justify the conflation, which Musorgsky had never envisaged, and actually made impossible—or so he thought.

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And yet both scenes are searingly effective musical and dramatic achievements. Both bring tears to the eyes of the audience, and the reprise of the *yurodiviy*'s lament (which is not a reprise unless both of the scenes are included) is perhaps the crowning stroke of musicodramatic genius. No wonder the version of the opera concocted in Moscow possibly for political purposes became standard in the Soviet Union, achieved popularity abroad thanks to recordings and a widely shown film (in which the part of the *yurodiviy* in both scenes was unforgettably sung by Ivan Kozlovsky), and has remained viable not only in post-Soviet Russia but in Europe and America as well. Among productions I have seen, both the Metropolitan Opera production of 1973, which reinstated Musorgsky's own orchestration on the basis of David Lloyd-Jones's Oxford University Press edition (published in full score two years later) and touted itself as unprecedentedly authentic for that reason, and a San Francisco Opera production of 1992 retained both St. Basil and Kromy and used them to flank the scene of Boris's death just as the Bolshoy had done (and continues to do). A 2010 production by Andrey Konchalovsky, the famous movie director, at the Teatro Regio of

⁴⁴ See M. M. Ippolitov-Ivanov, *50 let russkoy muziki v moikh vospominaniyakh* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1934), 146. That this production included Kromy as well as St. Basil's is attested by an affiche that lists the cast. The role of Khrushchev, who appears only in Kromy, is included in the list. The affiche is reproduced in Ruzanna Karpovna Shirinyan *M. P. Musorgskiy* (Moscow: Muzika, 1987), 134. My thanks to Robert W. Oldani for alerting me to it.

⁴⁵ Information kindly provided by Prof. Oldani in a private communication.

Torino, retained both scenes while (in keeping with today's aggressively interventionist staging practices) introducing even more extreme departures from the canonical scenario. The 2010 new production at the Metropolitan Opera under Valery Gergiev also flanked the death scene with both crowd scenes. Audiences (and directors) have become used to seeing both and have found it perfectly possible to overlook redundancies and contradictions.

And they are right! Although unforeseen and seemingly disallowed by the author (even though it uses only material he composed), the version with both scenes is, I believe, a greater work than either of the two authorial versions. And if that is musicological heresy, make the most of it.⁴⁶

And yet if, as I claim, the "supersaturated" redaction of *Boris* is greater than either of the two authorial versions, the question must inevitably arise: greater on what basis? If you measure greatness the modernist or academic way, in terms of internal unity and elegant form, it is a travesty.⁴⁷ If you measure greatness the way audiences measure greatness, in terms of what it does to them, it is a masterpiece. Modernists (and academic critics, who by and large still follow modernist principles by default), for whom the very first principle of art is "the customer is always wrong," cannot be expected to respect such a definition of greatness, and that is exactly where I differ with them (though whether to call that difference premodern or postmodern I gladly leave to others to decide). My sympathy, as a member of the audience, is finally with

⁴⁶ Somebody already has. Responding to my essay written for the Torino production, from which I took the idea at the heart of this paper, an angry Italian blogger whose moniker, Proslambanomenos, indicates that he is well and possibly professionally informed about music history, made this rejoinder: "There is one point, at least, that should be held to firmly: namely, the incompatibility between Saint Basil and Kromy. The technical procedure that Musorgsky employed to construct the second version saw to that: he not only eliminated St Basil but also salvaged from it what struck as useful (the episode with the Holy Fool) in the construction of Kromy. This is proof positive of the impossibility of retaining both scenes. And the beautiful thing is that—in theory—this fact has been recognized by eminent scholars, such as Prof. Richard Taruskin, one of whose articles opens the program book of the Sala Regia. Too bad that, as soon as he has recognized the validity of this logic, our man loses no time declaring himself in favor of the coexistence of the two scenes. And why? Because the public likes it that way! The grandiosity of this affirmation is matched by its silliness. Because if you pursue this logic, as long as it would please the public, one might perform infinite different versions of the symphonies of Beethoven, constructed from the mountain of sketches, notes, and ideas that the genius of Bonn left behind. What idiocy. You have to have a chair in Berkeley to come up with ideas like this. . . ." My translation from Italian with the assistance, gratefully acknowledged, of Mary Ann Smart. For the original Italian, see (<http://proslambanomenos.blogspot.com/2010/10/lurca-boris-torino.html>). Yet I, for one, would be quite interested in hearing those new Beethoven symphonies, and I don't exclude the possibility that any one of them might be a keeper.

⁴⁷ And so I myself argued, quite puritanically, a quarter century ago (in "Musorgsky vs. Musorgsky"; see note 16 above), before I had the nerve (and the job security) to argue on behalf of my actual convictions.

my own kind. Does an evil message (say, the Stalinism to which I have already called attention, or the anti-Semitism of Bach's *St. John Passion*, or the German chauvinism of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*) prevent a work of art from achieving the status of a masterpiece? Only by the sort of circular critical fiat that declares evil masterpieces to be a contradiction in terms that must be resolved either by proving that they are not evil or by proving that they are not masterpieces.

But even though my preference may seem to contradict the composer's, in another sense I am in solidarity with him. For Musorgsky's seeming ideological or historiographical change of heart in revising *Boris Godunov* had its origin, as I have argued, not in a considered historiographical analysis of the events the opera depicts, but in an aesthetic and stylistic crisis. Whatever political or ideological messages Musorgsky's contrasting versions may appear to espouse are thus by-products rather than premises of his artistic performance. For him, the Kromy mob was less a historical agent than a musicodramatic device (a *priyom*, as Russian formalists would say). Its purpose was not to secure a truthful representation of historical events but to "realize the dramatic essence of musical drama" and "concoct some magnificent history," the way Rimsky-Korsakov had done in *The Maid of Pskov*. Representation (or, in Musorgsky's language, concoction) was the end. The crowds, the mobs, and the national historians—the means.

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ABSTRACT

When Musorgsky revised his opera *Boris Godunov* in 1871–72 as a condition for its eventual performance in 1874, he made many changes that went far beyond what the Imperial Theaters demanded of him. Among these changes was the composition of a crowd scene outside Moscow, in which the rebellious populace hails the Pretender, to replace a crowd scene at Red Square in which a submissive, hungry crowd begs Boris for bread. The original scene came, like the rest of the libretto, directly from Pushkin's eponymous play. The new scene reflected a new view of the historical events, and Musorgsky wrote his own text for it. The two scenes are ideologically at odds, particularly as regards their view of the Russian nation in relation to the Russian people. Moreover, the two scenes share the episode of the Holy Fool and the thieving boys, which Musorgsky transferred from the one score to the other. Obviously, Musorgsky regarded them as incompatible within a single production and thought he had made conflating them impossible. And yet, at the Bolshoy Theater, beginning in 1927, the two scenes have indeed

been played that way, inconsistencies and redundancies be damned. The Bolshoy production of 1939 (which became widely known and influential through recordings and film) might be written off, the way we tend to write off the art of the Stalinist era, as a politically motivated anomaly. But many other productions and most recordings since 1948 have included both scenes without any such evident motivation, indicating that the Bolshoy production is now regarded as canonical. Is the historiographical contradiction involving the theme of the conference at which this article was first presented (“Opera and Nation,” Budapest 2010) to be regarded as a blemish? If not, what considerations can be seen to outweigh it? Can Musorgsky’s political ideas be deduced from the work in which we assume they are embodied? And if they can be, should they be regarded as an aspect of the work that performers need respect?

Keywords: *Boris Godunov*, Musorgsky, historical opera, nationalism, redactions