MIKLÓS MEZŐSI

Как сделан Подъячий Мусоргского?

An Opera Emerging from Gogol's Sleeve—“Musical Synecdoche” in the making

Music is no guest here called in from outside, but an active participant in the debate, or to put it more precisely, the one who promotes discourse.

The art of speech distorts the face, bursts its quietness, tears off its mask.

Osip Mandelstam

Introduction

On the occasion of the joint anniversary of Pushkin and Gogol, as part of the act of remembrance, I will now invite a third author for whom these writers had been “pre-texts”, both influencing and determinating his oeuvre. The third author is the opera composer Modest Musorgsky, who in 2009 also celebrated a “round birthday”, as he was born March 16, 1839.

Uttering the two names—Pushkin and Musorgsky—at the same breath will most probably remind one of Boris Godunov... How about Gogol, then? If one puts Gogol and Musorgsky side by side, two opera titles are likely to enter one’s mind: The Marriage (Женитьба) and The Fair at Sorotchints (Сорочинская ярмарка). From among the oeuvre of Musorgsky I will, however, select a work different than these above for discussion, an opera which under close inspection will betray its author's strong and intrinsic ties to both of the writers celebrated on this jubilee. This opera is set forth by a certain “musico-rhetorical trope” which apparently stems from and is based upon one of the main and decisive rhetorical and poetical tools employed in his prose by Gogol. This musical trope may be regarded an offspring, or perhaps rather a sibling, of that tool of Gogol’s which further on is to be transformed and merged into music. The opera in question is Khovanshchina whose author was a devoted adherent of both Gogol and Pushkin. After the first scenes the opera will be leaving behind the technique borrowed from the “Gogol heritage” as “dead weight”, only to set for itself a course wherein it can shape its own evolvement on the basis of the “legislative process”, or “constitution”, of—its own—musical (opera) poetics. Khovanshchina will, then, advance on its way under the control and responsibility of this “musico-poetic constitution”.

It should be stressed beforehand that in terms of poetic structure and composition the inner relationship between Musorgsky and Pushkin, however strange it may seem, lies not between the two Boris Godunovs (Pushkin's tragedy and Musorgsky's opera) but between the Pushkin play and Musorgsky's Khovanshchina and is secured by the polyphonic music-

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1 This is an edited and revised version of a paper read at the “International Conference for Slavists, Devoted to the Jubilee of A. S. Pushkin and N. V. Gogol” [Международная славистическая конференция, посвященная юбилею А. С. Пушкина и Н. В. Гоголя], held at the Institute for Slavic Studies of Savaria University Center, West-Hungarian University in Szombathely, June 19, 2009.
dramaturgic composition and the “poetics of open closeness” of the opera. In this paper I intend to pull out the “Gogolian thread” from the fabric of *Khovanshchina*, with focus on Gogol’s “verbal mask” and its adaptation for opera, being transformed into a “trope” used as a technique for musical expression. Thus we start from Gogol's clerk, the чиновник, and end up at the подъячий, the Scribe in *Khovanshchina*. Starting our way from Gogol's verbal mask, we will peep in Musorgsky’s poetical workshop, where we hope to catch a glance at “opera rhetoresis” in the making, and expect to be granted opportunity to watch how a “musical metaphor” is being operated. In my attempt to describe what I call musical metaphor and musical synecdoche, I heavily rely on the interpretations of Gogol given by Boris Eikhenbaum and Yuriy Tynyanov, respectively. In addition, on the ground that the concept of the Gogolian mask may be assumed to rest on the poetics of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* as interpreted by Osip Mandelstam, in my discussion of Musorgsky’s adaptation of Gogol’s mask I will be supporting my argumentation also with Mandelstam’s findings on Dante.

Modest Musorgsky had developed deep and thorough ties with the works of the elder members of the “Troika”. As the youngest of the Gogol—Pushkin—Musorgsky triad, he adapted several of his writer-predecessors’ works for the opera stage. The best-known of these adaptations, *Boris Godunov*, had relatively soon conquered the opera stage. It was composed after the text of Pushkin’s “romantic tragedy”, with significant alterations by the composer in both the dramatic plot and the text of the source play. Of his two “Gogol operas” *The Marriage* closely follows the text of Act I of Gogol’s play of the same title, whereas *The Fair at Sorotchintsi*, an opera comique based on a cycle of short stories, *Evenings on a Farm near Dikanka*, was left unfinished—in a fragmented state, in fact—when the composer died. As for the resulting operas, they either bear but slight resemblance to the original pre-text (*The Fair at Sorotchintsi*), or, as is the case with *Boris Godunov*, the main organizing force of the drama,
polyphonic dramaturgic structure, “dissolves” in the music, that is, on (inside?) the musical stage.

What in all certainty is pressing for explanation is the term “musical stage”. Musical stage is something that should not be understood “physically”, i.e. as a part or the whole of the “physical” scene. Instead, this term should be conceived as the space or field generated, created and “furnished” in the listener’s consciousness by the sonic qualities and effects of music. It is entirely an imaginary “space”, laid out and designed by the structure made up of musical sound. It is the music that is to assure that this space and what in it happens should be made subject to our perception. In other words, it is the the music that is supposed to “guarantee” for what takes place on the “musical stage” to actually appear in a “consumable” form for the receptive audience’s consciousness. Musical stage is designed to host operatic drama, regardless any non-immanent circumstances, say, the particular historical age or the identity of the composer: whether it be Gluck or Verdi, Mozart or Bartók, Don Giovanni or Rigoletto, opera per definitionem functions via musical figures, “tropes”—meaning that it lives and breathes on and by the musical stage. Musorgsky’s musical stage is unique in that it has special relations with the art of word.

The trope I term “musico-dramatic synecdoche” occurs several times in the First Act of Khovanshchina. As indicated above, with the opera advancing on, this trope will be eliminated, “dropped”, just to pave the way for “polyphonic dramaturgy”. As regards the question of polyphony and drama, it may be worthy of note to recall Mikhail Bakhtin’s categorial rejection regarding genuine polyphonic structure in any of the dramatic genres whatsoever. However, there is in all probability at least one instance to provide an exception to that “rule”, and that exception is Pushkin’s Boris Godunov, a dramatic play that can be viewed as a typical example of the polyphonically composed drama. This interpretation is essentially bound to genre poetics, with Boris Godunov representing a unique phase in literary history in that it embodies the process of quitting the genre of “traditional drama”, creating at the same time a new type of drama.

The present paper focuses on but one single appearance of the musical synecdoche, the brief scene of the Scribe and the Streltsy from Scene 2 in Act I, and its source in Gogol’s prose poetics, more specifically in The Overcoat. I will be discussing one of the basic and most characteristic elements of Gogol’s poetics, termed by Boris Eikhenbaum as “verbal mask”,

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8 See Mezősi: 2003

9 Id.: 2006, pp. 45-117

10 Eikhenbaum: Кирай, Ковач, pp. 409-21
which in my view is to re-appear in the opening scene of Khovanshchina. Before pursuing a close inspection of the “Gogolian mask”—a technique (прием) originally designed and developed as the core element in a particular prose poetics—with the intent to follow its way to become a “musical trope”, a brief excursus has to be made to support the concept, origin and functionality of the “musical metaphor”, whose subspecies, the “musical synecdoche” is the actual subject-matter of this study.

On the first pages of Osip Mandelstam’s magnificently sensitive critical essay, written on Dante¹¹ with an enthralling eloquence, we read:

Уста работают, улыбка движет стих, умно и весело алеют губы, язык доверчиво прижимается к нёбу. Внутренний образ стиха неразлучим с бесчисленной сменой выражений, мелькающих на лице говорящего и волхующегося сказителя. Искусство речи именно искажает наше лицо, нарушает его маску [...]¹²

One of the numerous, both striking and appealing points Mandelstam makes in this essay is when he connects Divina Commedia with music. I cite but two examples:

Музыка здесь не извне приглашенный гость, но участница спора; а еще точнее – она способствует обмену мнений [...]¹³

Представлять себе дантовскую поэму вытянутым в одну линию рассказом или даже голосом – абсолютно неверно. Задолго до Баха и в то время, когда еще не строили больших монументальных органов [...], когда ведущим инструментом была еще цитра, аккомпанирующая голосу, Алигьери построил в словесном творчестве бесконечно могучий орган и уже наслаждался всеми его мыслимыми регистрами и раздувал мехи, и ревел, и ворковал во все трубы.¹⁴

References to music are conspicuously abundant in Conversations about Dante. Wherever Mandelstam resorts to “music” in his interpretation of the Commedia, he seems to inevitably touch the very core of what “drives” this poem forward. In his concept music and musicalness occupy a focal position in the poetics of the Divine Comedy. Dante’s poetics is conceived by Mandelstam as a never-ending process of forms evolving and emerging one from another. There are several instances when he demonstrates this unique characteristic of the Commedia by referring to, and providing a keen analysis of, passages as the Geryon

¹¹ Mandelstam, op. cit.
¹² Ibid. I, pp. 365-6
¹³ “The mouth is working, the smile moves the verse; the lips are cleverly and merrily rubified, the tongue trustfully cleaves to the velum. The inner image of the verse is inseparable from the innumerable changes of expressions that flash through the enthusiastically reciting man’s face. The art of speech distorts the face, bursts its quietness, tears off its mask... [...] The work of Dante is first and foremost Italian speech of his age appearing on the world scene as a system.”
¹⁴ Ibid. II, p. 373

― To imagine Dante's poem as a narrative—or a voice—stretched along a single line is totally misleading. Well before Bach—in an age when there were no monumental organs built [...], when the main musical instrument was the zither that accompanied the singing voice—Alighieri in the domain of philology built an immensely huge organ and found pleasure in its every register of thought, blowing all its pipes with sweep, making them roar and coo.”
episode (canto XVII)\textsuperscript{15} and what he calls the “Heraclitan metaphor” (canto XXIV)\textsuperscript{16}, both from the Inferno, just to mention a few.

У Данта не одна форма, но множество форм. Они выжимаются одна из другой […] … форма ему представляется выжимкой, а не оболочкой. Таким образом, как это ни странно, форма выжимается из содержания-концепции, которое ее как бы облекает. Такова четкая дантовская мысль. […] …всякое формообразование в поэзии предполагает ряды, периоды или циклы формозучаний […] Научное описание дантовской Комедии, взятое как течение, как поток, неизбежно приняло бы вид трактата о метаморфозах и стремилось бы проникать в множественные состояния поэтической материи […]\textsuperscript{17}

Образное мышление у Данта, так же как во всякой истинной поэзии, осуществляется при помощи свойства поэтической материи, которое я предлагаю назвать обратимостью или обратимостью.\textsuperscript{18}

Mandelstam’s understanding of the Divine Comedy seems something of a “physiology-based approach” at the start—not only to Dante but to poetry in general. „The mouth moves the verse“, smile and other „distortions of the face“ emerge when one speaks etc. As the reciting person produces all those myriads of feelings that “flash through the face of the reciting man” in the act of recital, poetical matter is “distorted”, with the artistic forms “squeezed out” one from another like grape juice crushed out from pomace with the ultimate goal of winning wine in a never-ending process… In Mandelstam’s interpretation of Dante this process starts with the physiologic events the reciting person is going through and ends up at “Bach-like” organ and orchestral music, which turns out to be the perhaps most genuine perceptible form of Divina Commedia. It should not escape our attention that one of the modes of existence of the world of Paradise, as presented by Dante, is music. In fact, Dante’s Paradiso cannot be conceived without music. Another point which should be made here is that although we shall never know what the burned portion of Gogol’s Dead Souls would be like if it had survived, we should not forget it either that Gogol intended the extant part of his novel to be an Inferno in a modern Divina Commedia…

To support my analysis of the début of Musorgsky’s Scribe, I will now focus on one of the decisive elements in the poetics of Gogol’s prose. The unique status Gogol enjoys in

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. IV, pp. 380-3
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. V, pp. 386-7
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. II, pp. 375-6
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. IV, p. 382

“In Dante there is no one form but a multitude of forms. These are being pressed out of each other […] for him form is like grape pomace, not a husk in itself. Therefore, however strange it is, the form is squeezed out of the conception, the content, which envelopes it. This is succinct Dantian thought. […] … in poetry, creation of a form in all cases assumes the lines, periods and cycles of resonances of forms […] A scholarly description of Dantian Comedy taken as a process, as a current would inevitably take the form of a treatise on metamorphosis, and would take pains to penetrate into the wide-ranging states of poetic matter […]”

“Imagery thinking in Dante, just as in all kinds of genuine poetry, is realized through that quality of poetic matter which I suggest being called transformability or transformation.”
literary canon is in close connection with his peculiar style and diction, analysed in Boris Eikhenbaum’s article, *How Gogol’s Overcoat Was Made*, noted for the originality and ingeniousness of its approach. Not unlike Frigyes Karinthy, for example, the Hungarian satirical writer who viewed the world in kind of a “curved mirror” (actually the title of one of his books) and used comicality created and reflected in this “mirror” as the cement in his writings, Gogol never halts at “pure” comicalness. In Gogol, comic elements and humor in most cases add up to something unexpectedly incompliant with our perception of “the comic”. “Gogol viewed things in a peculiar way”, Yuriy Tyananov says. Evidently this peculiar way of looking at things makes him capable to “grasp the comicality of things” which he “attains by listing objects in a tone unchanged, objects that are incongruous with each other.” Tyananov regards *mask* as Gogol’s main technique used to represent human figures. Tyananov mentions a Prince Dmitry Obolensky who relates a story about Gogol creating a mask and making it “work”. Remarkably, the same story can also be found in Eikhenbaum when he is discussing the process of the construction of Gogol’s text. According to this account, Gogol extemporaneously acts out the figure of a plaintiff on the spot, based on a single written complaint: “Right away he set to describe the gentleman’s outward appearance in the most amusing and original way, his career in the civil service and even episodes from his life, visualizing some additional characters as well. I remember I was roaring with laughter as a madman, while Gogol was performing the skit with a serious face.” Now let us see the characterization given by Eikhenbaum about this basic feature of the Gogol text:

\[…\] основа Гоголевского текста — сказ, что текст его слагается из живых речевых представлений и речевых эмоций. Более того: сказ этот имеет тенденцию не просто повествовать, не просто говорить, но мимически и артикуляционно воспроизводить слова, и предложения выбираются и сцепляются не по принципу только логической речи, а больше по принципу речи выразительной, в которой особенная роль принадлежит артикуляции, мимике, звуковым жестам и т. д. Отсюда — явление звуковой семантики в его языке: звуковая оболочка слова, его акустическая характеристика становится в речи Гоголя значимой независимо от логического или вещественного значения. Артикуляция и ее акустический эффект выделяются на первый план, как выразительный прием.

19 Eikhenbaum: Кирай, Ковач
20 Görbe tükrő was first published in 1912 and in several editions after the writer’s death in 1938.
23 Ibid., p. 204
24 Eikhenbaum, op. cit., p. 410
25 “[…] И тут же начал самым смешным и оригинальным образом описывать мне первую наружность этого господина, потом рассказал мне всю его служебную карьеру, представляя даже в лицах некоторые эпизоды его жизни. Помню, что я хохотал, как сумасшедший, а он все это выделял совершенно серьезно.” Tyananov, op. cit., p. 203 (italics in the original).
26 Eikhenbaum, op. cit., p. 411

“[…] Gogol’s texts are based on *сказ*, ‘narration in the first person’. This means that the text is composed of live speech images and speech images. Furthermore, this *сказ* tends to not simply relate what happened, not simply speak, but, through mimesis and articulation, it embodies the words used, and the sentences are
Eikhenbaum then goes on:

Настоящая динамика, а тем самым и композиция его вещей — в построении сказа, в игре языка. Его действующие лица — окаменевшие поэзы. Над ними, в виде режиссера и настоящего героя, царит веселящийся и играющий дух самого художника.27

Karinthy and Gogol apparently share a feature in their diction to secure for them the reputation they both hold which makes them “close kins” within the literary canon. This “curved mirror” and poignant diction, enabling both writers to “dispose of” such figures as the Important Personage (The Overcoat) or the ill-famed versemonger (This Is How You Write28), lie at the bottom of what may be called the “poetics of freak”, described by Eikhenbaum thus:

Прием доведения до абсурда или противологического сочетания слов часто встречается у Гоголя, при чем он обычно замаскирован строго-логическим синтаксисом и потому производит впечатление непроизвольности; так, в словах о Петровиче, который „независимо от своей кривой глаз и рябику по всему лицу, занимался довольно удачно починкой чиновничих и всяких других панталон и фраков”. Тут логическая абсурдность замаскирована еще обилием подробностей, отвлекающих внимание в сторону; каламбур не выставлен на показ, а наоборот — всячески скрыт, и потому комическая сила его возрастает. Чистый этимологический каламбур встречается еще не раз: „бедствий, рассыпанных на жизненной дороге не только титулярным, но даже тайным, действительным, надворным и всяким советникам, даже и тем, которые не дают никому советов, ни от кого не берут их сами”.29

selected and connected one after the other not merely by logical speech but rather by expressive speech in which articulation, mimics, vocal gestures etc. are given particular emphasis. Hence the phenomenon of sonic semantics in Gogol’s diction: the sonic shell, its acoustic character, apart from the logical or material meaning, becomes meaningful. Articulation and its acoustic effect come to the forefront as a technique of expression [выразительный прием].”

The real dynamics and hereby the composition of Gogol’s works are inherent in the structure of the narration ['сказ'], and in the play with the language. His characters are, in fact, petrified postures, and above them, as the stage director and the actual hero, reigns the artist’s merry-making and playful spirit.”

The technique of advancing absurdity or illogical compounds often occurs in Gogol, at the same time, as a rule, masked by strictly logical syntax which, consequently, gives the impression of spontaneouness. Take, for example, the description of Petrovich, the tailor, who lived somewhere on the fourth floor up a dark staircase, and who, in spite of his having but one eye, and pock- marks all over his face, busied himself with considerable success in repairing the trousers and coats of officials and others; that is to say, when he was sober, and not nursing some other scheme in his head. Here the logical absurdity is concealed behind the abundance of the details that divert attention; instead of showing off the paronomasia, the writer, on the contrary, hides it with every effort, which only increases its power. Purely etymological puns occur even more often: „...were it not that there are various ills strewn along the path of life for titular councillors as well as for private, actual, court, and every other species of councillor, even to those who never give any advice or take any themselves.”

The English citations from The Overcoat are taken from The Project Gutenberg EBook of Best Russian Short Stories. Release Date: September 11, 2004 [EBook #13437]. Produced by David Starner, Keith M. Eckrich, and the Project Gutenberg Online Distributed Proofreaders Team. Compiled and Edited by Thomas Seltzer. (Note that this edition has The Cloak as title.)
“The basic technique Gogol uses to portray people is mask”—indicates Tinyanov the main characteristic of Gogol’s poetics, listing and analysing half a dozen “masks”, including “geometrical”, “bodily”, “material”, “verbal” masks. This tool, the core of the “poetics of freak”, will turn up in Musorgsky, who regarded Gogol’s art as an étalon— which also meant that for him, the musician, Gogol’s oeuvre is a pre-text of especial importance.

“Material metaphor is transformed into verbal mask”, Tinyanov continues (Korobochka in Dead Souls), or “the verbal mask is associated with phonics and has become a sounding and phonetical metaphor” (Akaky Akakievich in The Overcoat, for example). It can be seen that, according to Tinyanov, these masks are always set in motion by some metaphor. If we “read” Khovanshchina’s Scribe, the Подъячий, entering the stage in the beginning of Act I, alongside with the best-known of Gogolian masks, Akaky Akakievich, we find a far-reaching kinship and similarity between the two chinovniki. It must be stressed here that it is not their personal character, destiny or other personal particulars that link these two characters; it is, rather, the poesis of their build and appearance that makes them close kins. “All Gogol’s ‘characters’, ‘types’, are masks, as they are all determined once and for all; no ‘cracks’ can be spotted on them and they do not go through ‘development’”—i.e. they are unchangeable, Tinyanov says. Eikhenbaum, it should be noted, as he is discussing Gogol’s way of building his text, offers a full analysis of the musico-poetical “toolbar” that produces Khovanschina’s Scribe—at the same time casting light on a rare if not exceptional instance in scholarship that an approach, originally invented and applied for interpreting a literary work, seems to be adaptable to adequately describe the “poetics” of a musical piece from the same cultural context. A thorough examination of this close relationship may bring us nearer to a more distinct understanding of a deeper layer in Musorgsky’s music: how music becomes

30 “Основной прием Гоголя в живописании людей — прием маски.”
Tinyanov, op. cit., p. 202
31 Ibid.
32 Among Musorgsky’s extant personal documents there are two pieces of evidence that expressly indicate his devotedness to Gogol: 1. a letter he wrote to his friend, Golenishchev-Kutuzov on August 15, 1877; 2. a letter written to Vladimir Stasov on October 18, 1872. The standard editions of Musorgsky’s correspondence are: Модест Петрович Мусоргский. Литературное наследие. Составители А. А. Орлова и М. С. Пекелис. Москва, 1971 and М. П. Мусоргский. Письма. Москва, 1981 (no editor indicated). All Musorgsky’s letters that have survived, along with all the extant documents connected with the composer, can be found (in Hungarian translation) in this excellent edition: Bojti, J., Papp, M. (eds.), Musorgsky. Letters, Documents, Recollections. Budapest 1997 [Muszorgszkij. Levelek, Dokumentumok, Emlékezések], pp. 481-2.; p. 261. A comprehensive collection of all documents relating to Musorgsky, along with detailed biographic references, is Орлова, А., Труды и дни Мусоргского. Летопись жизни и творчества, Москва 1963. It has an English version: Orlova, A., Musorgsky’s Days. UMI Research Press 1983. On Gogol’s influence and the way it has left its mark on Musorgsky the opera composer, see fn. 5 above. In the context of Musorgsky’s operatic oeuvre, “The Gogol case” definitely speaks of remarkably much more than the mere choice of subject, as I hope to show in this paper.
33 “Коробочка», где вещная метафора стала словесной маской; «Акакий Акакиевич», где словесная маска потеряла уже связь с семантикой, закрепилась на звуке, стала звуковой, фонетической.”
Tinyanov’s examples for the verbal mask and metaphor effectuating language parody and his supporting arguments can still be considered valid, even after Árpád Kovács’s discovery of layers in The Overcoat’s main character’s naming deeper than the “verbal mask”. Cf. Kovács: 1999. See fn. 21
34 “Характеры», «типы» Гоголя — и суть маски, резко определенные, не испытывающие никаких «переломов» или «развитий». Tinyanov, op. cit., p. 204
separated from words; how musical form comes to life; and, what perhaps is most important, dealing with this problem may take us close to find out more about the nature of the relation between music and words in Musorgsky.

Let us have a glance at Gogol’s description of Akaky Akakievich’s appearance in The Overcoat:

“So, in a certain department serves a certain official — not a very prominent official, it must be allowed — short of stature, somewhat pockmarked, rather red-haired, rather blind, judging from appearances, with a small bald spot on his forehead, with wrinkles on his cheeks, with a complexion of the sort called haemorrhoidal.”

The relevance of Eikhenbaum’s comment on this description to the way Musorgsky introduces the Подъячий into Khovanshchina is anything but unnoticeable:

“... this sentence [Gogol’s description of Akaky A. – M.M.] is not so much a description of the main character, as a mimico-articulative depiction of him: the words are selected and placed in a certain order not to mark the typical traits, but, rather, on the basis of phonic semantics. […] The sentence gives the impression of an accomplished whole, a system of sound gestures to be realized by the selection of the words. Consequently, these words, as logical units, as signs of concept, are hardly perceptible, and are re-arranged and -grouped along the principle of sonic speech. This is one of the remarkable effects of Gogolian language. Some of its sentences operate as though they were sonic inscriptions — so much do articulation and acoustics come to the forefront.”

Eikhenbaum, op. cit., p. 415 (italics mine–M.M.)

I have replaced “sanguine” in The Project Gutenberg Ebook’s text for “haemorrhoidal”.

“… the personal tone, with all the techniques of the Gogolian сказ, definitely penetrates into the long-short story, taking on the character of grotesque scowl or grimace. […] Then [sc. after the genesis of the name Akaky
The accord between the two chinovniks, Akaky Akakievich and the Подъячий being introduced into the poetical (musical) world of The Overcoat and Khovanshchina is more than apparent. In his début the Подъячий not only seems to follow closely Akaky Akakievich in his mask-like appearance but, what is even more striking, the two figures, as they make their ways into the texture of the syuzhet, are accompanied by the very same artistic techniques: 1. then [after the Scribe enters the stage = 'the genesis of the name Akaky Akakievich'] follows the torrent of “mockery” [on behalf of the streltsy]; 2. after the streltsy leave the scene, heading to the Kremlin, a turning-point is brought about by the melodramatic excursus, whereby the scene of the Scribe’s début is raised to the grotesque. This obviously speaks of Gogol’s strong and decisive influence on Musorgsky. Gogol’s ways of building the narration, analysed by Eikhenbaum (“mimic-articulative depiction”, “principle of sonic speech”, “articulation and acoustics”, “live speech images, speech emotions”, “sonic gestures”, “sonic semantics”, the sonic shell of a word” etc.), become part of the technique to be used by an opera composer—true, not the main and most important one employed in Khovanshchina, but in the course of syuzhet development certainly the one that paves the way for polyphonic opera dramaturgy.

Eikhenbaum’s account of Prince Obolensky’s anecdote with Gogol at the postal station immediately follows the elucidation of the “basis of the Gogolian text”, which perceptibly bears an ultimately close resemblance to the way Musorgsky utilizes the musical techniques he is using to represent the chinovnik entering the stage. The unique situation that a literary terminology proves adequate for explaining a musical phenomenon sheds extra light on the “poetics” of Khovanshchina. Obolensky’s report is in fact a “historification” of the Pygmalion myth from the age of modernity, in which the artist—Gogol—creates the contradictio in adiecto of “live work of art”. Comes another artist—Musorgsky—and creates the figure of the Подъячий in the beginning of his opera; this figure steps forth from behind the mask and comes to life right away. Tropologically speaking, the “rhetorical figure” applied by Musorgsky in the scene of the Scribe and the streltsy is the musical synecdoche. Belonging to the family of the “musical metaphor”, it generates musical mask responsible for operating the “musical or opera rhetorhesis” in that scene. This is probably the most characteristic and most conspicuous example of the musical synecdoche in Khovanshchina. Kuzka and two other Streltsy recognize and scornfully comment on the approaching Scribe. For the reader’s convenience I cite the “lyrics” of this scene—the musical score can be found at the end of the paper.

1-й стрелец
и 2-й стрелец. [...] Гляди-кось: сам строчило прёт.

[Входит Подъячий, очинивая перо.]

1-й стрелец. Гуся точит.
Кузька. Чернилице-то, господи!

Akakievich] follows the torrent of “mockery”, with the narration reaching the sentence “But Akaky Akakiyevich answered not a word”, when the comical narration is suddenly interrupted by a melodramatic excursus with the typical techniques of the sentimental style. This way […] The Overcoat is raised from a simple anecdote to grotesque.”

Ibid. p. 417 (italics mine–M.M.)
In the vocal parts we first hear of the “scribbler”, then a “goose” (standing for “goose-quill” and referring, of course, to the scribe) being “pointed” (i.e. sharpened). Then a new metaphor turns up (a synecdoche again): “That big ink-horn”. Finally, a verbal metaphor rounds off the image: “What a scraping and scratching!” Now that the scene—the image—has been completed, with the figures sketched and the colours applied onto the canvas, the two streltsy start directly (in the second person) to mock the scribe, with Kuzka suggesting “putting him “up here on this column”. (What “this column” really stands for is left to be revealed in the scene with the “Muscovites”, the пришлые люди, right after the denunciation scene of the Scribe and Shaklovity. On this column is a list of those recently killed and beaten up by the streltsy. The exact reference of “[getting] up here on the column” is yet vague; still, neither we nor the scribe should have particular doubts about the sinister implications enveloped in Kuzka’s suggestion.) In the orchestral parts a goose’s cackle and the sharpening of a goose-quill is imitated. As an additional effect, “the goose” can be felt swaying its head—as implied by the peculiarly designed sound of the cackle. Presumably, the actual action is that the scribe has just arrived at the spot and is busy setting up his booth and making the rest of his habitual preparations for his daily work, such as arranging and sharpening his quills (note that it is early in the morning and we are right after the “Dawn over the Moscow river”). This brief scene, a fine snapshot from the Red Square, displays the compactness—and for that matter, the would-be power and potential—of this music, its ability to authentically represent


First & second strelyets: […] (The Chancellery Scribe enters, sharpening his quill.)
Look: old scribbler is pen-pushing already!

First strelyets: He’s sharpening his quill.
Kuzka: That big ink-horn! My God!
Second strelyets: What a scraping and scratching! (They approach the Scribe.)

First & second strelyets: Please, your Grace from the Chancellery… (They bow.)
Kuzka: Quick, up here on this column! Ha, ha, ha…
First & second strelyets: Ha. Ha, ha… (They all move off towards the Kremlin. The Scribe steps into his booth.)
Scribe: Sodom and Gomorrah! What times these are… (rubs his hands) Dreadful times!… All the same, I’ll manage to make some profit… oh yes!

an everyday situation by aptly responding to the sudden-arisen demands of the—musical—stage. We get information about four people in about half a minute’s music, with the scribe in the focus, and we have the figures of these people before us—“in our mind’s eye”. What we are facing here is a live instance of “musical metaphor”, a multiple or multi-layered musical metaphor, consisting mainly of synecdoches: the scribe, sharpening—“scraping and scratching”—his quills, resembles a goose in that he sways his neck, cackling, that is, “becomes a goose”: he is identified with his working tools (even with his ink-horn) in our perception. The final result is a mask through which we can peep in the figure itself. Remarkably, the streltsy—a part from the remark “the scribbler is pen-pushing” (which does not disturb or break the fine implicity of the situation, as it stands before, half-way outside of, the metaphorical structure)—never speak about “the scribe” in an explicit way; they only say these words: goose, scraping and scratching, ink-horn. The situation is unambiguous, even at the level of words. It is important to note the otherwise obvious fact that, despite the adequately arranged lexis of this scene (the work of Musorgsky’s hand), the real effect is conveyed not by the literary metaphors (synecdoches) but the musical ones. That the scribe “scraps and scratches” his quills, and his stature bears resemblance to a goose, is perceived not so much via the words as in and by the music. (Remember Gogol’s “sonic speech” in Eikhenbaum.)

The plasticity of the scene is mainly ensured by the sonic element—the “cackling” sound accompanying the scribe’s action on the stage commented on by the strelsy on the one hand, and the mockery by the strelsy of the scribe on the other. The “cackling sound” forms the skeleton of what I call musical synecdoche, for it is this very element that powerfully leaves its stamp on the musical stage, thus producing the aesthetically relevant (i.e. perceptible and adequately decodable) information for the listener of the opera.

What is manifested by the “peculiar arrangement” of words as a result of the evolvement of literary genres, in Musorgsky re-appears as though flesh enveloping the skeleton—i.e. in the fabric of the music. One instance of it is the musical synecdoche and the musical mask. In terms of aesthetic effect as well as the mode of operation, it bears strong resemblance to the structural component responsible for the effectiveness of Gogol’s comicality. It is remarkable that in the whole grand tableaux of Khovanshchina the application of this musical trope is but confined to the scenes of the scribe. Just as in The Overcoat, the

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39 The figure of Shaklovity can be taken as a musical form constituted and operated by musical metaphor—exclusively in his scene with the Scribe, but nowhere else in Khovanshchina.
artistic technique that makes the figure of the Подъячий as it appears for us, has essentially been designed for grasping and representing an entity of typically a small calibre—chronotopically, of course, which de natura sets the limitations for its applicability—and as a tool for producing or catalysing aesthetic process can effectively function in small rather than larger dimensions. To summarize, a musical mask built from musico-dramatic synecdoche(s) can only work—i.e. can only bring about aesthetically perceptible effect—in the short run and on a smaller scale, which evidently proves insufficient for a grand-scale musical drama. Because the musical mask seems by nature to have much in common with the zeugma, a rhetorical figure that often links ideas and actions in an absurd way, thus producing humorous and comical effect, it necessarily follows that this technique is inappropriate to cope with larger-scale artistic representations.40 There are rhetorical figures, however, which, for example the hyperbaton, are able to switch over to carry a larger semantical unit.41

Though unable to govern and keep the musical dramaturgy of the whole opera under control, the musical metaphor (synecdoche) and musical mask have both proved to be excellent techniques to launch Khovanshchina and set it in its proper orbit, so that from this point the opera can find and develop the artistic concept that best fits it.

Typically, during Musorgsky’s mature period the technique termed here as “musical synecdoche” appears exclusively in a comic—and in some part also grotesque—situation and figure, as thanks to its expressively parodistic character it is suitable for the representation of a small-scale entity to be represented. By this tension, based upon zeugmatic correlation, everyday normality is shattered to pieces; yet at the same time—in the given musico-dramatical moment—it does not generate another, larger-scale, configuration to constitutively re-arrange the outlines of the figure and the situation as, for example, Marfa’s figure does versus the old Khovansky who is gradually pushed into regression.

At this point a comparative analysis ought to follow of the Musorgsky opera and its “Pushkinian pre-text”: the undoing of the network of threads connecting Khovanshchina to Pushkin’s “romantic tragedy”, Boris Godunov, i.e. catching “polyphonic dramaturgy” on the opera stage in action and, finally, placing all this in the mirror of the interpretation of Musorgsky’s Boris Godunov.42 That may be the subject of another paper, but the present paper is ended...

40 Cf. Tynyanov above on Gogol’s techniques applied for attaining comicalness. Cf. “...by listing objects […] that are incongruous with each other.” See fn. 22
41 Pushkin’s Boris Godunov can be interpreted as a huge hyperbaton. See the chapter Hyperbaton and Irony. From the Disciple to the Pretender [Hiperbaton és irónia. A tanítványtól a trónkövetelőig] in Mezősi: 2006, pp.63-75
42 Part of that work has been done in Mezősi: 2006. The thorough analysis of Musorgsky’s Boris, and involving it in a comprehensive study of the “Russian chronicle play” is a work lying ahead.
The piano score of the scene of the Scribe
and the streletsy from Act I of Khovanshchina