

Semiotic Explorations of Russian National Identity Formation

Through Realism in the Music of Modest Mussorgsky

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By

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Preface

I've had many false starts on this paper over the past year and a half, overwhelmed by the scope of the questions that have arisen from my research. Don't get me wrong, I love the feeling of being consumed by new information, which is different from consuming it. Consuming information implies that you have control over what you process and spit back out. And sure, you might retain some of the nutritional value of your new-found knowledge, but being consumed by information transforms you completely. It's a volatile experience; you never know when, if ever, you'll be released from the clenches of its jaw. I'm still very much in the bellies of not one but two beasts, cultural semiotics, and the history of Russian national identity formation, which is why it's been so difficult to tear myself away from them long enough to attempt to explain what exactly is going on in here. I don't claim to have any solid answers; instead, this is my attempt to lay out a framework through which we might glean some understanding of national identity formation in Russia through semiotics. This paper should be read as a practical exercise in semiotic theory, a la Yuri Lotman style, to ultimately support my claim that Mussorgsky's music makes a strong case for Russian national music, as we understand it today, having been developed primarily through conventions of realism, as opposed to romanticism.

Semiotics: a relatively brief introduction

As mentioned, the first beast I find myself in the throes of is the field of cultural semiotics. I think the father of the Moscow-Tartu school of semiotics, Yuri Lotman, said it best here:

Just as a film director will look at the world around him/her through his/her fingers which are placed to form a frame and to 'cut' separate pieces from the totality of the view, so

the semiotic researcher has the habit of transforming the world around him/her so as to show up the semiotic structures. Everything that King Midas touched with his golden hands turned to gold. In the same way, everything which the semiotic researcher turns his/her attention to becomes semioticized in his/her hands. (Y. M. Lotman 5)

The more I read about semiotics, the more aware I become of how much it permeates our lives. Now that I know what it is, I can't escape it. As my mom likes to say, the toothpaste is out of the tube! To attempt to define it for you, semiology is the study of signs and the cultural significance we attach to them, and semiotics is the method of analysis we use by looking at the world through the lens of semiology. Semiotics can, therefore, theoretically be applied to any subject imaginable.

In my junior year of high school, I was introduced to Plato's allegory of the cave. The assignment that accompanied this unit of my Intro to Philosophy class was to apply the allegory to explain a natural phenomenon. Being the anthropology nerd I was and still am, I argued that our cultures are the caves in which we are born and shape our perceptions of the world. I think I was on the right track with this thought, but I was limited by my knowledge of social theory and academic vocabulary. Having now read many essays by Yuri Lotman, I realize a more accurate word for the cave would have been semiosphere. According to Lotman, the semiosphere is, in short, the metaphysical space that creates and is created by language. (Y. M. Lotman 125)

The key to understanding this is to expand our definition of language beyond what is written and verbally spoken, what we will henceforth call natural language. Language, as Lotman refers to it, includes any form of expression that contains intended information encoded by the transmitter. Therefore, dance, poetry, music, etc, also fall under the category of language

as artistic languages. Semiosis, the cognitive process through which we imbue signs with meaning, allows languages to become vessels of cultural memory:

A text [understood here as the physical manifestation of language] has the capacity to preserve the memory of its previous contexts [...] for the perceiver a text is always a metonymy of a reconstructed integral meaning, a discrete sign of a non-discrete essence. The sum of the contexts in which a given text acquires interpretation and which are in a way incorporated in it may be termed the text's memory. (Y. M. Lotman 18)

And when they interact and collaborate, as in the case of lyrical music (poetry + music) or the act of translation, languages can also be agents that generate new cultural meaning:

“A text, like a grain of wheat which contains within itself the programme of its future development, is not something given once and for all and never changing. The inner and as yet unfinalized determinacy of its structure provides a reservoir of dynamism when influenced by contacts with new contexts” (Y. M. Lotman 18)

The trouble is that even if there is an intended message, it is not guaranteed that the receiver will interpret that message the way it was intended; in fact, outside of the realm of artificial language, it's rare that the receiver does so with 100% accuracy because most signs carry multiple meanings. Furthermore, the more meanings a sign holds, the more “the language of the artistic text acquires secondary features of iconism, which sheds light on the problem of the ‘untranslatability’ of poetic language.” (Y. M. Lotman 17-18). This phenomenon is also known as asymmetrical translation.

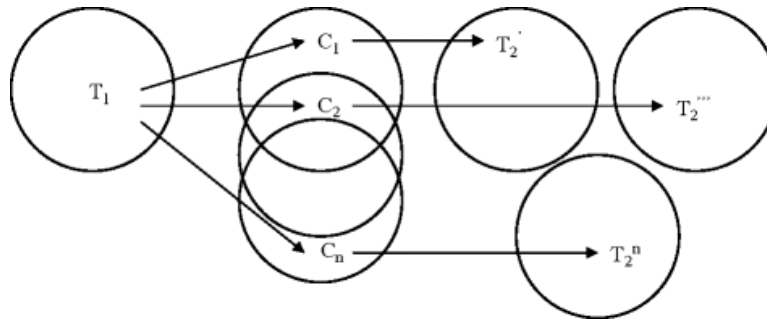


Figure 1 Asymmetrical translation (Y. M. Lotman 15)

This reveals the primary challenge facing the application of semiotics to music, arguably the most abstract of artistic languages. To semiotize any language, one must translate it into one's native natural language because natural language is the type of language through which academics have implicitly agreed to communicate. As we've established, this becomes increasingly difficult the more abstract the original language of the message. The distance between a symbol expressed through language and the object it represents in the physical world creates space for abstraction. How is that distance determined in the first place? We run into a dilemma of causality here where it's impossible to know whether the semiotic limitations of each language mirror human linguistic evolution on a collective and individual level or vice versa. It's widely accepted amongst anthropologists that pictures preceded speech in the timeline of human cognition. We painted on caves before we had the words to describe that very action. Psychologists will also agree that babies respond to images well before they utter their first word, hence why we give babies picture books. Did pictorial language develop first because it has the capacity to produce the closest approximation to the physical object, or do we believe in the capacity for objective representation of pictorial approximations simply because it was the first language to develop in the evolution of our species? Either way, the results are the same:

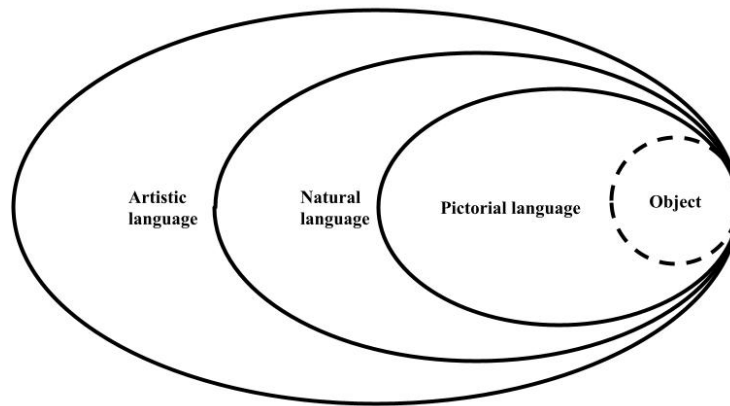


Figure 2 Linguistic capacities for abstraction

Let's circle back to our definition of language and run some hypothetical scenarios.

Languages are not only defined by their capacity for abstraction but also by space and time. The following is an example of how language is constructed spatially as dialects: Natural language aside, if I were to say, "I have to go to the city today" while I am in San Jose, California, it would mean something different if I were to say the same phrase in Lexington, Massachusetts. In San Jose, "the city" is a metonym for San Francisco. Meanwhile, in Lexington, "the city" stands in for Boston. As the original person transmitting this message, which can also be understood here as a symbol for the object that is the action of going to San Francisco that day, I would have to translate my original statement to say instead, "I have to go to San Francisco today," if I want my message to retain its intended meaning. This act of translation reveals my dialect and positionality as a speaker from the Bay Area in California. The same principle can be applied when constructing language temporally as conventions. Still using the phrase above as an example, if I wanted to express the same statement in California in 1755, I would have to use a different set of words to describe the geographical location that we know today as San Francisco because the historical reality was that there was no city of San Francisco in California in 1755. Instead, I might say, "I have to go up the peninsula today." Let's lay this hypothetical situation to rest and turn our eyes toward a more practical application of the concept of conventions.

Semiotics of 19th-Century Russian Linguistic Conventions

In the 19th century, the convention that came to be known as realism swept across Europe and Russia as a reaction to the lofty ideals of romanticism that were deemed too abstract for the common man. It appears to have manifested in natural and pictorial languages but eluded the artistic languages. From a semiotic perspective, we can define the convention of realism as an attempt to close the gap between artistic and natural language by minimizing the abstractions that occur through the seemingly unavoidable process of asymmetrical translation. Realists would say they were searching for the true essence of their subject. Still, the definition of truth is highly subjective, and I believe that the existence of essence is an outright myth, so I prefer the semiotic approach. In Russia, this led to the emergence of literary figures such as Gogol, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, and Chekhov, to name a few. Through pictorial language, the *Peredvizhniki* became the leading group of painters within the convention of realism in Russia (Miliukov). When it comes to artistic languages, such as music, however, there are a few possible reasons why they seem stuck in the convention of romanticism.

The first is simply because the reigning narrative, purported by music critics, theorists, and composers alike since this problem arose in the 19th century, is that music is an inherently romantic and, therefore, unrealistic language. Arnold Schönberg was among the loudest voices pushing this reductionist view of music (Dahlhaus 11). Many people have taken this theory at face value without questioning the implications. I understand the appeal of the simplicity of this narrative, given the complexity of the second explanation that I am about to offer, but it should not satisfy us.

One of the biggest issues I have with Schönberg's proposition here is that he constructs romanticism and realism as timeless entities rather than the linguistic conventions that they are.

The transition from romanticism to realism represents the swing of a pendulum between maximizing and minimizing abstraction, which has been swinging since the invention of language. Romanticism and realism are not exceptions; they're just some of the most well-documented examples of this cultural phenomenon. In other words, they happened in the right place at the right time. The European Enlightenment gave birth to the social sciences as we know them today and the metalanguage through which they are expressed and through which I am writing now. This metalanguage is a heuristic tool that helps explain the events occurring around us. It encourages the practice of labeling past, present, and even theoretical future social phenomena to help us manage the overwhelming amount of information that surrounds us constantly. It just so happened that the pendulum swing that coincided with the rise of modern social sciences was that of romanticism and realism. Social theorists of the time became obsessed with documenting this cultural shift in real-time as active participants, an endeavor that Yuri Lotman would argue is fundamentally impossible:

insofar as culture is memory, or in other words, a record in the memory of what the community has experienced, it is, of necessity, connected to past historical experiences.

Consequently, at the moment of its appearance, culture cannot be recorded as such, for it is only perceived ex post facto. (214)

I'll leave the full extent of the consequences of their futile attempts to be explored in a future paper. For now, let's just focus on how this resulted in an over-representation of studies of romantic and realist conventions. This over-representation has inflated their importance into a myth of exceptionalism that still accompanies these two conventions in the Western psyche. Romanticism gravitates towards abstraction, just as Surrealist and Baroque conventions do, which is why I say that music is abstract, not romantic.

The second qualm I have with the existing narrative surrounding realism in music is that it promotes the false notion that language can be translated without abstractions. If we follow this logic, then artificial languages (i.e. computer coding or Klingon) are the most real languages, an inherently contradictory statement. Returning to the diagram in Figure 2, we see that the object exists within a message no matter what language the transmitter uses. Picture the transmitter's message as a dart board with the object of their message as the bullseye. The transmitter determines the minimum distance within the limitations of the language through which they choose to transmit their message when they formulate their message. The receiver is then tasked with throwing the dart from whatever distance the transmitter has set. The receiver's distance and angle are also affected by any discrepancies in life experiences and cultural contexts that inevitably exist between the transmitter and the receiver. Naturally, the further away the receiver stands, the higher the chance is that they'll miss the point of the transmitter's message, but the possibility of hitting a bullseye is always there.

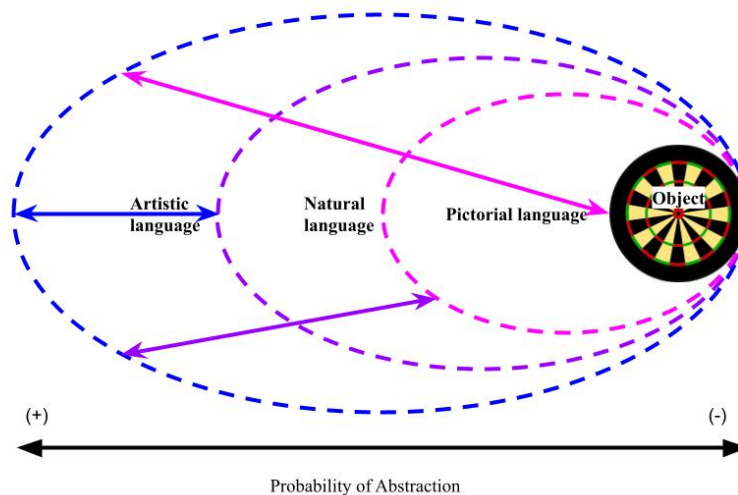


Figure 3 Linguistic mobility within abstraction

Here's the twist: the dartboard disappears the moment the dart leaves the receiver's hand. The receiver will derive meaning no matter where their dart hits. Oftentimes, as in the case of

literary analysis and music criticism, the transmitter isn't even there to assess the receiver's accuracy. Even if they are present, it's not guaranteed that the transmitter will remember where the bullseye was in the first place. Sometimes, there is no transmitter at all, but whether we like it or not, our senses are constantly receiving messages from the physical world, and so we are all fated to keep throwing darts at the wall. One could argue that because we can't discern between messages designed with an intended object and messages without one, then maybe everything is pointless. This is also known as nihilism. On the other hand, we have existentialism, where it's possible that there is meaning to be found in everything for the exact same reason. I won't claim to have an answer for this, only that the coexistence of these thoughts suggests that there must be a middle ground somewhere.

If romanticism and realism are to be found on opposite sides of the probability of abstraction scale in this model, then it suddenly becomes quite clear why "realism was never more than a peripheral phenomenon in the music of the 19th century" (Dahlhaus pg 12). Whereas pictorial language provides the transmitter with the freedom to create as much or as little space for abstraction as they choose, transmitters communicating through artistic languages have a much more limited range of motion. Pictorial language can produce messages as subjective as artistic language, but artistic language can never produce messages as objective as pictorial language.

Mussorgsky's Explorations of Musical Realism

Despite these limitations, some 19th-century composers still attempted to convey realism in music, heavily encouraged by the words of Chernyshevsky and Herzen (Ridenour). The most notable Russian composer who took on this challenge was Modest Mussorgsky. Mussorgsky was acutely aware of the limitations of his craft:

Explain this to me, only leave aside the boundaries of art— I believe in them only very relatively, because *boundaries of art* in the religion of the artist, means *standing still*.

What if someone's wonderful brains did not think and come to any conclusion; but other brains did think and did come to conclusions— where then, are the boundaries? But relatively— oh, yes! Sounds cannot be chisels, brushes— well, of course, as *in each best thing there is a weakness and vice versa*— even children know this. (Leyda and Bertensson 193)

By no means did this stop him from pushing the boundaries of music; if anything, it only encouraged him to do so. His approach was centered on musically representing qualities of natural speech, such as intonation and cadence. Referring to himself in his autobiography, he explained his view on the “task of art”:

Art is a means of communicating with people, not an aim in itself. This guiding principle has defined the whole of his creative activity. Proceeding from the conviction that human speech is strictly controlled by musical laws he considers the task of musical art to be the reproduction in musical sounds not merely of the mood of the feeling, but chiefly of the mood of human speech. (Leyda and Bertensson 420).

His adamant rejection of the romantic notion of creating art for art's sake led him to experiment with atonality and irregular time signatures to mimic speech patterns and made him quite a polarizing figure during his lifetime. His opera *Boris Godunov*, one of his largest and most experimental works, was not received well when it debuted at the Mariinsky Theater in 1874, receiving sharp criticism even from Cesar Cui, one of the Mighty Five. This exclusive club, active from 1862-1870, also included the likes of Mili Balakirev, Alexander Borodin, Modest Mussorgsky, and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Eleven years after Mussorgsky's death in

1881, Rimsky-Korsakov decided he had the right to revise his late friend's work. What's more, this was seen as completely acceptable despite huge stylistic differences and methodological approaches between the two composers. Mussorgsky must have been rolling in his grave. The very practice of revision went against his philosophy regarding the completion of his compositions. In a letter addressed to Rimsky-Korsakov on *St John's Night on Bald Mountain* in 1867, Mussorgsky expressed the following about the finality of his piece: "Let us understand that I'm not going to start altering it; with whatever shortcomings it was born, it will have to live, if it does live" (Leyda and Bertensson 87). Rimsky-Korsakov justified his actions by perpetuating the misleading narrative that Mussorgsky had been an idiot-savant and that he was simply correcting his friend's mistakes because Mussorgsky didn't know what he had been doing (Ridenour). This was, of course, the easiest way to explain why *Boris Godunov* had initially received such a negative reaction; it was easier to blame one person than to consider how the audience had been positioned to receive messages through the convention of romanticism and were thus missing the point of Mussorgsky's realism.

While it was true that he had never received a formal education in music theory or composition, he was not without practical knowledge, courtesy of Mili Balakirev's mentorship. Although Rimsky-Korsakov had also begun his compositional career this way, by the 1890s, he had been involved with the Russian Musical Society (RMS) and Tchaikovsky for at least ten years (Miliukov 118). It is entirely possible that, along with learning formal Western music theory, Rimsky-Korsakov was conditioned at the conservatory to value standardized classroom learning over learning through experience, which tainted his opinion of the late composer. Ironically, this is precisely what concerned Mussorgsky about the entire concept of a music conservatory. Balakirev encouraged his belief that the institutionalization of music was

counterproductive to the goal of personal and Russian national musical development, especially through the RMS, which he believed encouraged stagnation through conformity to the conventions of European romanticism. Some of this sentiment indeed came from a place of xenophobia and antisemitism aimed at the founder of the RMS, Anton Rubenstein, but a lot of it came back to fundamentally disagreeing with the idea of a music conservatory.

It's worth considering whether the quest to find the Russian national musical sound led to Mussorgsky's pursuit of realism in music or vice versa, but not worth dwelling on now because, regardless of causality, these two efforts were united in the mind of the composer by the common goal of rejecting Europe. Но сначала, если мы хотим понять роль Мусоргского в развитии того, что мы сегодня называем русской национальной музыкой, мы должны сначала понять, как зародилась русская национальная идентичность. Я не имею в виду происхождение Руси; я говорю об историческом моменте, когда перед русским народом была поставлена коллективная задача самоопределения по отношению к остальному миру, особенно Западной Европе.

Россия через петровскую парадигму

Как обсуждалось ранее, к началу XVIII века Западная Европа действовала в рамках Вестфальской системы. Это была система, с которой молодой Петр Великий познакомился во время своих заграничных путешествий, система, которую он непреднамеренно навязал своим подданным, и система, в рамках которой мировая политика существует и сегодня (Nation-States and Sovereignty). Я имею в виду, что все установленные им реформы и институты были заимствованы из Вестфальской системы. В Европе такие институты, как национальные правительства и стандартизированное образование, были изобретены для поддержки Вестфальского национального государства.

В России Петр основал те же учреждения, надеясь, что они «модернизируют» Россию, не задумываясь, почему они существовали в Европе. Иными словами, эти петровские реформы и институты были созданы до того, как сформировалось национальное государство, для поддержки которого они были созданы. Будучи по своей сути чуждыми понятиями, они, таким образом, стали символами всего того, чем Россия не была.

Если мы проанализируем петровские реформы как существующий в дискурсе того времени символ, мы увидим, что они значили многое. Для Петра и его сторонников реформы были символом прогресса и модернизации, двух абстрактных понятий, которые по большей части сохраняют свой положительный смысл в сегодняшнем лексиконе. Как я уже сказала, они также представляли Европу, потому что именно оттуда они были заимствованы. Таким образом, процесс семиозиса привел к смешению всех этих понятий и значений. По мнению Петра I, “Европа” равно “прогресс и модернизация”, “модернизация и прогресс” равно “благо”, значит, “благо” равно “Европа” (Lotman and Uspenskij). И, возможно, самым важным и проблематичным элементом послания Петра и причиной, по которой он в первую очередь осуществил эти реформы, было то, что он считал Россию противоположностью Европы в первую очередь с точки зрения прогресса и модернизации.

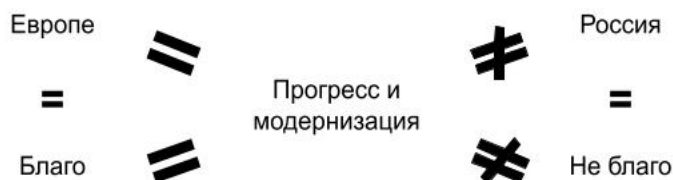


Figure 4 Петровская парадигма

Такова была семиотическая парадигма, которую установил Петр Великий вместе со своими реформами. Официальная точка зрения отражена в похвале Ломоносова царю:

“Подвигнулся великий государь из отечества с великим посольством видеть европейский государства, познать их преимущества, дабы, возвратясь, употребить их в пользу своих подданных.” (Ломоносов)

Это была также парадигма, в рамках которой зародилось русское национальное самосознание, потому что если бы Европа была современной и прогрессивной, а Россия — нет, то из этого следовало бы, что Россия не была Европой. Эта загадка поставила большой вопрос: что такое Россия и кто такие русские народ? Этот вопрос сегодня так же актуален, как и более 300 лет назад.

Однако эта парадигма также создала второй, возможно, более зловещий набор бинарных ассоциаций, предполагающих, что Европа лучше России, потому что она современна и развита. Таким образом, условия превосходства и неполноценности были связаны с практиками русской национальной идентичности еще со времен Петра Великого (Зорин). Большинство националистических действий сосредоточено на утверждении превосходства, но лишь немногие страны с самого начала боролись против того, чтобы их называли неполноценными, как это было в случае с Россией.

Здесь хотелось бы уточнить, что еще до Петра Великого, на территории, известной сегодня как Российская Федерация, в результате культурной и биологической эволюции уже сложились физические маркеры как эвристический инструмент обозначения принадлежности человека к своим социальным группам. Линии были проведены, чтобы различать все: от пола до класса, этнической принадлежности. Хотя он не изобретал социальных категорий, поскольку они являются естественным социальным явлением, он переопределил значение ранее существовавших социальных категорий посредством реформ. Что касается этничности как социальной категории, то русские люди, конечно,

существовали и до Петра Великого, но они познавали себя просто через свой фенотип, культурные обычаи и язык. Не было необходимости оценивать собственное существование, поскольку оно просто рассматривалось как единственный способ жить согласно той социальной категории, в которой вы родились. В антропологической теории это называется габитусом, когда образ жизни человека формирует его идентичность просто посредством практики. Поэтому, когда Петр Великий пришел и сказал людям, что есть другой образ жизни, европейский, и что это правильный образ жизни, он фактически обесценил русский образ жизни и, следовательно, русскую идентичность в целом. Со временем это переросло в комплекс неполноценности внутри русской национальной идентичности, как сформулировано здесь Достоевским:

что самое недоверчивое к себе, самое самобичующее общество в целом мире!.. Мы не только славянам сочувствовали, мы и крестьян освободили, а посмотрите, были ли когда в истории русского народа более скептический, более самопроверяющий себя момент, как в эти последние двадцать лет русской жизни? В недоверии к себе мы доходили, в эти годы, до болезненных крайностей, до непозволительной насмешки над собою, до незаслуженного презрения к себе и уж слишком, слишком далеки были от самоупоения нашими совершенствами. (Достоевский 304-305)

Размышления Достоевского в «Дневнике писателя» полны самосознания, свойственного его писательскому стилю, но важно отметить, что они проникнуты и русским шовинизмом, симптомом его реальности как человека, усвоившего колонизацию, осуществленную Петром реформы и парадигма. Но именно это делает его взгляды на этот вопрос еще более ценными. Вес его слов как активного участника формирования русской национальной идентичности, современника Мусоргского и общественного деятеля,

имеющего устоявшуюся аудиторию, здесь нельзя недооценивать. Да, для нас, читая его слова задним числом, они служат окном в определенный образ мышления, существовавший среди русской интеллигенции того времени, но к моменту написания этой статьи Достоевский достаточно зарекомендовал себя как писатель, чтобы, по его словам, иметь право влиять на общественное мнение по этим вопросам. Говоря семиотическим языком, «Дневник писателя» поэтому не просто продукт внутри семиосферы (Y. M. Lotman) русского интеллигентского общества 1876 года, он сам стал производителем смысла в том же пространстве в последующие годы.

Поначалу такие европейские страны, как Голландия, Франция и Англия, поддержали реформы Петра, основанные на евроцентристском моральном превосходстве, которое мотивировало все их имперские начинания. Но Россия была другой. России не суждено было стать французской колонией, несмотря на все усилия Наполеона. Хотя реформы Петра, возможно, первоначально представляли собой все, что не было Россией, мы знаем, что значения символов весьма условны и подвержены изменениям, как и контексты, в которых они интерпретируются. Таким образом, мы должны помнить о том, чтобы оставить место для того, чтобы значение реформ Петра могло со временем измениться. Кампания Наполеона против России в 1812 году вызвала культурный сдвиг против Запада. Это также создало культурный парадокс, который Достоевский пытался сформулировать в 1876 году:

Вот что мне кажется: не этот ли факт (т. е. в присоединении к крайне левым, а по сути, отрицателям Европы, даже самым ярким нашим западникам) не отразился в этой протестующей русской душе, какая европейская культура всегда был, начиная с самого Петра, был ненавистен и во многом, слишком во многом казался чуждым

русской душе? Это именно то, что я думаю. О, конечно, этот протест происходил почти все время бессознательно, но что драгоценно, так это то, что русский инстинкт не умер: русская душа, хотя и бессознательно, протестовала именно во имя своего руссизма, во имя своего русского и подавленное начало? (Достоевский 198)

К тому времени, когда Достоевский представил своим читателям этот парадокс, панславянское националистическое движение, известное как славянофильство, существовало уже более 40 лет, а жители Запада существовали со времен Петра Великого и теперь считались придерживающимися крайне устаревших взглядов. Здесь Достоевский постулирует, что сущность русскости можно найти в том, как петровские реформы были истолкованы русскими западниками, тем самым каким-то образом делая западников самыми русскими из всех, поскольку их неизбежная русскость делала петровские реформы по своей сути русскими. Он утверждает, что эта русскость проявляется через дух революции и левые тенденции:

Что русские действительно в большинстве своем заявили себя в Европе либералами, — это правда, и даже это странно. Задавал ли себе кто когда вопрос: почему это так? [...] они склоннее европейцев примкнуть прямо к крайней левой с самого начала, чем витать сперва в нижних степенях либерализма, — одним словом, Тьеров из русских гораздо менее найдешь, чем коммунаров. (Достоевский 197)

Когда мы вспоминаем декабристское восстание 1825 года, трудно не согласиться в какой-то степени с доводами Достоевского, но я думаю, что эта группа реформаторов вообще заслуживает отдельной категории. Эта группа частично отвергла петровскую

парадигму, потому что они отказывались верить в то, что прогресс и модернизация были по своей сути европейскими, в отличие от западников, но они также отказывались верить в то, что прогресс и модернизация были плохими, в отличие от славянофилов. То есть они верили в выгоды прогресса и модернизации, обещанные петровскими реформами, и верили, что Россия сможет достичь этих благ, не потеряв при этом себя. Здесь мы снова встречаемся с нашим дорогим другом Модестом Мусоргским и, принимая все это во внимание, мы приближаемся к пониманию того, что для него лично могло означать быть русским в России.

Outside of folk songs, the history of secular music in Russia also began when Peter the Great began importing composers and musicians, primarily from Italy, to perform at his court and share the knowledge of their craft with the Russian people. As this practice became normalized in Russian society over the next century in tandem with the Petrine paradigm, Russians of the upper social strata who ventured into the world of composing produced imitations of the only reference source deemed socially acceptable for them by the Petrine paradigm: Italian music. Composing in Russian was only considered acceptable for the lower half of society, again reinforcing the superiority-inferiority binary between the West and Russia created by the paradigm. The musical tradition of people within these ranks was, by its very nature, Russian folk music. These two camps continued to develop side by side, divided by social stigma designated by the class culture, natural language, and instrumentation of their art, that is, until Mikhail Glinka (Miliukov). In the 1830s, Glinka, a self-proclaimed patriot, was the first Russian composer to take a swing at the barriers constructed by the Petrine paradigm. Not only was he someone of noble birth composing in the Russian language, but he was also writing for European instrumentation within the conventions of Russian folk music (Frolova-Walker).

By crossing all these semiotic wires, Glinka invented a new genre that garnered him a cult-like following, courtesy of the Mighty Five, and created a bridge between social classes that brought Russian society one step closer to finding itself through national unification.

If there was one thing that the Mighty Five could agree on, it was their worship of Glinka. According to Balakirev, the aspect of Glinka's genius that warranted the most admiration was his innovation, which he believed was Glinka's most Russian trait (Ridenour 79). This sentiment echoes Dostoevsky's paradox almost verbatim. Thus, Russian national identity was constructed by the qualities of progress, innovation, and restlessness for the Mighty Five, just as it was for Dostoevsky. As we have established, out of the Five, Mussorgsky was arguably the most experimental with his compositions. Some would say he was ahead of his time, an innovator, if you will, just like Glinka. Anyone who knows anything about Russian history knows that this semiotic association between Russia and revolution has only grown stronger since the mid-19th century. It should, therefore, come as no surprise that the music of Mussorgsky, a revolutionary in the field of music, has come to be one of the leading representatives of the Russian national sound in the artistic language of music.

Closing Remarks

I first heard of Modest Mussorgsky when I began brainstorming topics for this paper with my advisor, Alexei Pavlenko. He brought him up at the mere mention of nationalism in Russian music. I hope someday to write more on the semiotic transformations Mussorgsky's music has undergone within the conventions of nationalism since being canonized as a Russian national composer. However, all I wanted to do in this paper was to use semiotics to understand how Mussorgsky became an icon of Russian national music in the first place, as so perfectly proven by my advisor's association between the two concepts that came out naturally in our

conversation. Many questions remain unanswered, but I think that's just part of being consumed so entirely by subjects like these. I will leave you with one final quote by Dostoevsky that reflects the relevance of some of points brought up in this paper:

Скажут, что они обличали в нашем народе лишь темные стороны; но дело в том, что, обличая темное, они осмеяли и всё светлое, и даже так можно сказать, что в светлом-то они и усмотрели темное. Не разглядели они тут, что светло, что темно! И действительно, если разобрать все воззрения нашей европействующей интеллигенции, то ничего более враждебного здоровому, правильному и самостоятельному развитию русского народа нельзя и придумать. [...] А между тем для меня почти аксиома, что все наши русские разъединения и обособления основались, с самого их начала, на одних лишь недоумениях, и даже самых грубейших, и что в них нет ничего существенного. Горше всего то, что это еще долго не уяснится для всех и каждого. И это тоже одна из самых любопытнейших наших тем. / Some may say that they have only condemned t (Dostoevsky)he dark side of our people; but the point is that in condemning the dark side they have also belittled all that is bright, and one can even say that it was precisely in the bright side that they saw darkness. They have not managed to make out what is bright and what is dark here! And in truth if one looks closely into all the views of our Europeanizing intelligentsia, then one can conceive of nothing more harmful to the healthy just and independent development of the Russian people. [...] and yet for me it is almost axiomatic that all our Russian disunities and dissociations have been founded from the very beginning only on misunderstandings, the crudest sort of misunderstandings, with nothing of real substance in them. The worst of it is that it will be a long time yet before each and every one of us realizes that. This, too, is one of our most interesting topics. (Достоевский 407) / (Dostoevsky 754)

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