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Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov the Antiquarian: The Narrativity of Diegetic Song in the Opera Sadko

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Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov the Antiquarian:

The Narrativity of Diegetic Song in the Opera *Sadko*

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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in Musicology

by

Jeffrey T. Riggs

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov the Antiquarian:

The Narrativity of Diegetic Song in the Opera *Sadko*

by

Jeffrey T. Riggs

Doctor of Philosophy in Musicology

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Professor Mitchell Bryan Morris, Chair

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov subtitled *Sadko* "an Opera-*Bylina*," a gesture which both reveals his compositional approach, and gives the piece a *sui generis* designation as an operatic and folk-epic hybrid. The composer drew from an extraordinary range of textual and musical material to fashion *Sadko*, a work that is thoroughly imbued with references to Russian folk culture. His primary source texts were the Russian *byliny*: folk-epic poetry that had circulated orally for some seven centuries before being collected and transcribed in the nineteenth century. While Rimsky-Korsakov's preoccupation with folklore represents a thematic continuation of his prior operas, his approach to his source material takes a decidedly antiquarian and philological turn in *Sadko*.

Rimsky-Korsakov's transmutation of the *byliny* into operatic form involved his development of a set of narrative strategies that approximate the storytelling conventions of the source texts. Rimsky-Korsakov includes multiple narrators in the opera who present Sadko's tale through different narrative frames, chronotopes, and musical idioms. The arias of each narrator constitute moments of heightened narrativity, in which the events of the plot are condensed, refracted, retold, and foretold through the prism of diegetic song. The diegetic passages, though generally critiqued as moments of stasis in the dramatic action of the opera, are in fact the active fulcra of the narrative, foretelling, even *generating*, its subsequent events as well as offering retrospective viewpoints on prior events from alternate narrative perspectives. The diegetic songs communicate implicit details about the narrators' respective positions in the social strata, and their underlying alliances with other characters. *Sadko* not only tells the story of the eponymous hero, but foregrounds the mechanisms, modalities, and multidimensionality of telling itself.

The dissertation of Jeffrey T. Riggs is approved.

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Introduction

1. Antiquarian sensibilities

In the 1890s, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov returned to the operatic genre after a silence of over ten years since *The Snow Maiden* (1881). His decision was occasioned by several factors, including his grudging acceptance of Wagner, the upsurge of a new populist nationalism in the 1890s, and the growing public profile of Savva Mamontov's Private Opera Company, which premiered Rimsky-Korsakov's flagship opera *Sadko* in 1897. As an opera composer, Rimsky-Korsakov had produced works such as *The Maid of Pskov* (1872), which mined the Musorgskian vein of historical Realism, though by *Sadko* his thematic direction had taken a palpably folkloric and mythological turn. While Musorgsky and Glinka created a template for Russian opera through a return to pre-Petrine, Muscovite Russia – with its dramas of murderous autocrats, Polish impostors to the throne, and ecclesiastical intrigues – and Tchaikovsky took the more Europeanized route of Pushkinian adaptations and ballet in the manner of Parisian *grand opéra*, Rimsky-Korsakov's operatic antiquarianism in *Sadko* lacks a clear precedent.

The opera reconstructs the remote Russian past, on the one hand, through a rejection of Musorgskian historical Realism, allowing for excursions into the world of myth and folklore, and, on the other hand, through Rimsky-Korsakov's philological forays into the Russian folk *epos* and *melos*. With his musical apprenticeship in the "Mighty Coterie" (*Moguchiaia kuchka*) and his formative intellectual years occurring in the progressivist 1860s, Rimsky-Korsakov's interest in folk culture is on the one hand *de rigueur* for a composer of his generation. Rimsky-Korsakov's musico-philological enthusiasm for *byliny*, *skazaniia*, and folk song occurs against

the backdrop of a generation of Russian composers who are preoccupied with *narodnost'*, or the idea of nationhood based in the folk.[1]

In *Sadko*, Rimsky-Korsakov creates a fictive world steeped in the semiotics of the Russian cultural imagination that departs in important ways from Kuchkist and more civically-minded models of the nation. The opera not only draws musical material from folkloric sources, but also attempts to create a folkloric world unto itself. *Sadko* is not merely inspired by folk culture; it attempts to *re-instantiate* a Russian folk ethos. Rimsky-Korsakov's treatment of folk material in the opera is as a kind of curator of musical antiquities, an antiquarian entrusted with precious artifacts which he is to preserve and place on display. Part of his antiquarian enterprise is to tap into a dimly, though viscerally, remembered layer of Russian cultural consciousness replete with stories of underwater kingdoms, sorcerers, and invisible cities—an impetus not unlike that behind Stravinsky and Roerich's high-modernist *tour de force*, the *Rite of Spring*. Rimsky-Korsakov's approach differs, however, in its recreationist sensibility, its citational approach to its source texts. His project is to investigate this sublimated layer in a philological and historical fashion, and to reconstitute it within the musical and dramatic structures of opera.

In the 1870s, Rimsky-Korsakov began to devote himself to the study of Russian folk culture, a pursuit that occupied him for the rest of his life.[2] From *May Night* (1880) on, his operatic compositions are suffused not only with folk melodic adaptations, often drawn from his

[1] Marina Frolova Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism: Glinka to Stalin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 3-15.

[2] N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov, *Letopis' moei muzykal'noi zhizni* [A Chronicle of My Musical Life] (Moscow: Muzyka, 1980), pp. 46-47. See also S. Evseev, *Rimskii-Korsakov i russkaia narodnaia pesnia* [Rimsky-Korsakov and Russian Folk Song] (Moscow: Muzyka, 1970).

own anthology of folk songs,[3] but also with a folk sensibility derived from his readings of Russian folk tales and poetry. Rimsky-Korsakov seems particularly interested in how these texts demonstrate what he calls the "remnants of ancient paganism."[4] Recalling his composition of *May Night* in his *Chronicle of My Musical Life*, Rimsky-Korsakov specifies that the opera's choral songs "all have a ritual aspect… The action in the opera is connected with the week of the emergence of the *rusalki* [a South-Slavic syncretistic ritual—J.R.]… In this way, I was able to fuse the folk content beloved by me with the ritual side of folk life, which evinces the remnants of ancient paganism."[5] The second act of *Mlada* (1892) – with its depictions of round dances and ritual soothsayings by the casting of wreaths – inaugurates the strain of Christian pantheism that would later permeate *Sadko*.

Rimsky-Korsakov's reconfiguration of Russian historical reality in *Sadko* should be viewed in a synoptic sense—it extends to his composition of the libretto, to the opera's première in the traditionalist, i.e. non-classicizing, stage setting of the Private Opera,[6] and to his creation of a fictive world fashioned according to the Russian folk imagination. The task Rimsky-Korsakov set for himself was not only to recreate scenarios from Russian history, but to reinstantiate the historical sensibility within which they were initially narrated. As Soviet opera scholar A. Gozenpud writes,

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[3] A. Gozenpud, *N. Rimsky-Korsakov: Temy i idei ego opernogo tvorchestva* [Rimsky-Korsakov: Themes and Ideas of his Operatic Works] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1957), p. 40.

[4] Ibid., 68. All translations from the Russian are mine.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Olga Haldey, *Mamontov's Private Opera: The Search for Modernism in Russian Theater* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), pp. 96-100.

> One could characterize Rimsky-Korsakov's approach as "from song to life and from life to song." The collection and adaptation of folklore were a kind of prelude to creative work… Consciously or unconsciously, Rimsky-Korsakov fulfills Dobroliubov's maxim from his review of Afanas'ev's collection of Russian folk tales: "…it seems that those who notate and collect the works of folk poetry would be doing a useful thing if they were not to limit themselves to the strict notation of the text of the tale or song, but were instead to convey its whole atmosphere both in terms of the form as well as the situation in which they were fortunate enough to hear the tale or song." The task consists not only in the notation and collection of folklore, but in answering the question "in what way do the folk apprehend the tales and traditions narrated to them."[7]

Rimsky-Korsakov's recreationist motives led him not only to draw compositional material from his source material, but also to approximate the narrative conventions and plot construction of the Russian *byliny*.

The *byliny* (singular *bylina*) are folk epic narratives that circulated by oral transmission in Russia circa the twelfth to the nineteenth century.[8] They recount the trials, tribulations, and heroic deeds of figures of local and national repute. They contain mythic and legendary subject matter, and generally feature an idiosyncratically combined pagan and Christian worldview, in which Christian saints and biblical figures commingle with animate spiritual presences in nature. The *byliny* were a form of folk poetry that were melodically declaimed by itinerant bards, usually to the accompaniment of the gusli. *Byliny* began to be recorded and notated by folk song

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[7] A. Gozenpud, *N. Rimsky-Korsakov: Temy i idei ego opernogo tvorchestva*, p. 40.

[8] Much of the groundwork on Rimsky-Korsakov's source materials for *Sadko* has been done by Brian Reeve in his "Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's Use of the *Byliny* (Russian Oral Epic Narratives) in his Opera *Sadko*" (PhD dissertation, University of Nottingham, 2005), pp. 104-128. For an examination of the narrators of the *byliny*, see Iu. A. Novikov, *Skazitel' i bylinnaia traditsiia* [The Narrator and the Bylinic tradition] (St. Petersburg: Pushkinskii dom, 2000). For an analysis of narrative structures of the *byliny*, see O. V. Zakharova, *Byliny: poetika siuzheta* [*Byliny*: The Poetics of Narrative] (Petrozavodsk: Izdatel'stvo petrozavodskogo universiteta, 1997). For an analysis of verse forms of the *byliny*, see M. A. Lobanov, *Stikh byliny: metrika, semantika, genezis* [The Verse of the *Bylina*: Metrics, Semantics, Genesis] (St. Petersburg: Rossiiskii institut istorii iskusstv, 2008). For a classic of structuralist scholarship regarding the *byliny* and other Russian folk poetic forms, see Vladimir Propp, *Russkii geroicheskii epos* [The Russian Heroic Epos] (1958; repr., Moscow: Labirint, 1999).

collectors on travels through remote regions of Russia beginning in the early nineteenth century. From the earliest publications of collections of the *byliny*, they attracted a great deal of interest from Russian poets and philologists. The interest in the *byliny* reached a peak in the 1860s with the publication of Petr Kireevskii's *Songs Collected by P. V. Kireevskii* (*Pesni sobranniia P.V. Kireevskim*).[9] The heightened attention to the *byliny* coincided with the years of Rimsky-Korsakov's musical and intellectual *Bildung*. The composer's first work based on the Sadko *bylina* was a tone poem, op. op. 5, 1867. He later revised the tone poem in 1869 and 1892 before heeding Vladimir Stasov's advice to compose an opera on the Sadko theme in 1894.

Rimsky's approach to *Sadko* as its librettist and composer was to completely imbue the work with both textual and musical artifacts, as well as with the historical mentality or perspective of the actual narrators of *byliny*. Thus the incorporation of fantastical or pantheistic elements into the dramatic action is to be viewed as the perspective of the bardic narrator. There are four narrators in the opera: the bard and *gusliar'* Nezhata, the chorus of townspeople, the *skomorokhi*, and, of course, Sadko himself. The variance of narrative voice, and Rimsky-Korsakov's approximation of *skaz* technique (characterization according to linguistic particularity), invokes Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia.[10] The ensuing narratological analysis has also been informed by the work of the Russian formalists, particularly Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Eikhenbaum, and Vladimir Propp.[11]

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[9] Petr Kireevskii, *Pesni sobranniia P.V. Kireevskim* [Songs Collected by P.V. Kireevskii], 10 vols. (Moscow: Obshchestvo liubitelei rossiiskoi slovesnosti, 1860-1874).

[10] M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. by Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

[11] Plot analysis will be assisted by V. Shklovsky's *Energiia zabluzhdeniia: kniga o siuzhete* [The Energy of Delusion: A Book about Plot] (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1981); formulations of *skaz* will be provided by B. Eikhenbaum, *O proze, o poezii* (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia

The multiple narrators in Sadko serve to retell, foretell, and enact the narrative events of the plot. The inclusion of several narrators, and their recapitulation and projection of certain dimensions of the operatic plot, impacts the opera's dramatic pacing. This aspect of the work – its overarching structure and dramatic sequencing – has elicited criticism since its première.[12] The diegetic arias of Nezhata, Sadko, and the *skomorokhi* constitute moments of heightened narrativity, where the narrative events are condensed, refracted, retold and foretold. The critical opinions regarding these diegetic passages will be reviewed in chapter 1. As will be demonstrated, this criticism does not always acknowledge is that a multiplicity of narrative voices is a structural feature of the *byliny*. The dramatic sequencing was a deliberate choice by Rimsky-Korsakov in an attempt to imitate, or perhaps *preserve*, the particular sense of narrative time that the *byliny* convey.[13] The *byliny* combine tales of bygone years with accounts of the present, and generate an effect of simultaneity between historical and present time. What *Sadko* lacks, unforgivably for some, is inner structural unity. The opera, however, is an instance where antiquarianism overshadows structural organicism.

The opera does not contain acts, but rather a sequence of seven tableaux (*kartiny*). It therefore takes on an episodic quality. The story accumulates horizontally rather than vertically as a series of self-contained musical units. The work's lack of dramatic arc may perhaps be

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literatura, 1986); the structural analysis of folk narratives will reference V. Propp's *Fol'klor, literatura, istoriia* [Folklore, Literature, History] (Moscow: Labirint, 2002).

[12] Brian Reeve, "Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's Use of the *Byliny* (Russian Oral Epic Narratives) in his Opera *Sadko*," pp. 137-156.

[13] A. Gozenpud, *N. Rimsky-Korsakov: Temy i idei ego opernogo tvorchestva*, pp. 90-91.

understood as an instance of *drobnost'*,[14] where the autonomy of the parts supersedes the unity of the whole. *Drobnost'* here is an aspect of Rimsky-Korsakov's interpretation of the pace of the *byliny*. The accretionary structure of the opera follows the episodic sequencing of the *byliny*. Rimsky-Korsakov subtitles the work an "Opera-*Bylina*," suggesting that a seamless transferral of the *bylina* to the conventions of opera is not to be expected. The seams are highlighted rather than hidden within the fabric of the narrative.

The opera's *drobnost'* and multiple narrative voices convey sense of suspended chronology or ambiguous temporality. "Bylinic time" may be characterized as an obscuration of the continuum between past and present. The shifting temporality of the narration also corresponds to changes in musical language, meter and orchestration. Accordingly, *Sadko* comes up against Carolyn Abbate's contention in *Unsung Voices* that music's narrative tense is exclusively relegated to the past.[15] The opera's mode of bardic narration, as well as its narration by the Novgorodian townspeople (as in the choral songs), relates the past as a kind of "co-present."

This conflation of past and present tenses serves a nationalist as well as narrative purpose. Part of Rimsky-Korsakov's idea behind depicting folk culture in opera consists in reminding – in the Platonic sense of *anamnesis* – the Russian nation of its historical identity. *Sadko* redistributes the folk culture of the *byliny* from the pages of specialist inquiry to the operatic stage. It was in keeping with the opera's national character that Rimsky-Korsakov

[14] Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions*, vol. 1 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 1444-1465.

[15] Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 3-30.

selected the Private Opera, with its folk-inspired stage settings and costume design, for the première.[16]

2. The antique and the archaic

Between 1803 and 1826, Nikolai Karamzin published a 12-volume work entitled *The History of the Russian State* (*Istoriia gosudarstva rossiiskogo*). Working as an official state historian under the patronage of Tsar Alexander I, Karamzin produced a history of Russia from the pre-Christian era to the Time of Troubles in the early seventeenth century. Karamzin's work represents the first secular account of a period in Russian history that, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, was being bracketed into the past. The cultural developments of the late-seventeenth and eighteenth century, such as Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich and Peter I's Westernization of Russia as well as Lomonosov and Fonvizin's adaptations of the French Enlightenment – not to mention the Napoleonic wars which were underway at the time of Karamzin's writing – marked the distance.

Karamzin's *History* also represents the eighteenth century's impact on the Russian literary language, which by the early nineteenth century borrowed increasingly from French. He represents the "innovators" in a literary debate with the "archaists," the former camp advocating a literary middle style drawn from French and the latter supporting an older, high style based in Church Slavonic.[17] Karamzin's *History* marks a decisive turn in the Russian literary language away from lexical and morphological forms such as we find in the libretto of *Sadko*. It likewise

[16] Olga Haldey, *Mamontov's Private Opera: The Search for Modernism in Russian Theater*, pp. 96-100.

[17] Iu. N. Tynianov, *Arkhaisty i novatory* [Archaists and Innovators] (Leningrad: Priboi, 1929).

indicates a shift in perspective regarding the pre-Petrine period of Russian history, in which the operas are set. Karamzin had been inspired in his historiographical endeavors by Edward Gibbon and Walter Scott. Scott's novels were significant in the formation of the Russian historical imagination of the early nineteenth century.[18] His works figured significantly in the development of Russian prose fiction in the 1830s by the likes of Pushkin and Aleksandr Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, and later in Tolstoy's *magnum opus* of Scott-inspired prose, *War and Peace*.

The works of Johann Gottfried von Herder, folksong collections such as *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (1805-1808), and German Romanticism had precipitated a folk turn among the European cultural elite by the early nineteenth century.[19] In the 1820s, Petr Kireevskii began documenting Russian folklore and songs on his travels to distant regions of the country.[20] Aleksei Musin-Pushkin's discovery of the *Tale of Igor's Campaign* (*Slovo o polku Igoreve*) in 1795 provided a key impetus for Russian philological inquiry in the following century. The *Igor* story is a heroic boyar's tale featuring bardic narration, linguistic archaisms, and a particular type of Christian pantheism called "dual belief," or *dvoeverie*. Narrated by a bard and gusli player Baian, it acts as one of the formative sources for Rimsky-Korsakov's eponymous hero in *Sadko*. Aleksandr Borodin had previously adapted the story to opera in *Prince Igor* (1890).

An enthusiasm for folklore and old Russian song is characteristic of the Slavophile movement of the early- to mid-nineteenth century. Kireevskii, along with his brother Ivan, are

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[18] Sona Stephan Hoisington, "Pushkin's Belkin and the Mystifications of Sir Walter Scott," *Comparative Literature* 33.4 (1981), pp. 342–357.

[19] See George Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany: Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

[20] Ian K. Lilly, "N.M. Iazykov as a Slavophile Poet," *Slavic Review* 31.4 (1972): 797–804.

important representatives of Slavophilism, a movement which responded to Westernization with a renewed emphasis on Russian cultural institutions such as Orthodoxy and tsarist autocracy.[21] The Slavophile folklorist, philologist, and poet Lev Mei wrote *The Tsar's Bride* (1849) and *The Maid of Pskov* (1859), both of which would later serve as the subject of operas by Rimsky-Korsakov. *Sadko*, in both the language of its libretto and its thematic focus, represents a clear affiliation with the archaic, pre-Petrine strain in Russian literature. Rimsky-Korsakov's recreation of the *byliny* involved considerations of poetic meter and linguistic form, as Gozenpud discusses:

> Rimsky-Korsakov dedicatedly worked on developing the sequence of scenes, attempting to preserve the plot of the *bylina*, as well as on the poetic meter. Iambic pentameter, the meter in which Russian dramaturgists conventionally wrote plays depicting Russian history, did not suit Rimsky-Korsakov on this occasion, although the initial drafts of the libretto were written in this meter. Having placed the task before himself of recreating the character and nature of bylinic narration, the composer in choosing a versifying meter had to depart from the traditional iambic pentameter and attempt bylinic verse.[22]

In *Sadko*, Rimsky-Korsakov opted for trochees of varying line lengths and mixed meters, both of which are more in keeping with examples from Russian folk poetry than iambic pentameter.[23] Moreover, he developed what he called "bylinic recitative"—an archaic linguistic idiom based on the declamatory style of the narrators of the *byliny*.[24] Sadko's recitatives were modeled on "Sadko, the Rich Trader," a tune which was collected by the ethnographer Pavel Rybnikov in

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[21] Abbott Gleason, *European and Muscovite: Ivan Kireevsky and the Origins of Slavophilism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

[22] A. Gozenpud, *N. Rimsky-Korsakov: Temy i idei ego opernogo tvorchestva*, p. 90.

[23] Roy Glenn Jones, *Language and Prosody of the Russian Folk Epic* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972).

[24] Rimsky-Korsakov, *Letopis' moei muzykal'noi zhizni*, pp. 85-86.

1862, and sung by a Karelian peasant named Leonty Bogdanov.[25] Nezhata's gusli-accompanied narration likewise demonstrates its own formal characteristics and offers its own sort of structural consistency throughout the opera.

Glinka, Musorgsky, and Borodin's portrayals of Russian history in opera likewise constitute important precedents for Rimsky-Korsakov. Occurring contemporaneously with, and sometimes in response to, the Kuchkists, the Russian "New Direction" (*Novoe napravlenie*) of the 1870s represents a similar preoccupation with developing a distinctly Russian national idiom in sacred music.[26] While Rimsky-Korsakov drew primarily from secular folk material (though he composed sacred music and even acted as the Kapellmeister at the Imperial Chapel in St. Petersburg),[27] the "New Direction" composers attempted to rediscover and harmonize monophonic *znamennyi* chants.[28] In both Kuchkist and sacred music, the pre-Petrine period acts as a source for native melodic material. Rimsky-Korsakov's melodic adaptations for *Sadko* are remarkable in that the composer attempted to draw from the folk stratum which produced the *dvoeverie* of the *Igor Tale*.

Rimsky-Korsakov states in his *Chronicle* that he aims in his musical works to "preserve the last remains of ancient songs, and along with them all of the signs of ancient pantheism."[29]

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[25] A. Gozenpud, *N. Rimsky-Korsakov: Temy i idei ego opernogo tvorchestva*, pp. 84-85.

[26] Marina Frolova Walker, *Russian Music and Nationalism: Glinka to Stalin*, pp. 120-165.

[27] N. V. Shelkov, ed. *Materialy, sviazannye s deiatel'nost'iu v pridvornoi pevcheskoi kapelle* [Materials Associated with Rimsky-Korsakov's Work at the Imperial Chapel] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1963).

[28] Johann von Gardner, *Bogosluzhebnoe penie russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi* [Russian Church Singing], vol. 2. (Jordanville: Holy Trinity Orthodox Monastery, 1978-1982).

[29] Rimsky-Korsakov, *Letopis' moei muzykal'noi zhizni*, p. 120.

The question arises, however, as to what he means by pantheism. Gozenpud suggests that "Rimsky-Korsakov called his love for nature – his ability to apprehend it animately and unmediatedly and to recreate impressions from it – pantheism."[30] While he undoubtedly had a lifelong appreciation for the natural world,[31] Rimsky-Korsakov's notion of pantheism seems to be derived from the Christian-pagan *dvoeverie* of the Russian *byliny*. The interspersal of pagan and Christian thematics is suggested in places such as tableau 5 of the opera, where Sadko sacrifices himself to appease the disconsolate Sea King (and instead enters his underwater kingdom as a guest). Later a saintly apparition intervenes to put an end to the reign of the Sea King, and commands Sadko to return to the upper world. Rimsky-Korsakov's totalized recreation of the folkloric world of the *byliny* includes representations of the panthestic religious sensibility of the source texts.

3. The problem of humor

Rimsky-Korsakov's interest in Gogol as an interpreter of the Russian folk imagination may offer oblique insight into aspects of *Sadko* such as its narrative structure, dramatic sequencing, and even its première date. Gogol's classification among canonical Russian realists of the nineteenth century is somewhat problematic.[32] Similarly to *Sadko*, his Ukrainian tales combine Realism with elements of fantasy. His *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka* (1832), upon

[30] A. Gozenpud, *N. Rimsky-Korsakov: Temy i idei ego opernogo tvorchestva*, p. 53.

[31] Rimsky-Korsakov, *Letopis' moei muzykal'noi zhizni*, pp. 15-18.

[32] See Edyta Bojanowska, *Nikolai Gogol: Between Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); see also Roman Koropeckyj and Robert Romanchuk, "Ukraine in Blackface: Performance and Representation in Gogol's *Dikanka Tales*, Book 1." *Slavic Review* 62.3 (2003), pp. 527-547.

which Rimsky-Korsakov drew for *May Night* and *Christmas Eve*, include features of folk ritual and syncretistic belief. Gogol's stories constitute an important model for Rimsky-Korsakov not only in their inclusion of otherworldly realms and figures sourced from Southern Ukrainian folk tales, but also for their approximation of a folk mentality through the use of particular linguistic idioms and forms. As demonstrated by Boris Eikhenbaum, who first developed the analysis of *skaz*, Gogol is a progenitor of the *skaz* technique in Russian literature.[33] Rimsky-Korsakov approach to *skaz* in *Sadko*, as mentioned prior, takes on musical as well as narrative dimensions. He was probably aware of Gogol's exclamation: "What an opera one could put together out of our folk melodies!"[34] Rimsky-Korsakov's use of *skaz* as a technique of characterization, either consciously or unconsciously, appears to derive from Gogol.

Gogol's stories convey a folk sensibility by reproducing the linguistic usage of small town inhabitants of southern Ukraine. An inadequately understood feature of his *skaz* is its humor. Vladimir Propp ascribes a structural function to humor in Russian folk narratives.[35] One use of *skaz* narration in Gogol's stories is to elicit the reader's laughter, though generally not in a supercilious sense at the expense of the narrator, but instead as a token of appreciation for quaint folkways receding into the past. Rimsky-Korsakov's most direct nod to the Gogolian humoristic tradition in *Sadko* is the inclusion of the *skomorokhi*. In the 1860s, Gogol's works were read aloud at Kuchkist gatherings attended by Rimsky-Korsakov.[36] His influence is present, in fact,

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[33] Boris Eikhenbaum, "Kak sdelana *Shinel'* Gogolia," in *O proze, o poezii* (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1986).

[34] Quoted from A. Gozenpud, *N. Rimsky-Korsakov: Temy i idei ego opernogo tvorchestva*, p. 39.

[35] See V. Ia. Propp's *Problemy komizma i smekha: ritual'nyi smekh v fol'klore* [Problems of Comedy and Humor: Ritual Humour in Folklore] (Moscow: Labirint, 1999).

[36] A. Gozenpud, *N. Rimsky-Korsakov: Temy i idei ego opernogo tvorchestva*, p. 39.

throughout Rimsky-Korsakov's career.[37] The humor of Gogol's *skaz* storytelling may provide narratological insight into what Rimsky-Korsakov is up to in *Sadko*. The piece in effect contravenes our assumption about post-Wagnerian opera that it be *serious*. Tableau 1 depicts a feast for the Novgorodian merchants, in which the joyful atmosphere is conveyed through bardic song, round dance, and choral singing. Its première during the Christmas season of 1897 is perhaps also reflective of the opera's festive setting. The contention here is not that *Sadko* demonstrates Gogolian humor (which veers into the non-Rimsky-Korsakovian territory of the grotesque), but that Gogol's humoristic approach to the Russian folk tradition figured in Rimsky-Korsakov's representations of folk culture.

If the expectation of a Germanic brand of operatic seriousness involving organic unity and structural coherence is unfulfilled by design in the opera, then certain analytical and narratological possibilities present themselves. The *drobnost'* evidenced in *Sadko* may be partially attributable to Gogolian folk aesthetics. Its episodic, song-and-dance narration seems aimed less at the individual listener's quasi-devotional contemplation of the piece's inner unities, and more at generating a kind of bygone folk *radost'*, or merriment, among the entire audience. The piece's structure can be read as an extension of Rimsky-Korsakov's interpretation of folk aesthetics, and not as a shortcoming of the piece's construction.

The ensuing chapters examine the narrative structure, dramatic pacing, and the diegetic music of *Sadko*. Chapter 1 surveys the critical opinion regarding the opera, particularly as it concerns the issues of plot construction and dramatic sequencing. This chapter likewise attempts to portray Rimsky-Korsakov, in his preoccupation with folkloric preservation, as a kind of

[37] A. Gozenpud, "Gogol' v muzyke" in *Russkii opernyi teatr XIX veka*, vol. 2 ["Gogol in Music," Russian Operatic Theater of the Nineteenth Century] (Leningrad: "Muzyka," 1969), pp. 34-62.

operatic curator. The remaining chapters examine the diegetic music of Nezhata, Sadko, and the *skomorokhi*, respectively. Chapter 2 investigates Nezhata's role as Sadko's narrator within his own tale. Nezhata, a fellow bard and *gusliar'*, tells Sadko's story to the townspeople. His arias function as *byliny* inserted within the broader structure of the opera-*bylina*, both foretelling and recounting the narrative events with a prescience that frames his diegetic music within a wider scope than the real-time unfolding of the operatic plot. Chapter 3 will analyze the structure of Sadko's narrative voice. Sadko's diegetic music has a generative effect on the narrative proceedings, precipitating the major narrative events such as his banishment from Novgorod, his encounter with Volkhova, and the creation of a river at the piece's conclusion. As an embodiment of Orpheus, Sadko represents the mysterious power of song over nature and the ascendancy of the artist within society. The discussion turns to the narrative function of the *skomorokhi* in chapter 4. The *skomorokhi* serve as a mirror of the narrative events, retelling them in a humorous light that provides both comic relief and an alternate viewpoint on key events that have transpired. They serve as the locus of social critique in the opera, masking their incisive observations with amusing satire. The conclusion points to directions for future research.

Chapter 1—

Rimsky-Korsakov as Curator:

Questions of Genre and their Narrative Implications

1. "A semiotician's dream, and a critic's nightmare"

Setting out to write a dissertation in English on Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *Sadko* can be seen in (at least) two lights. *Sadko* is a rarely performed and relatively unknown piece in the Anglophone world. Its composer – in America, at least – is primarily known for his concert repertoire rather than his operas; *Scheherazade*, an orientalist foray into the *Arabian Nights*, is generally the first Rimsky-Korsakov piece to come to mind among performers and musicologists alike. Consequently, on the one hand, the effort required to unpack and interpret the fictive world of *Sadko*, which is so thoroughly steeped in the mythical and fantastical ethos of Russian folklore, is at risk of falling on deaf or indifferent ears when addressed to an English-speaking readership. Clearly, given the scarcity of English-language monographs on Rimsky-Korsakov, scholars have been reluctant to take on a composer who has not traveled well outside of his native country. On the other hand, if this endeavor is conducted appropriately and with full knowledge of its risk, it has the potential to do what a dissertation is supposed to do – to reveal questions worth asking, present new findings, and generate interest in a topic that was previously undelineated. It is my hope that the present study does the latter.

In Russia, Rimsky-Korsakov is foremost known as an opera composer. *Sadko*, which was premiered on January 7, 1898 (new style) at Moscow's Solodovnikov Theater by the Mamontov Private Opera Company, is considered by Russian critics and audiences to be Rimsky-Korsakov's flagship opera. The opera was first performed in St. Petersburg at the

Mariinsky Theater in 1901. It returned to Moscow in 1906 and was staged at the Bolshoi Theater. *Sadko* continued to be a favorite of Russian audiences in the Soviet period, with performances at the Bolshoi Theater in 1935, 1949, 1963, and 1980. Its popularity has continued into the post-Soviet period, with performances throughout Russia from 1993 to the present day. As of this writing, the opera is currently running at the Mariinsky Theater.

Despite its enduring success in Russia, *Sadko* has not become a fixture of operatic repertoires outside of its home country. The explanations for its limited appeal are many, and should begin with the composer's own admission that the opera contains a density of national and folkloric references that could be fully appreciated only by a Russian.[1] Indeed, *Sadko*'s scenes from the Novgorodian *veche* (town hall gathering), its litany of characters from Russian folklore, and its narrative topoi derived from the Russian *byliny*, require a degree of familiarity with the Russian context that could not be expected of a non-Russian-speaking or non-specialist audience. As Richard Taruskin has decreed regarding Rimsky-Korsakov's operas,

> The trouble has always been the amount of subtext required for full comprehension. Rimsky-Korsakov is a composer who cannot travel light; his work is a semiotician's dream and a critic's nightmare. Unprepared to receive its messages, alien ears perceive mainly its suspiciously decorative packaging and an unacceptably high (but characteristically Slavonic) level of ritualized repetition or sequence. Richard Struass's reaction to the *Christmas Eve* suite was typical: 'That is all very well, but unfortunately we are no longer children.' Yet to those properly receptive (and that probably means exclusively to Russians), it can seem the most multivalently evocative and transporting music in the world.[2]

Taruskin's remarks present a host of complications related to Rimsky-Korsakov's music and its reception that the current study will attempt to grapple with, including its inaccessibility to non-

[1] Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, *Letopis' moei muzykal'noi zhizni* (Moscow: Direkt-media, 2015), pp. 527-528.

[2] Richard Taruskin, "Rimsky-Korsakov, Nikolay Andreyevich." *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. by Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1992) III, p. 1337.

Russian audiences, its semiotic density, its preference for unusual sequencing (particularly in a narrative sense), and, most importantly, its ability to transport audiences to pluriform and multivalent fictive worlds.

The Strauss quotation ("That is all very well, but unfortunately we are no longer children.") is representative of an operatic aesthetics in which the seriousness of the music and thematics possesses an inherent value. A different form of seriousness, however, applies to Rimsky-Korsakov's *tvorcheskii zamysel* (creative vision) for *Sadko* and his approach to the sources upon which the opera is based. *Sadko* appears as an effortless display of Russian national identity that was in fact a product of Rimsky-Korsakov's painstaking (and serious) philological research into Russian folklore and the *byliny*. While its surface gleams with playful and quaint appeal, its depths are a reservoir of Russian folkloric narratives, tropes, and musical quotations. The opera's seriousness is in effect concealed behind scenes of merrymaking, the antics of the *skomorokhi*, and lighthearted folk tunes.

Implicit in Taruskin's comment is the assumption that what makes Rimsky-Korsakov's operas a "semiotician's dream" also makes them a "critic's nightmare." The Russian musicologist and critic Boris Asaf'ev addresses the very same feature of Rimsky-Korsakov's operas in a passage from his monograph on the composer, though in an effusive and laudatory tone:

> Rimsky-Korsakov's operas are thoroughly permeated, suffused and inundated with charms (*zagovory*), spells (*zaklinaniia*), incantations (*zakliatiia*), imitations of mysterious invocations and the voices of nature, laments (*prichitaniia*), cries of mourning (*plachi*), spiritual verses (*dukhovnye stikhi*), epic declamation (*bylinnyi skaz*), songs for dancing and merriment (*pliasovaia i igrovaia pesn'ia*), round dances (*khorovody*), holiday carols (*koliadki*), antics of the *skomorokhi* (*skomorosh'ie vykhodki*), folk tunes (*naigryshi*), church songs (*zapevki*), renderings (*perevody*) and enumerations (*perebory*).[3]

[3] B. V. Asaf'ev, *Nikolai Andreevich Rimskii-Korsakov*, 1844-1944 (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1944), p. 10. All translations from the Russian are mine unless otherwise noted.

Here Asaf'ev generates a veritable laundry list of the elements of Rimsky-Korsakov's operas that make them incapable of traveling light outside of the Russian semiotic sphere. Several of these elements, namely the spiritual verses, *khorovody*, and escapades of the *skomorokhi*, are cultural artifacts exclusive to Russia, while others, like epic declamation, folk tunes, and church music assume specific forms within the Russian context. The escapades of the *skomorokhi* (itinerant music and comedy troupes in medieval and early-modern Russia) figure especially prominently in *Sadko*. Thus the "semiotician's dream" consists in the immensity and depth of signifying elements in Rimsky-Korsakov's music, albeit to a Russophone audience.

The "critic's nightmare" consists in the fact that essentially none of the aspects of Rimsky-Korsakov's operas that elicit praise from Asaf'ev would be familiar to an Anglophone audience. This is all to say that the level of background work and cross-cultural deciphering required for an Anglophone critic is commensurate to the level of nuance and national distinctiveness of Rimsky-Korsakov's operas perceived by a Russian critic. At a time when national color and national character were defining points of both musical language and operatic thematics, Rimsky-Korsakov created a semiotic universe utterly replete with signifiers of "Russianness." As a result, his operas – *Sadko* in particular – may be imagined as a kind of kaleidoscope—a term that is encountered frequently in the secondary literature on the opera. Looking through its lens reveals a spectacle of color; however, one must have the *sui generic* apparatus in hand to view the light refracted in such a way.

This chapter will first discuss the curatorial element of Rimsky-Korsakov's use of folk material for *Sadko*. Rather than merely adapting or basing his opera on folk sources, the composer attempted to "inundate" (to use Asaf'ev's term) the piece with examples of Russian folk culture. The discussion will then turn to the narrative implications of Rimsky-Korsakov's

attempt to fuse the dissimilar genres of opera and *bylina*. It will then review select critical opinions on the opera, particularly as they concern the piece's narrative structure and dramatic pacing. The chapter's contention is that the bylinic,[4] static passages of the opera must be seen outside of late nineteenth-century aesthetic criteria, and regarded not as asides from the narrative, but instead as complex and multi-tiered narrative devices. These considerations will then supply a framework for investigating the narrative role of the opera's diegetic music in chapters 2, 3 and 4.

2. A curatorial opera

The inherent Russianness of the Sadko story does not necessarily explain its limited appeal. Compare, say, Stravinsky's *Petrushka* or the *Firebird*, which also derive from Russian folk themes, but have entered international repertoires. There is also evidence to suggest that Rimsky-Korsakov did not expect Russian audiences to catch all of the references, either. The full depth and breadth of subtextual presence in the opera does not reveal itself upon a casual listening. Uncovering the voluminousness of its references, rather, is a formidable scholarly task involving careful philological research into Russian folklore and the *byliny*, much as Rimsky-Korsakov did in composing the libretto and music. Brian Reeve, in summarizing his source

[4] Throughout this dissertation, I will use a neologism, "bylinic," as the adjectival form of *byliny*. I ask for the reader's indulgence, as I have done this for several reasons. Most importantly, as the *byliny* are a specific Russian genre that may be rendered in English only inexactly as "folk epic," using the adjective "bylinic" avoids the need for a hyphenated adjective ("folk-epic") that inadequately describes whatever noun it is modifying. The *byliny* have no direct analog in the English folk tradition, and thus I have used the transliterated Russian *byliny* as the nominal form in the dissertation. It follows, then, to use an adjectival form that is based on the transliterated Russian nominal form for purposes of consistency and exactitude. Moreover, "bylinic" acts as an anglicized version of the Russian adjectival form *bylinnyi*.

study of *Sadko*, states that "there is hardly one detail of language or subject matter in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sadko* that does not derive from Russian traditional sources."[5] The opera is in effect layered – "permeated, suffused, and inundated" to use Asaf'ev's words – with textual and music references to Russian folklore and history. To use a modish term, the opera is palimpsestic in its omnibus of folkloric sources pertaining to the character of Sadko from various historical periods. If the (Russian) audience was not meant to grasp the full range of *Sadko*'s subtext, then the question presents itself as to why Rimsky-Korsakov maintained such strict adherence to bylinic and historical sources for his thematic and musical material.

The answers to this question are many, and could easily begin in a historical vein with a recounting of Rimsky-Korsakov's affiliation with the "Mighty Coterie" (*Moguchaia kuchka*), who sought to create a Russian national idiom in music. The historical account, though valid, is a well-trodden path, and it does not necessarily explain how Rimsky-Korsakov *valued* his historical and folkloric sources for the opera, or why he sought to fashion the opera out of them almost exclusively. Rimsky-Korsakov appears to regard these sources as having an inherent signifying power, one that could perhaps convey signification independent of their perceiver's knowledge of their meaning or provenance. When combined in such profusion, they both contain and disclose an inherent value, an innate capacity for signifying Russianness, which could render an intangible or subconscious effect on a Russian audience. This notion of the latent signifying agency of folkloric sources plays into *Sadko*'s Orphic theme of supremacy of art over natural law. Much as Orpheus' song entrances animals and moves inanimate objects, and Sadko's song conjures fantastical presences from aqueous realms, the opera's folkloric sources

[5] Brian Reeve, "Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's Use of the Byliny (Russian Oral Epic Narratives) in his Opera *Sadko*" (PhD dissertation, University of Nottingham, 2005), p. 17.

could be seen to invoke an *Ur* form of Russianness to which, Rimsky-Korsakov supposes, Russian ears are specially attuned. Just as Sadko awakens to his own mirror reflection in tableau 7, Russian audiences are intended to see themselves in the opera—an experience of self-recognition that surpasses cognitive understanding, and touches on intangible qualities of selfhood, *narodnost'* (folk-centered nationality), and communal self-identification.

Rimsky-Korsakov seems to be suggesting in *Sadko* that what is portrayed in symbolic form in art can then become actualized in reality, or can create an idealized reality, by indeterminable means. Similar to the way that the Russian Symbolists championed the theurgic purpose of art to give form to the mysterious, the ineffable, and the occluded – thereby proceeding "from the real to the realer"[6] – Rimsky-Korsakov contemporaneously sought an accentuated form of Russianness that exceeds verbal description, and instead enacts something elemental and subconscious about the nation. The Symbolists supposed that theurgy consisted in artistic forms and ritual formulae from antiquity that, when reproduced, could affect current historical circumstances; Rimsky-Korsakov, meanwhile, postulates that textual and musical relics from the remote Russian past could reinstantiate dimly recalled forms of Russian identity.

The etiology of this line of reasoning for both the Symbolists and Rimsky-Korsakov seems to be deemphasized in favor of the effect. The means by which *Sadko*'s folk material brings about a reinvigorated form of Russianness may be preferentially enshrouded in mystery, though its result is clear: to (re)create a heightened form of Russian identity and to incite a dialectical process of self-recognition and historical transformation. Thus the democratic

[6] Russian Symbolist poet and theoretician Viacheslav Ivanov postulated that the purpose of symbolic poetry was to elevate the reader's (or listener's) consciousness "a realibus ad realiora" ("from the real to the realer"). Ivanov, "Dve stikhii v sovremennom simvolizme" ["Two Elements in Contemporary Symbolism"], *Po zvezdam. Borozdy i mezhi* (Moscow: Astrel', 2007), p. 196.

political subtext of the opera and the theme of art's power over nature might be Rimsky-Korsakov's Aesopian language for bringing about a more egalitarian and aestheticized reality in Russia. Rimsky-Korsakov appears to think that bringing his audience to collective self-awareness may be accomplished by the latent signifying potential of folk source materials out of which the piece is fashioned.

Regardless of the means of transmission of the opera's semiotic content, or how much of it the audience was meant to grasp, Rimsky-Korsakov's thorough suffusion of folk material throughout the piece seems to have been aimed at creating a new template for Russian opera, one that not only incorporated historical and folkloric themes à la Glinka and Musorgsky, but also painstakingly layered and redistributed folk material in an elaborate composite. *Sadko* not only adapts its sources along the lines of *Ruslan and Liudmila* or *Khovanshchina*; it is thoroughly imbued with them. It is as if Rimsky-Korsakov envisioned himself less as the composer and more as the arranger of the work. In carefully selecting and re-allocating his sources, as Reeve notes, "the composer may have been attempting not only to create new art-forms, but [also] to forge a new cultural and artistic sensibility which would be able to appreciate and evaluate these forms."[7] In other words, the opera was designed to reward a philological study of its sources—an investigation much like Rimsky-Korsakov himself undertook in order to create the opera. Thus, the number of references that its original audiences understood notwithstanding, *Sadko* was intended to encourage a kind of demotic antiquarianism. Should its listeners be enticed to delve into the details of its source materials, they would discover a wealth of information that

[7] Reeve, "Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's Use of the *Byliny* (Russian Oral Epic Narratives) in his Opera *Sadko*," p. 141.

would inspire a sense of national partisanship and civic identity. The opera is constructed such that it satisfies both the casual listener, and the curious pedant compelled to fact-check.

The citational quality of *Sadko* not only plays into Kuchkist, civically minded models of Russian nationality, but also takes them a step further in creating a new referentially centered aesthetic framework. As Reeve points out above, the opera was innovatory not only in formal terms, but also in terms of its *sensibility*, i.e. in its assumptions about how folk material could be used, and what it, in effect, *does* to the listener. In one sense, the opera's aesthetics seem to be motivated by its recreationist (or preservationist) spirit instead of its recreationist spirit being guided by aesthetic considerations. In other words, its aesthetics are antiquarian rather than its antiquarianism being aesthetically motivated. Rimsky-Korsakov even, at times, knowingly sacrifices aesthetic criteria in favor of faithfulness to his sources. The affective result of this is the impression that Rimsky-Korsakov constituted the opera as a kind of archetype of the Sadko story; its formal properties as an opera are incidental to its wholesale purveying of the Sadko narrative in all of its various historical recensions. The aesthetic criteria of the opera, on which critical opinion has diverged (as will be surveyed below), are mere accidentals of representing the Sadko legend in the given format. It is in this manner that Rimsky-Korsakov becomes less the composer than the arranger of the piece, in that he envisioned his task to consist in transferring existing textual and musical material from the *byliny* into operatic form.

From this standpoint, Rimsky-Korsakov becomes Sadko's curator placing the story on display for the operatic stage. In its extensive borrowing from the *byliny*, *Sadko* remains contiguous with rather than merely adjacent to the older forms of the story, albeit in the form of a nineteenth-century stage work. The antiquarian character of the piece is encapsulated by its

philologically tinged "Introduction," in which Rimsky-Korsakov (selectively) reveals his sources for the ensuing work:

> The contents of the opera-*bylina* Sadko are borrowed primarily from assorted variations of the *bylina* "Sadko the Rich Trader" (the collections of Kirsha Danilov, Rybnikov, and others) in conjunction with the fantasy tale of the Sea King and Vasilisa the Wise (Afanas'ev, Russian folk tales). A few sections are from the verse of the Dove Book, and also from the bylina "The Terenty Guest," as well as others.[8]

In providing his introductory explanation, Rimsky-Korsakov not only informs the audience of his sources, but also suggests that the opera be viewed as somehow integrally tied to them. By his own account, Rimsky-Korsakov weaves *Sadko* out of sources hailing specifically from the north-westerly, Novgorodian region of Russia, which is in keeping with the opera's setting in Novgorod (as well as the composer's own birthplace in Tikhvin). Rimsky-Korsakov seems to suggest that the source materials that he identifies are merely reconstituted in the opera rather than radically transformed or heavily modified. Its patchwork of Novgorodian folk sources permits the consideration of the piece as a continuation of the Novgorodian bylinic tradition, i.e. as a nineteenth-century extension of its pre-modern sources.

3.1. Questions of genre

Rimsky-Korsakov's subheading to *Sadko* – an "opera-*bylina*" – is at once a descriptor of its folkloric content, a qualification of its unusual form, and a nudge toward an interpretive angle. Its hyphenation suggests a sense of hybridity, a kind of dual nature to the opera, that endows the piece with a sense of intrigue from the outset. Though Rimsky-Korsakov's interpolation of the *byliny* into an opera was not unprecedented (one thinks particularly of Borodin's unfinished

[8] N. A. Rimsky-Korsakow, *Sadko: Romantische oper in sieben bildern* (Piano-vocal score), M.P. Belaieff edition (London: Boosey & Hawkes, Ltd., 1896), p. 1430.

Prince Igor[9]), the explicit avowal of Sadko as an opera-*bylina* marks it as idiosyncratic in the Russian operatic tradition. What, after all, *is* an opera-*bylina*? The subheading perhaps elicits consternated questions regarding genre, style, and form rather than providing a solvent, standalone descriptor. It indicates that the piece is a kind of negotiation of disparate elements, a collision of the separate entities "opera" and "*bylina*." Moreover, it points to Rimsky-Korsakov's attempt to subsume the piece within the bylinic tradition.

Rimsky-Korsakov's hyphenated subheading figures within the tradition of inventive generic designations for opera in the nineteenth century. Moreover, it brings up the question of what a generic designation such as opera-*bylina* is meant to signify. Given Rimsky-Korsakov's somewhat reluctant "conversion" to Richard Wagner's music in the years preceding his composition of *Sadko*, the opera's subheading carries more than a tinge of Wagnerian unconventiality. Wagner's dubbing of his operas as music dramas, his composing of his own libretti as well as music, and his attempt to reconstitute the dramatic arts within a single form as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, has several echoes in *Sadko*. For one, the opera is Rimsky-Korsakov's sole foray into libretto composition (although he had help from several contributors). Its premiere at the Mamontov Private Opera in Moscow rather than in St. Petersburg under imperial patronage calls to mind Bayreuth. By Rimsky-Korsakov's insistence, the original production was to recreate the world of medieval Russian folk tales down to the minutest detail in order to give the piece a totalizing period effect; even Rimsky-Korsakov's performance instructions were written

[9] *Prince Igor* is an adaptation of a folk verse tale dating to the twelfth or thirteenth century entitled *The Tale of Igor's Campaign* (*Slovo o polku Igoreve*). Rimsky-Korsakov had a hand in the posthumous revising of Borodin's opera, and was clearly familiar with the *Igor Tale* in addition to the Sadko *byliny*. Since its discovery in 1795, the *Igor Tale* had caused something of a sensation in Russian philological studies. To this day it is the most widely known example of medieval Russian folk poetry.

in the stylized archaic language of the libretto. Rimsky-Korsakov's drawing of *Sadko*'s theme and musical material from Russian folk tales likewise recalls Wagner's preoccupation with Scandinavian and Germanic mythology. In effect, with Rimsky-Korsakov's predilection for Wagner in the 1880s and 1890s, his attachment to civic-minded realism in the 1860s and 1870s began to give way first to Gogolian fantastical realism in *Christmas Eve* (1895), and then to a dedicated antiquarian excursion into the *byliny* in *Sadko*. The opera is in essence Rimsky-Korsakov's *Gesamtkunstwerk*; its subheading opera-*bylina* is his music drama.[10]

Rimsky-Korsakov had likewise given two of his prior operas (*Sadko* is his sixth opera) folk-themed subheadings. The *Snow Maiden* (1881), his third opera, carries the subtitle of "A Spring Folk Tale" (*Vesenniaia skazka*). His fifth opera, *Christmas Eve* (1895), he subtitled "A Tale after a Christmas Carol" (*Byl'-koliada*). Subsequent operas were also accompanied by folk-inspired epithets: *Kashchei the Deathless* (1901) was subtitled "A Little Autumn Folk Tale" (*Osenniaia skazochka*). By his penultimate opera, *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh and the Maiden Fevronia* (*Skazanie o nevidimom grade Kitezhe i deve Fevronii*, 1907), the title of the folk tale had been incorporated into the main title of the opera: *skazanie* denotes a genre of the folk tale involving a historical theme (which may also be rendered as "saga" in English). To the title of his final opera, *Zolotoi petushok*, Rimsky-Korsakov addended the subtitle of "An Acted-Out Nonsense Story" (*Nebylitsa v litsakh*). Thus Rimsky-Korsakov's subtitling of *Sadko* as an opera-*bylina* is not an isolated occurrence in his operatic output.

[10] In contrast to this assertion, Gerald Abraham contends that *Sadko* is "in no sense a Wagnerian opera;" Abraham, *Studies in Russian Music* (London: W. Reeves, 1935), p. 229. He qualifies this statement by claiming that *Sadko* is the opera "in which (Rimsky-Korsakov) is most completely and exuberantly himself and most profoundly Russian," (ibid.). In fact, *Sadko* seems to represent an application of Wagnerian principles of folk-centered national identity to Rimsky-Korsakov's own Russian context.

What does stand out about *Sadko*, however, is the narrative effect of Rimsky-Korsakov's melding of remarkably dissimilar genres. Perhaps in no other aspect of the piece is the sense of opera-*bylina* as a negotiation more palpable than in its narrative structure. In what could be described as an effort at cross-genre verisimilitude, Rimsky-Korsakov attempted to incorporate the defining characteristics of the Russian *byliny*, such as bardic narration, heroic derring-do, and a religious outlook that combines paganism and Christianity, into the format of opera. *Sadko* is in effect a recreationist opera: a transmutation of a musico-literary genre originating in the remote Russian past into a nineteenth-century stage work. Rimsky-Korsakov's recreationist motives in fact were prioritized above his adherence to certain conventions of dramatic sequencing and narrative coherence. As a result, many viewers and listeners have commented on a sense of "stasis" in the dramatic and narrative structure of the opera. Though this criticism is usually levied as a shortcoming of Rimsky-Korsakov's compositional design, the static nature of certain passages of the opera are an extension of the piece's reenactment of the narrative structure of the *byliny*, which is of an episodic, non-linear, and structurally disunified nature. Moreover, the Sadko *byliny*, which date to the thirteenth or fourteenth century, vastly predate the development of an aesthetics of inner unity and structural organicism in nineteenth-century (German) music. Thus many of the opera's critics are asking of it what it expressly does not set out to do. The qualitative criterion of structural coherence certainly applies to the opera part of the subheading (and Rimsky-Korsakov made clear concessions to coherence at the expense of *bylinic* re-creation, as will be discussed below); however, it is altogether foreign, perhaps "un-Russian," as it concerns the *bylina* side of the subheading.

3.2. Suspension, stasis, and symmetry

In a rare opportunity to invoke a term that is shared by chemistry and music, one might say that the opera is a suspension: a combination of substances of diverse natures that are interspersed together in a state of flux, settling and separating out over time and resolving to a stabler, more uniform state. In a chemical suspension, the suspended elements eventually separate out according to mass, and, in music, a suspension anticipates a satisfying release of tension through resolution; however, in *Sadko*, opera and *bylina* are given equal weight, and the admixture is continually and purposefully shaken so as to construe the whole as a sum of its parts. Though thoroughly interspersed, opera and *bylina* retain their individual attributes and distinguishing features in *Sadko*. The generic negotiation amounts to a compromise, in which opera acts as a platform for the characters, language, narrative structures, dramatic conventions, and musical idiom of the Russian *byliny*. As Reeve notes, virtually every strand of the opera's text and music points to an analogue in Russian folklore.[11]

The quality of suspension to *Sadko* likewise extends to a whole host of dichotomous – though apodictically interrelated – constructs, such as past and present, self and other, part and whole, narrator and narrative, fantasy and reality, paganism and Christianity, and history and folklore. In its musical language, the opera intersperses modal and diatonic forms with octatonicism in order to delineate "real" events and characters from their "fantastical" counterparts.[12] The thorough suffusion of dualistic structures within the piece exhibits a quality of symmetry that acts as a main organizing principle of the opera. Simon Morrison describes

[11] Reeve, "Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's Use of the *Byliny* (Russian Oral Epic Narratives) in his Opera *Sadko*," p. 17.

[12] Rimsky-Korsakov inherited this technique of representing the fantastical through octatonicism, chromaticism, and whole-tone scales from Glinka's opera *Ruslan and Liudmila*.

Rimsky-Korsakov's reliance on dualisms in characterization, musical language, and setting as a "semiotics of symmetry."[13]

Indeed nearly every aspect of the construction of Sadko contains a correlated binary. In terms of characterization, Rimsky-Korsakov includes a duo of bardic tunesmiths-cum-narrators, Sadko and Nezhata, a duo of featured *skomorokhi*, Duda and Sopel', a duo of ecclesiastical figures, Foma Nazar'ich and Lova Zinov'ich, a duo of Sadko's wives, Liubava and Volkhova. As Asaf'ev and Morrison have observed, the structure of tableau 1 is symmetrically organized[14]—Sadko's opening aria is preceded and followed by recitatives; Nezhata sings two diegetic songs and two passages are sung by a chorus of Novgorodian nobles. Moreover, tableau 4 nearly duplicates the form of tableau 1 save for the addition of the songs of the foreign merchants. Sadko has two encounters with Volkhova the Sea Queen (in tableau 2 and tableau 6), and two scenes with Liubava (in tableau 3 and tableau 7[15]). Rimsky-Korsakov's source material for the Sadko legend also constitutes a binary: the opera is based on two *byliny* depicting Sadko.

Sadko contains a dialectical aspect in which each thesis generates its corresponding antithesis, while the synthesis retains the defining characteristics of its components. The synthesis often constitutes less a coherent whole than a sum of its parts. The sense of *drobnost'*, which Richard Taruskin identifies as a calling card of Kuchkist music, extends from the opera-

[13] Simon Morrison, "The Semiotics of Symmetry, or Rimsky-Korsakov's Operatic History Lesson," *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Nov., 2001), pp. 261-293.

[14] B. V. Asaf'ev, "The Problem of a Visible City," in *Symphonic Etudes*, ed. and trans. by David Haas (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008), pp. 99-102. Morrison, "The Semiotics of Symmetry, or Rimsky-Korsakov's Operatic History Lesson," pp. 263-265.

[15] Sadko and Liubava also encounter one another in tableau 4 before Sadko boards his merchant vessel, but only fleetingly—Sadko merely bids her farewell.

bylina subheading to the minutest structural details of the piece.[16] The symmetry evident in the dramatic, compositional, and narrative structures of *Sadko* has a non-totalizing effect, as a result of which the palpability of a synthesis is downplayed in favor of a commensurate balance of thesis and antithesis. The symmetry of the piece amounts less to a synthesis than a mirror reflection of dual constituents. This structural mirroring even has a scenographic analogue: in scene 7 of the opera, Sadko awakens from his encounter with Volkhova, the sea princess, and sees his reflection in Lake Ilmen. As Vladimir Jankélévitch notes,

> Nearly all of Nikolay Andreyevich's operas include as part of their scenery a smooth mirror [the flat surface of a body of water] where man could see his reverie reflected and which could clear a space in the world for a world in reverse, a land of marvels, a surreal and poetic space of solitude.[17]

The image of the mirror, which is physically present onstage, likewise exhibits an unseen presence in the compositional design of the opera. Sadko himself inhabits two fictive worlds which both reflect and contrast one another, the first being a historical re-creation (twelfth-century Novgorod), and the second an imaginative fantasy (the underwater realm). Sadko's observation of his own reflection in the water likewise represents his dominion over both land and sea. The symmetry evident in the structure of the piece seems to resist homogeneous synthesis as a whole in favor of a commensurate balance of parts.

The quality of *drobnost'* in *Sadko* is in one sense inscribed into the piece due to its composite nature, as it is a veritable hodge-podge of melodies, characters, and myths drawn from Russian folklore. The composite even includes prior compositions by Rimsky-Korsakov: *Sadko*

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[16] Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works through Mavra*, vol. 1 (Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California Press, 1996), p. 138.

[17] Vladimir Jankélévitch, *La Musique et les Heures* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1988), p. 100. Quoted from Morrison, "The Semiotics of Symmetry," p. 292.

interpolates thematic material, most notably the "sea music" from the introductory passage, from the composer's symphonic poem of the same name (op. 5, 1867, revised 1869 and 1892). The extent of Rimsky-Korsakov's source work for the opera suggests that *drobnost'* – in the sense of piecing together the whole through collecting parts, and not in the sense of a structural flaw – was a generative aspect of its compositional design. Rimsky-Korsakov's prose introduction to the score (*Vmesto predisloviia*), quoted above, details the composer's folkloric sources, and also gives significant insight into his compositional approach to the opera. The introduction evidences his *drobnyi* compositional plan in action, as Rimsky-Korsakov culls an extraordinary range of Russian folkloric sources into a single narrative.

His comprehensiveness in accounting for the different versions of the Sadko *bylina* (of which there are two main recensions, with numerous extant variations on each) in a sense facilitated the *drobnost'* of the piece. Tableaux 1-4 of the opera follow the earliest version of the Sadko tale, which depicts him as an impecunious *gusliar'* singing to win the favor of the Novgorodian merchants, who he hopes will provide him with the means to start his own mercantile enterprise. Tableaux 5-7 are based on the second of the Sadko narratives, according to which Sadko is already an established Novgorodian merchant who funds the construction of two cathedrals in Novgorod named after the Russian martyrs Boris and Gleb. In a compositional gesture that is nothing short of philological, Rimsky-Korsakov even incorporated the divergences between the Hilferding and Rybnikov transcriptions of the Sadko *byliny* into the text and music of the opera. Simon Morrison concludes from this that "(the) opera thus narrates both the contents of 'Sadko the Rich Trader' and its history, showing how successive generations of performers embellished and enriched the text and music."[18] The *skazki* of the Sea King and

[18] Morrison, "The Semiotics of Symmetry," p. 267.

Vasilisa the Wise are interpolated *ad hoc* from Afanas'ev's collection *Myths and Beliefs of the Ancient Slavs*. In effect, *Sadko* is a composite of folk sources of diverse genres, provenances, and time periods.

Rimsky-Korsakov's philologically motivated compositional approach entailed a degree of comprehensiveness in source citation that came up at odds with dramatic pacing and narrative movement. Simon Morrison notes that

> "(Rimsky-Korsakov) not only sought to import the syllabic patterns and cadential formulae of this *bylina* into his opera, he also sought to account for discrepancies between the transcriptions. To demonstrate, for example, that the variant of "Sadko the Rich Trader" published by Kireyevsky bears the influence of Nordic and Eastern legends, the composer inserted a Viking and an Indian into his opera who perform songs referring to these legends. To account for vagaries in oral transmission, he saturated the score with allusions to other *byliny* and the songs and stories that they spawned over the years.[19]

Thus, rather than dispensing aspects of the Sadko *byliny* that he deemed incompatible with the narrative cohesiveness of the opera, Rimsky-Korsakov took a more totalizing approach in attempting to include *all* of the various recensions of the Sadko story. The opera in effect acts as a kind of musical ledger of folk creativity related to the character of Sadko. Rimsky-Korsakov's objective was, in other words, not to fashion an opera merely based on Sadko, but to write an opera that would act as a veritable reference source for the numerous versions of the Sadko legend. His comprehensiveness even accounted for folk material directly related to or similar to that of Sadko. Therefore, on a scale of prioritization, one might contend that Rimsky-Korsakov placed this cataloguing of philological materials higher than narrative cohesion or dramatic effect. The static passages of the opera in turn may be viewed as the result of Rimsky-Korsakov's accentuation of the philological aspect of the opera's design above dramaturgic or narrative aspects.

[19] Ibid.

Rimsky-Korsakov in fact tried to impose a level of narrative coherence into his abundant source material in various ways. In the extant versions of the Sadko *bylina*, few variants include the two episodes of the hero's life that are narrated in the opera, namely his presenting himself before the Novgorodian nobility in an attempt to gain their patronage (tableaux 1-4), and his travels in the underwater realm (tableaux 5-7). Most of the versions recount one or the other tale of Sadko's adventures. The one main discrepancy between the two stories of Sadko relates to his social status: the first tale portrays him as an impoverished bard who attempts to use his musical talents to win over the Novgorodian nobles, and the second tale portrays Sadko as a wealthy merchant who is summoned to the Sea King for not repaying his tribute to him for supplying his wealth. Thus Rimsky-Korsakov streamlines these two accounts of Sadko's life by portraying him as a musician who earns his wealth by winning the favor of Volkhova, the sea princess, through his musical ability. The plot line of Sadko's musical prowess leading to Volkhova's falling in love with him, in other words, is not a feature of the bylinic accounts. Rimsky-Korsakov appears to have added this aspect of the narrative to give a motive for their marriage on the seabed in tableau 6—an event that is depicted in the *byliny*. Volkhova's name is in fact coined by Rimsky-Korsakov; she is not named in the bylinic accounts, but simply known as a sea princess.[20] Thus Rimsky-Korsakov attempts to impart narrative cohesiveness to the opera by

[20] Rimsky-Korsakov provides an explanation for his coinage of Volkhova's name in his introduction to the score: "The feminine ending Volkhová – the princess of the Volkhov river – has been given on the basis of Afanas'ev's evidence of such endings being used for the original ancient names of rivers, as in, for instance, the Dneper, or *Dnepra-reka*." Rimsky-Korsakow, *Sadko: Romantische oper in sieben bildern*, p. 1430. In Russian, the word for river (*reka*) is of the feminine gender, as it contains a word-ending "a." Rimsky-Korsakov bases Volkhova's name on a feminization of the name of the major river in the Novgorod region, the Volkhov river. At the beginning of tableau 7 of the opera, Volkhova bids farewell forever to Sadko, proclaiming that she will dissolve into a mist and form a river. The entire cast including Sadko, the Novgorodian townspeople, Nezhata, the *skomorokhi*, and the foreign merchants then sing the praises of the newly-formed river and marvel at its spontaneous creation. Rimsky-Korsakov's

adding the Volkhova narrative to the first bylinic account of Sadko as a bardic singer, thus merging it with the second bylinic account of Sadko on the seabed. In combining the two plot lines, Rimsky-Korsakov enlivens Sadko as an aspriational figure, an artist who seeks to become a merchant and bring glory and riches to Novgorod. He likewise forwards Sadko's artistic skill as the cause for his mediating between humanity and nature, thereby playing more directly into the traditional image of Sadko as the Russian Orpheus.

Rimsky-Korsakov imparts a different form of coherence into the bylinic sources by giving Sadko's wife, who is not named in the Sadko *byliny*, the name Liubava Buslaevna. Her patronymic derives from the surname of another figure who is featured in *byliny* originating in and set in the Novgorodian region, Vasilii Buslaev.[21] By giving Sadko's wife the patronymic Buslaevna, Rimsky-Korsakov indirectly alludes to Liubava as Vasilii's daughter. Through this gesture, he intertwines two bylinic figures of the Novgorodian region, giving the impression of a cohesive and interrelated social world of the medieval Novgorodian epics. Reeve remarks that "By this deft interweaving of references from various epics…the composer is presumably attempting to create, in folk-bard style, the illusion of a coherent and all-embracing epic

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naming of the sea princess as Volkhova, which, as stated above, is nowhere mentioned in the *byliny*, thus implies that both the river and its name arose due to this mythic event. His implication requires significant factual oversight on the part of the audience, since the merchants featured at the beginning of the opera presumably earned their wealth by traveling on the very river that is formed at the opera's conclusion. Historically speaking, Novgorod's mercantile prominence in medieval Russia is integrally tied to its location on the Volkhov river, which connects Lake Ilmen to the sea. Thus Rimsky-Korsakov's coinage of the name only partially bridges legend with actuality, and imparts coherence simultaneously with incoherence onto the events depicted.

[21] The figure of Vasilii Buslaev is figured in a series of *byliny* entitled *Vasilii Buslaev Went to Pray* (*Vasilii Buslaev molit'sia ezdil*) that detail his exploits, repentance, and eventual pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

universe."[22] This implication, that Rimsky-Korsakov is imitating bardic creativity by selectively filling in missing narrative motives and supplying absent storylines from the byliny, applies to other elements of Sadko's construction that will be discussed below in section 4.

Liubava Buslaevna provides the opera with another aspect of narrative coherence in addition to merging two of the Novgorodian epic narratives. If one is to read an overarching narrative arc into Sadko, Liubava serves as a key figure. Positing her as crucial to the narrative is somewhat ironic, however, because she appears only three times in the opera—once only briefly to attempt to dissuade Sadko from embarking on his seafaring journey. Sadko's departure from Liubava in scene 4 and his return to her in scene 7 constitutes one of the only narrative bookends of the story. The Liubava character was written in to the score almost as an afterthought by Rimsky-Korsakov, who seemingly added her more for the purpose of including an F-minor aria than for her role in the narrative.[23] Whatever coherence Liubava adds to the story was probably incidental, since the episodic nature of the narrative was an intentional effect on the part of Rimsky-Korsakov, a conscious emulation of the incongruities and inconsistencies of bylinic form.

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[22] Reeve, "Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's Use of the *Byliny* (Russian Oral Epic Narratives) in his Opera *Sadko*," pp. 51-52.

[23] Rimsky-Korsakov mentions in his *Chronicle* that "…after the draft of the entire opera in the original format had been completed, I began to think about Sadko's wife. It's funny, but at that time I felt an indefinable longing for the F minor tonality, in which I had not composed for a long time and which did not occur in *Sadko*. This inexplicable yearning for F minor led me irresistibly to the composition of Liubava's aria, for which I there and then drafted the verses. The aria was composed, pleased me, and served as the source of the third scene of the opera, for which I asked Belsky to write the remaining text." Rimsky-Korsakov, *Letopis' moei muzykal'noi zhizni*, p. 255. Quoted from Morrison, "The Semiotics of Symmetry," p. 265.

4. Critical opinion

The critical contingent that decried the narrative torpidity and incoherence of the opera was, for the most part, unaware of the structural characteristics of the Russian *byliny*. Those familiar with the *byliny*, by contrast, almost uniformly praised Rimsky-Korsakov's innovation, and heralded the piece's representation of the folk tradition as a triumph of Russian national music.[24] The overt and, one assumes from Rimsky-Korsakov's introduction, premeditated *drobnost'* of *Sadko* served as a critical ax to grind for several of the piece's commentators. V.A. Tsukkerman reflects at length on what he considers to be the piece's shortcomings in narrative pacing in his article "On the Plot and the Musical Language of the Opera-Bylina *Sadko*" (*O siuzhete i muzykal'nom iazyke opery-byliny* Sadko, 1933). By his account, the piece's adherence to the narrative conventions of the *byliny* defies its classification as an opera:

> The stylistic features of bylinic-folktale narration are all evident. As such it is not very organically connected, and various episodes which allow for separation and repetition are linked. The opera for the most part is a chain of songs, dances, tales, and *byliny*: *Sadko* without any exaggeration can be called a theatrical and symphonic suite.[25]

[24] Those familiar with the *byliny* included fellow Kuchkist Cesar Cui, who published a favorable review in *Novosti i birzhevaia gazeta* [News and Stock Gazette], no. 544, (Feb. 24, 1898); included in A. A. Solovtsov, *Zhizn' i tvorchestvo N. A. Rimskogo-Korsakova* [Life and Works of N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov] (Moscow: "Izdatel'stvo muzyki," 1964), p. 391. The music critic N. D. Kashkin effused that "The music of Sadko is enchantingly beautiful. This *bylina* for the stage presents a completely distinctive, solitary occurrence in musical literature." Kashkin, Review in *Russkie vedomosti* [The Russian News], 1897, No. 357; quoted in A. Gozenpud, *Russkii opernyi teatr i Shaliapin: 1890-1904* [Russian Operatic Theater and Shaliapin] (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo "Muzyka," 1974), p. 176. Elsewhere Kashkin comments that "Russian musical literature since the time of Glinka has not had another such example of the artistic embodiment of folk style." Kashkin, Russkie vedomosti [The Russian News], 1898, No. 6; quoted in A. Gozenpud, *Russkii opernyi teatr i Shaliapin: 1890-1904* [Russian Operatic Theater and Shaliapin], p. 176.

[25] V. Tsukkerman, "O siuzhete i muzykal'nom iazyke opery-byliny *Sadko*" [On the Plot and the Musical Language of the Opera-Bylina Sadko], in *Muzykal'no-teoreticheski ocherki i etiudy* [Music-Theoretical Essays and Etudes], vol. 1 (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1970), p. 446.

Tsukkerman's distinction between an opera and a suite is based on a rhetoric of structural organicism and inner unity derived from nineteenth-century musical aesthetics. The *byliny* upon which the opera is based, however, predate these aesthetic criteria by six or seven centuries. This is to say that Tsukkerman, in faulting the opera for inorganicism, is applying aesthetic criteria to it that Rimsky-Korsakov expressly attempts to defy by modeling it after the *byliny*.

The bylinic form of *Sadko*, in Tsukkerman's view, runs contrary to the operatic convention of sequentially unfolding dramatic events. However, in searching for organicism in the piece, Tsukkerman submits that it is precisely its bylinic form that makes the piece cohere as a whole:

> If the manner of theatricalized bylinic narration, which is consistently and carefully maintained in the opera, communicates integrity and internal stylistic unity to it, then it also separates *Sadko* from the customary type of opera with energetically unfolding action.[26]

The paradoxical nature of this claim – that its narrative cohesiveness also entails a lack of narrative progression – suggests that the aesthetic framework in which Tsukkerman is attempting to fit the piece is entirely foreign to its conceptual and structural design. In a similar manner to his reclassification of the piece as a theatrical and symphonic suite, this contention derives from a search for unifying elements as a foregrounded aesthetic concern. Indeed, a consistent feature of *Sadko* is its tendency to stand still at times; however, what this evidences is that the piece operates according to bylinic narrative norms rather than those of nineteenth-century (German) opera.

[26] Ibid., p. 447.

The bulk of unfavorable critical opinions regarding *Sadko*, represented here by Tsukkerman's account but also found elsewhere,[27] consists precisely in the opera's replication of bylinic narrative conventions, which undermine any overarching sense of structural organicism. The opera does not contain acts with corresponding scenes, but rather seven scenes or tableaux (*kartiny*).[28] Without acts as a kind of foundational structural principle, the opera's seven scenes may be regarded as having an episodic quality. It must be noted, however, that the episodic nature of the narrative is a borrowing from the narrative structures of the *byliny*, which are far removed from nineteenth-century notions of structural organicism. Regarding the progression of scenes and the absence of acts, Tsukkerman comments that "…the 'change' (an entirely appropriate word) does not constitute internally motivated scenic movement. It is difficult to deny thus the lack of a causally consequential link…on the narrative canvas of *Sadko*."[29] Tsukkerman's perception of the opera as a succession of suites also reflects this structural feature. Thus the brunt of the criticism appears to be levied on the opera for Rimsky-Korsakov's compositional design rather than his execution of his generative impulse. Tsukkerman and

[27] N. D. Kashkin likewise refers to the lack of a unifying thread to the seven tableaux of the opera; however, he praises the music for being coherent as a whole. He rejects the "Songs of the Three Foreign Merchants" in tableau 4 as an inexcusable and unnecessary digression. Kashkin, "Sadko-opera-bylina v semi deistviiakh," *Russkoe obozrenie*, (Moscow), Jan. 1898, p. 573. The British critic and musicologist Gerald Abraham claims that "The story is little more than a pretext for brilliant stage pictures and for music," though he declares *Sadko* to be Rimsky-Korsakov's "best opera," Abraham, *Studies in Russian Music*, pp. 229-230.

[28] On Rimsky-Korsakov's organization of the sections of the opera into tableaux rather than acts, Reeve comments that "…the lack of any 'acts' emphasizes the fact that the entire opera consists of vivid representations, almost in the form of a folk chapbook, of episodes drawn from an epic narrative." Reeve, "Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's Use of the *Byliny* (Russian Oral Epic Narratives) in his Opera *Sadko*," p. 29. The absence of acts reinforces the episodic quality of the narration, whereas if there were acts they would suggest a subdivided whole.

[29] Tsukkerman, "O siuzhete i muzykal'nom iazyke opery-byliny *Sadko*," p. 449.

others fault the narrative precisely for what it expressly does not set out to do—to cohere as a whole.

Rimsky-Korsakov was aware that adhering to the structure of the *byliny* would necessitate concessions in dramatic sequencing. He comments in *Chronicle of my Musical Life* that "the narrative of *Sadko* by its essence does not exhibit purely dramatic aspirations; it is seven tableaux of a folkloric, epic character."[30] Not only were "dramatic aspirations" not at the forefront of his mind, but, in contrast to a number of his critics, Rimsky-Korsakov also considered certain elements of the opera's design to be evenly distributed: "The real and the fantastical, the dramatic (insofar as it is included in the *byliny*) and the everyday find themselves in complete harmony."[31] Clearly the structural principles that Rimsky-Korsakov followed in composing the opera were of a different order than what his critics anticipated. Rather than organizing the narrative according to the principle of inner unity, Rimsky-Korsakov appears to have sequenced the opera as an even progression through different fictive worlds.[32] His qualification of the dramatic element of the opera, that it is evidenced "insofar as it is included in the *byliny*," indicates that dramatic excitement was subordinate to the opera's re-creation of its

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[30] Rimsky-Korsakov, *Letopis' moei muzykal'noi zhizni*, p. 526.

[31] Ibid., p. 526.

[32] The depiction of various locales – the town square, the shores of Lake Ilmen, Sadko's house, the underwater realm, and Sadko's ship – may have been motivated by an urging on the part of Vladimir Stasov. Rimsky-Korsakov originally envisioned the opera as depicting only Sadko's adventures in the underwater realm, and thus the primary setting would have been the fantastical realm that ends up appearing in merely two tableaux in the finished opera. It was Stasov who suggested opening the opera with a scene in the town square to depict the social milieu of medieval Novgorod. In a letter to N. F. Findeizen, Stasov confided a fear that Rimsky-Korsakov would "turn back to only the underwater and fantastical scenes of the *byliny*," lamenting that "that would be such a shame—then all would be lost!" Quoted from Tsukkerman, "O siuzhete i muzykal'nom iazyke opery-byliny *Sadko*," p. 443. The original source is not cited.

source texts. The opera's dramatic content, he suggests, follows the dramatic paradigm set by the *byliny*. Rimsky-Korsakov even advised A.N. Liadov to compose a folkloric opera "without drama" in a letter dating to 1895, at the time he was composing *Sadko*: "Dear and good Liadov! Write an opera, a Russian opera…a folkloric opera, without drama."[33] Thus to Rimsky-Korsakov, writing an opera in the folkloric style precludes a dramatic component. Modeling an opera after the particular narrative and dramatic aspects of Russian folklore to him necessitated nothing short of a shift in the conventions of the genre. Perhaps not surprisingly, a corresponding shift in critical opinion was not readily forthcoming.

The critical reaction to *Sadko* was not uniformly negative. The most vocal and emphatic proponent of the opera was the Russian musicologist and critic Boris Asaf'ev. Asaf'ev reserves particularly high praise for *Sadko* in his article "The Problem of a Visible City" (*Problema vidimogo grada*). He makes particular note of its structural cohesiveness, stating that "Based on its structure, the internal logic of its formal design, and the connections and associations of the musical materials, this work is among the most exemplary in Russian music."[34] Thus in contrast to Tsukkerman, who views the opera as bereft of a unifying structural thread, Asaf'ev finds it cohesive enough to rank it among the best works in Russian music. [35] Asaf'ev's remarks on the opera primarily concern its structural integrity, while Tsukkerman focuses on *Sadko*'s shortcomings in dramatic intrigue in addition to what he perceives to be its structural

[33] Ibid., p. 446. The original source is, again, not cited.

[34] Asaf'ev, *Symphonic Etudes*, p. 9

[35] What remains consistent between the two appraisals is their exclusive attention to structural coherence. While Tsukkerman finds fault with this feature of the opera, and Asaf'ev finds reasons to praise it, their critical eye falls on the same object.

weaknesses. Asaf'ev, like Tsukkerman, weighs in on the dramatic aspect in less laudatory terms: "The movement of the action is usually taken up by various elements of religious rites, rituals, and, simply, scenes from everyday life—particulars and details that are not always organically connected with the development of the dramatic kernel."[36] Asaf'ev likewise seems to be of the opinion that Rimsky-Korsakov's faithfulness to the *byliny* does not necessarily yield successful results for operatic drama. However, in structural terms, Asaf'ev perceives *Sadko* as a "firmly welded organism":

> …the *bylina* of Sadko…becomes one of the most brilliant examples of a synthesis of contrasting elements and of the transformation of sound material that was skillfully laid out in balanced interrelationships: a transformation by the power of the human intellect and will into a harmonious, integral, and firmly welded organism.[37]

Rather than describing Rimsky-Korsakov's bylinic re-creation as episodic or piecemeal, Asaf'ev makes note of its "synthesis of contrasting elements" and "balanced interrelationships."

Remarks of praise are also found in Asaf'ev's *Rimsky-Korsakov: An Attempt at Characterization*:

> The composition of the opera-*bylina* Sadko is coherent and logical up to its most insignificant details. The richly and lithely developed language of the principal characters distinguishes them from one another (each character "speaks" according to the social class that he belongs to), while the magnificent choruses connect these heterogeneous units into something whole.[38]

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[36] B. V. Asaf'ev, *Rimskii-Korsakov: Opyt kharakteristiki* [Rimsky-Korsakov: An Attempt at Characterization] (St. Petersburg; Berlin: Svietozar', 1923), p. 10. Asaf'ev's observation points to another consistency with the Wagnerian project, that of creating the sense of a self-contained world within the parameters of the opera.

[37] Asaf'ev, *Symphonic Etudes*, p. 104.

[38] Asaf'ev, *Rimskii-Korsakov: Opyt kharakteristiki*, p. 23.

For Asaf'ev, Rimsky-Korsakov's emulation of the poetic language of the *byliny* constitutes the unifying thread that holds the opera together. The language of the libretto, per Asaf'ev, simultaneously differentiates the characters and connects them in the choral sections.[39] According to Rimsky-Korsakov's *Chronicle*, he approximated what he called "bylinic recitative" (*bylinnyi rechitatif*), or the declamatory style of the narrators of the *byliny*, in Sadko's speech:

> What separates *Sadko* from my other operas, and perhaps not only mine, but from other operas in general, is its bylinic recitative. […] The opera-*bylina*'s recitative, primarily that of Sadko, is distinctive in the sense of the uniformity of its internal structure. This sort of recitative is not conversational language, but rather the conventionally regimented bylinic narration (*skaz*) and intonation. The foremost example of this can be found in Riabinin's declamations of *byliny* (a recitor whose performances were attended by both Rimsky-Korsakov and Musorgsky[40]—J.R.). Passing like a red thread throughout the whole opera, the recitative suffuses the work with a national, bylinic character that can be fully evaluated only by a Russian person.[41]

Rimsky-Korsakov's own admission of "the uniformity of its internal structure" suggests that he intended the opera to cohere according to linguistic and poetic guidelines rather than those of dramatic development. Asaf'ev's observations on the poetic language of the opera are thus consistent with Rimsky-Korsakov's self-professed organizing principle.

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[39] In "The Problem of a Visible City," Asaf'ev states a similar claim about the language of the libretto as a structural principle of the opera: "…(Rimsky-Korsakov) called his *Sadko* an opera-*bylina* because it was based on the defining idea of employing *skaz* from the folk *bylina* as a unique kind of recitative by means of which the work would be given unity, organization, and a cohesion of elements. The *bylina*-recitative (a stylization of the *skaz* of the *bylina*) indeed has a predominant stylistic role in *Sadko*," Asaf'ev, *Symphonic Etudes*, p. 97.

[40] A. Gozenpud, *N. Rimsky-Korsakov: Temy i idei ego opernogo tvorchestva* [Rimsky-Korsakov: Themes and Ideas of his Operatic Works] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1957), p. 84.

[41] N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov, *Letopis' moei muzykal'noi zhizni* [A Chronicle of My Musical Life] (Moscow: Muzyka, 1980), pp. 85-86.

Brian Reeve has argued that Rimsky-Korsakov's incorporation of the Russian *byliny* into opera constitutes a new genre, one which departs in significant ways from the established operatic trajectory of the nineteenth century. He rejects the idea of *Sadko* as a hybrid genre, claiming that

> by pointedly naming his composition an opera-*bylina*, the composer was signifying not that he was simply transposing one genre to another, or creating a hybrid, but that he was in fact molding an entirely new, self-standing and independent artistic form, which would have to be viewed, interpreted, and responded to by the urban educated audience in a radically different manner from anything they had seen before.[42]

The citational quality of Sadko discussed above, and its thorough suffusion of folk sources, runs contrary to Reeve's contention that the opera is an "entirely new, self-standing and independent art form." The discussion of Rimsky-Korsakov as less the composer than the arranger of *Sadko* in section 2 likewise goes against Reeve's claim. One might posit the contrasting position that hybridity is built into the opera structurally, narratively, and dramaturgically. While Reeve's efforts to trace the bylinic elements and sources of the piece are thorough and painstaking (and invaluable to the current study), his attempt to prove that generic innovation was a premeditated effect on the part of Rimsky-Korsakov is somewhat strained, and, furthermore, neglects what could be called the curatorial aspect of the piece's compositional design, its recreationist spirit. Despite the novelty of the opera-*bylina* appellation, Rimsky-Korsakov's disposition is antiquarian rather than forward-looking. *Sadko* reaches into a remote folkloric past replete with underwater kingdoms, magical sorceresses, and saintly interventions, and places them on display on the operatic stage. Rather than this being presented as a pioneering generic synthesis *avant le mot*, it instead conveys a preservationist quality – a kind of exhibition of bygone traditions that

[42] Reeve, "Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's Use of the *Byliny* (Russian Oral Epic Narratives) in his Opera *Sadko*," p. 302.

have receded to a subconscious level of Russian cultural memory. While Reeve's comments on the transformation of folk tradition into generic innovation would seem apposite with regard to Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, Rimsky-Korsakov's emulation of the *byliny* projects a sense of faithfulness to the prior tradition, as if exhibiting it for museum display. What Rimsky-Korsakov accomplishes through the opera is a kind of amalgamation of distinct and remarkably dissimilar genres. The recreation of the *bylina* takes precedence over the dramatic conventions of opera.

Indeed there are times when Rimsky-Korsakov's faithfulness to the *byliny* is clearly at odds with narrative cohesiveness and dramatic movement. An important example of this is in Nezhata's arias in tableaux 1 and 4, when the sense of accretional narrative momentum suddenly cedes to long asides containing diegetic music. Another example is the scenes involving the diegetic singing and dancing of the *skomorokhi*. These asides featuring the *skomorokhi* generally follow Nezhata's songs, thus prolonging the narrative digression. Perhaps heightening the sense of stasis is the fact that both Nezhata's songs and the performances of the *skomorokhi* tend to center on identical narrative events (albeit featuring different narrative and musical voices), which have either already occurred or are about to transpire in the opera.[43] The critic E. Petrovskii offers a view on the asides of Nezhata and the *skomorokhi* that is representative of many critics' perception of stasis in these passages:

> The mimetic play of insignificant personages in *Sadko* was at times excessive. What are all of these exaggerated grimaces and gestures expressing extreme curiosity for? Are the stories that Nezhata tells really all that interesting? Are the silly antics of the *skomorokhi* really so infectiously funny?[44]

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[43] The retelling of certain narrative events through the perspective of different narrators represents another consistency with Wagner, who likewise created redundancies in narrative design through the inclusion of diegetic music.

[44] E. Petrovskii, *Russkaia muzykal'naia gazeta* [Russian Musical Gazette], 1898, No. 3, p. 288. Quoted from Gozenpud, *Russkii opernyi teatr i Shaliapin: 1890-1904*, p. 171.

Petrovskii's deeming of Nezhata and the *skomorokhi* to be "insignificant personages" at once relegates the stories that they tell to a secondary status. It likewise reveals his expectation of an overarching narrative frame to which each scene should contribute—an element that, as demonstrated above, Rimsky-Korsakov deliberately evaded by simulating the *byliny*. From Petrovskii's stance, Nezhata's stories and the scenes with the *skomorokhi* are superfluous because they do not, at least at first glance, appear to play a structural role.

5. Narrative implications of stasis

A consistent feature of these two examples is the occurrence of diegetic music and the introduction of new narrative and musical idioms into the proceedings. Since, as discussed above, Rimsky-Korsakov did not consider drama to be a significant component of the *byliny*, one must assume that his agenda for these diegetic passages did not involve enhancing the drama. While Nezhata's songs and the scenes of the *skomorokhi* neither heighten tension nor lead to conflict resolution between the characters, they make the narrative more layered and intricate. In other words, they have important implications for the narrative, but not necessarily for the dramatic plot. Chapters 2 and 4 will focus precisely on these static moments in the opera in order to piece apart their narrative functions, and examine how they both reflect upon and synthesize the stories of the other narrators in the piece. Chapter 3 will address Sadko's role as narrator of his own tale, and how his version of the narrative events contrasts with that of Nezhata and the townspeople.[45]

[45] After reaching a high-water mark in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the interest in narratology in musicological scholarship has since dwindled. My work is intended to represent a continuation of the significant contributions made by scholars such as Carolyn Abbate, Anthony Newcomb, Lawrence Kramer and Susan McClary to the field of musical narratology. It is my hope that the present study might perhaps lead to a revival of this sub-field of musicology.

There are other non-bylinic instances of narrative asides too, as in tableau 6, when narrative proceedings are paused in favor of a balletic suite of undersea naiads at Sadko's marriage to Volkhova, or, in one of the more well-known passages of the opera, in tableau 4, when the Varangian, Indian, and Venetian traders are entreated to sing the praises of their native lands to help Sadko to choose a seafaring destination (which he never reaches in the plot of the opera). Thus, in contrast to Reeve's assertion, the combination of opera and *bylina* does not assume a unified form that could be described as a generic synthesis. Rather than detracting, however, from the opera's inventiveness or narrative ingenuity, these scenes – particularly the diegetic music of Sadko, Nezhata, and the *skomorokhi* – bolster and heighten it. *Sadko* remains unruly, unwieldy, unseemly – and by design. The opera's conglomeration of disparate elements invokes Henry James' famous description of nineteenth-century novels as "large, loose, baggy monsters." Its unevenness, however, is an aspect of the piece's aesthetic that offers an array of hermeneutic insights when it is not perceived as a structural shortcoming.

The overtly bylinic passages of the opera are presented as if they are on display, bracketed off in various ways from the overarching narrative thread of the opera. It is as if these bylinic asides are the compositional equivalent of a museum exhibition of traditional Russian folkways, in which episodes from actual *byliny* are both interspersed within and constitutive of the piece's broader narrative objectives. As in a museum display, the bylinic passages have a quality of timelessness, as if they are excerpted from the past and presented in a state of temporal suspension. The bylinic re-creations occasion temporary departures in musical language, orchestration (as Rimsky-Korsakov attempts to emulate the sound of the gusli), key signature, and time signature (most notoriously in the case of the 11/4 measures of Nezhata's opening aria), as Rimsky-Korsakov attempts to replicate the bylinic sources mentioned in his introduction.

Static they indeed are, in that they are nominally modified cultural artifacts that have been placed on display as quaint curiosities in a state of immanence. As their curator, Rimsky-Korsakov appears to regard them with an inherent and self-evident value which overshadows the more prosaic demands of dramatic development. In these bylinic moments, linear narrative time within the opera cedes to deeper structures of historical and cultural time. The sequence of narrated events becomes momentarily de-emphasized as bylinic re-creation takes center stage. The real-time flow of the narration transitions to "bylinic time": a perpetual state of the present which is in fact a simulation of historical time. The viewer looks on as synchrony and diachrony become one and the same, with age-old folk tales appearing in the opera as diegetic music.

It should be more directly noted that narrative asides and multiple narrators are mainstays of the *byliny*. Like in *Sadko*, the narrators of the *byliny* were often portrayed as itinerant bards accompanying themselves on folk instruments such as the gusli. The *byliny* were generally sung, with or without gusli accompaniment. Thus the narrators within the story were musicians, and the stories themselves were declaimed in the form of song. The aforementioned *Igor Tale* opens with a prolonged soliloquy by its bardic narrator, Baian, who professes his skill on the gusli. Baian, like Nezhata or Sadko, regularly calls attention to himself within the narrative, thus redirecting the story from the narrative events to the narrator as the focal point of certain passages. These asides generally contain paeans to nature and avowals of his own tuneful prowess. This is to say that static passages such as those found in *Sadko* are consistent narrative tropes of the *byliny* as well as other forms of folk verse.

One of the most significant ways that these static passages function in *Sadko* is to call the listener's attention to the act of telling. They introduce multiple narrators in addition to different levels of narrative time into the opera. By foregrounding the presence of the narrator, the

narrative asides expose the artifice of storytelling within the parameters of the story. The halt in dramatic time occurs with a subsequent commencement of another sort of narrative time: retelling or foretelling. On the distinction between the dramatic and narrative components of the opera, Tsukkerman astutely observes that "at the foundation of the plot lies not so much a principle of dramatic development as a principle of narrative exposition."[46] The stories of the "insignificant personages" (to use Petrovskii's term) of Nezhata and the *skomorokhi* are in fact more to the point of what the opera is about than the dramatic plot. The opera is in essence about the mechanisms, modalities, and multidimensionality of telling. *Sadko* does not only center on the story of Sadko; it poignantly reflects on the reflexiveness of storytelling itself.

In a direct borrowing from the *byliny*, Rimsky-Korsakov weaves multiple narrators into the narrative fabric of *Sadko*. In a manner similar to nineteenth-century Russian realist novels, Rimsky-Korsakov sets up a framed story within which different characters, some more central or ancillary to the narrated events than others, recount the story. Sadko, a *gusliar'* and bard along the lines of Baian, acts as a primary narrator of his own story. Nezhata, another *gusliar'* and bard, whom Simon Morrison describes as Sadko's "Orphic double,"[47] serves as Sadko's narrator within the narrative. The *skomorokhi*, Duda and Sopel', likewise narrate events related to Sadko; they generally follow Nezhata's diegetic asides, offering a comic recounting of Nezhata's tales in which Sadko becomes the object of their lampooning. The opera also features a chorus of townspeople appearing in the first-person plural "we," who function as a kind of public perspective on Sadko and the narrative events. One might also construe the three foreign guests

[46] Tsukkerman, "O siuzhete i muzykal'nom iazyke opery-byliny *Sadko*," p. 446.

[47] Morrison, "The Semiotics of Symmetry," p. 274.

at the feast in tableau 4 as narrators, as they sing tales in order to entice Sadko to travel to their native lands.

In addition to the narrators that appear in the framed story, one must also consider the unnamed and unseen narrative presence in the opera which presides over the frame and imparts an organizing principle into the narrative events. Asaf'ev notes the "perennial, palpable presence of a rhapsode – of a narrator and singer whose prophetic lips 'know' the sequence of events already and recount them in a serene and majestic manner."[48] In other words, as well as the bards featured within the opera, *Sadko* gives the impression of being narrated from a bardic perspective by a narrator who stands outside of the frame, purposely absenting himself from the narrative proceedings. In order to mask his presence to the greatest possible extent, it appears that this narrator has populated the story with other narrators and constructed multiple frames within the main frame that function to diminish his authority over the narrated events. It would seem convenient to name Rimsky-Korsakov as this bard behind the frame; however, this would be an interpretive gesture akin to thinking that a short story or novel told in the first person in fact represents the author. Rimsky-Korsakov has effectively modeled his authorial voice within the piece after bards such as those in the story, thereby minimizing his own narrative presence.

Thus the curatorial element of the opera's design, i.e. its adherence to bylinic narrative and thematic construction, could have specific implications for interpreting Rimsky-Korsakov as the bard behind the narrative frame. Certain hermeneutic possibilities present themselves if one considers Rimsky-Korsakov's philological involvement with the *byliny* as aimed not merely at

[48] Asaf'ev, "Muzyka Rimskogo-Korsakova v aspekte narodno-poeticheskoi slavianskoi kul'tury i mifologii" [The Music of Rimsky-Korsakov from the Standpoint of Folk-Poetic Slavic Culture and Mythology], *Sovetskaia muzyka* [Soviet Music] (Moscow: Sovetskii Kompozitor, 1946), no. 7, p. 76.

re-creating the genre, but at *creating* an example of the genre. In other words, if Rimsky-Korsakov indeed construes his authorial presence in the opera as a bard, and cedes narrative authority to other bards within the framed narrative, then the opera was intended not only to emulate the *byliny*, but also to in essence *be* a *bylina*. From this standpoint, the piece presents itself as more *bylina* than opera per the subheading. Much as bylinic forms were recycled by folk bards and re-told within different narrative frames, and much as the narratives themselves were used as templates into which other characters and storylines could be inserted, *Sadko* selectively modifies and remains consistent with the bylinic tradition. Rimsky-Korsakov not only bases his opera on folk material, but also engages with folk creativity to the extent that he wants the opera to *become* a *bylina*. If one considers Rimsky-Korsakov's compositional approach to be as much an arranger of existing folk material as an innovator of operatic form, then he appears to be participating in the sort of folk creativity that gave rise to the Sadko legends in bygone times.

As the opera is not merely a representation, but an enactment of the *bylina*, narrative mediation is constitutive of its form. To achieve this effect, Rimsky-Korsakov minimizes the presence of his narrative voice by including multiple narrators. The opera distances itself from third-person omniscient narration as much as possible; it is the antithesis of the Tolstoian form of historical reenactment in *War and Peace*, in which the governing authority over the narrative events does not appear within the narrative, though is omnipresent and readily discernible. Instead, the figure of Sadko is framed, framed, and framed again in order to conceal the overarching narrative voice. Rather than representing the *byliny* from the distance of third-person narration, Rimsky-Korsakov's framed narrative acts as a device for enacting bylinic form.

Rimsky-Korsakov's deliberate obfuscation of his role as the narrator in adorning a bardic mask is accomplished by creating a degree of historical verisimilitude that renders the work nearly isomorphous with its bylinic sources. One could claim that the opera downplays narrative representation in favor of narrative enactment. In other words, the piece might be considered not to stand at a second degree of remove from a *bylina*, but to instantiate or enact a *bylina*. Carolyn Abbate offers a critical perspective on the notion of music as the direct enactment of its narrative subject in *Unsung Voices*:

> When music is explained as the direct *enactment* of what might be called 'promusical objects' (Marx's great battle, for instance, or a drama of tonal conflict), then it is denied discursive latitude, for it is read as *being* events, and not reformulating or recounting them. Any musical-narratological analysis that assumes that the musical work is *isomorphous* with certain events will allow no divergence between these imagined phenomena and their musical analog.[49]

While Abbate's remarks are critically inflected, her note on a lack of divergence between the narrative topic and its musical embodiment seems entirely appropriate regarding *Sadko*. Rimsky-Korsakov is indeed trying to instantiate the narrative rather than reformulate or recount it; the notion that the opera becomes isomorphous with its source material is in fact entirely descriptive of Rimsky-Korsakov's compositional approach. The historical *byliny* had a musical analog (e.g. the declamations of the bards with or without gusli accompaniment); however, they had no visual analog. Therefore Rimsky-Korsakov appears to have fashioned the opera, with musical, visual, and linguistic elements all present, as a sort of Platonic Form of the *byliny*. In essence, adapting the Sadko *byliny* to an opera supplies visual, musical, and scenographic aspects of the story that are left to the imagination in its original, oral-narrative form. Rather than altering or diverging from the bylinic model, Rimsky-Korsakov seems to regard these features as

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[49] Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 26.

contributing to a fuller embodiment of the bylinic sources—a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk* of folk epic media.

In attempting to enact and not merely re-create the Sadko *byliny*, Rimsky-Korsakov, as the "bard behind the scenes," may be understood as a quotational presence who presides outside of the narrative frame. By piecing together different recensions of the Sadko *byliny* and adding details from other contemporaneous folk material, the composer deliberately inserts coherence where it was not evidenced prior. In accomplishing this, Rimsky-Korsakov aims to participate in the sort of folk creativity that originally gave rise to the *byliny*. Rimsky-Korsakov's bardic function, in other words, is to synthesize the versions of the Sadko tale and its various historical recensions into a (relatively) coherent narrative while still retaining the episodic and structurally disunified quality of bylinic narration. In assuming a bardic role, Rimsky-Korsakov takes the stance that folk material has a self-evident value and a *sui generis* effect on its Russian audience.

The distinction between narrative and enactment will figure prominently as the discussion turns to the diegetic music of Nezhata, Sadko, and the *skomorokhi* in the following chapters. The notion that the diegetic music in the opera plays simultaneous narrative and enacting roles poses questions of narrative space and time. As a framed narrative concealing a bard behind the scenes, the story of *Sadko* is densely layered not only with references to folk culture, but also with narrative tenses, modalities, and points of view. Chapter 2 will examine Nezhata's role as Sadko's "personal" narrator as well as a narrator of the cumulative events of the opera.

Chapter 2—

The Diegetic Microcosm:

Narrative Recountings and Foretellings in the "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich"

1. Introduction

The previous chapter concluded with a discussion of bards both within and extrinsic to the opera's narrative. Recalling Asaf'ev's perception of a "perennial, palpable presence of a rhapsode – a narrator and singer whose prophetic lips 'know' the sequence of events already and recount them in a serene and majestic manner," one could consider there to be bards both within and, in a sense, behind the scenes of the opera.[1] Chapter 1 suggested that this "bard behind the bards" could be understood as a quotational presence, a narrator who supplies missing narrative links and rearranges preexisting material in such a way as to present the story in a more totalizing and historically synoptic manner. Rimsky-Korsakov does not so much alter his sources as reconfigure them in the manner of a bardic narrator who spontaneously conjoins certain narrative elements and adds intuitive or plausible details from the existing sources. One of these narrative elements consists in inserting other narrative voices to the structure of the piece, thereby both accentuating and diversifying its bylinic form. The opera's preponderance of narrators (the townspeople, the bard Nezhata, Sadko, and the *skomorokhi*—not to mention the bardic narrator behind the scenes) recount and foretell events in the form of diegetic and nondiegetic music. The diegetic music, however, seems to play a particularly accentuated and

[1] B. V. Asaf'ev, "Muzyka Rimskogo-Korsakova v aspekte narodno-poeticheskoi slavianskoi kul'tury i mifologii" [The Music of Rimsky-Korsakov from the Standpoint of Folk-Poetic Slavic Culture and Mythology], *Sovetskaia muzyka* [Soviet Music] (Moscow: Sovetskii Kompozitor, 1946), no. 7, p. 76. All translations from the Russian are mine unless otherwise noted.

complex narrative role. The opera is not only about the modalities of telling, as discussed in the previous chapter, but also about the generative effect of narrative songs. The diegetic music both embodies and enacts the Orphic power of art to enjoin and transform nature, thereby creating a more aestheticized and contextually rich reality.

This chapter will examine the forms and functions of diegesis in Nezhata's "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich." It will first provide a few examples drawn from the overarching plot structure that will support the notion of the generative effect of the diegetic music in the opera. It will then sketch a hermeneutic template for the concept of narrative diegesis that will be applied to Nezhata's diegetic music in this chapter as well as the diegetic music of Sadko and the *skomorokhi* in the following chapters. The chapter will provide an overview of Nezhata's role in the opera and his relationship to the main character Sadko before analyzing the narrative functions of Nezhata's diegetic song.

2. The diegetic microcosm

Chapter 1 quoted several commentators who associated their perception of stasis within the narrative and dramatic structures of the opera with diegetic bylinic asides such as those of Nezhata. These commentators uniformly observed that the bylinic interruptions to the narrative flow are separated from the linear trajectory of the plot. What they do not mention, however, is that these bylinic asides encapsulate and mirror the piece's overarching narrative design. Rimsky-Korsakov's principal device for enacting "bylinic time" is to introduce diegetic music into the narrative. The diegetic music, on the one hand, functions as a vehicle for Rimsky-Korsakov's antiquarian aims, in that it provides examples of *byliny* within a story that self-consciously emulates the *byliny*. On the other hand, the diegetic music, which ostensibly

constitutes a narrative aside, is also a complex and multivalent narrative device. The diegetic music, which is shorn of more conventional plot-development devices such as dialogue or onstage action, possesses a greater narrative power as music that is heard not only by the audience, but by the characters on stage as well.

As it is sung both by and for the opera's principle characters, the diegetic music has its own agency within the narrative, its own generative effect: it narrates, and also brings the events that it narrates into being. Sadko's songs conjure subterranean mythic presences and grant him access to a fantastical underwater kingdom, where his skill as a tunesmith earns him the approval of the Sea King, and his daughter Volkhova's hand in marriage. Mirroring its two-tiered functionality in the opera, i.e. to narrate to the characters as well as the audience, is the fact that the diegetic music narrates as well as creates the narrative. While it may at first appear static, ornamental, or ancillary, the diegetic music functions both to introduce multiple narrative voices into the piece, and to offer varying perspectives on events that have already occurred or will transpire later in the opera. The opera's inclusion of multiple narrators suggests its main narrative motive – it is about telling itself. Sadko is himself a bard, gusli player, and narrator – as well as the object of the narration. The diegetic music constitutes the past, present, and future of narrated time in the opera melded into one. Its stasis in fact contains retrospective appraisal as well as prescient foretelling of the narrated events.

This notion that the opera centers on the mechanisms, modalities, and multidimensionality of telling may be briefly illustrated by taking a synoptic look at the placement of diegetic music throughout the plot. Nezhata's diegetic song in tableau 1 chronicles the life of Volkh Vseslav'evich, a mythic figure reputed to have superhuman strength, who

assembles a *druzhina*[2] and conquers the kingdom of India. Nezhata's song foreshadows certain elements of Sadko's story, such as his setting sail for foreign lands with a *druzhina*, and his occupation of the underwater realm—events which will occur in tableau 4 and tableau 6, respectively. Tableau 1 also features a diegetic song by Sadko in which he proclaims his aspiration to join the Novgorodian merchants, assemble a *druzhina*, sail the seas, and bring glory and riches to Novgorod. Not coincidentally, tableau 4 features Sadko setting sail for Venice with his *druzhina*, while tableau 7 narrates his return to Novgorod after his overthrowing of the dominion of the Sea King. Also in tableau 1, the *skomorokhi* sing a diegetic song lampooning Sadko's ambition, jokingly imploring him to catch golden fish in Lake Ilmen to secure his fortune. In tableau 4, it is these very golden fish, granted by the Sea King at the behest of his daughter, Volkhova, that allow Sadko to join the merchant ranks of Novgorod. Thus the diegetic songs of tableau 1 have essentially foretold the entire plot of the opera. What are at a glance perceived as narrative asides in the first tableau have provided a prismatic view of the whole narrative.

While it might be possible to read the diegetic songs of tableau 1 simply as foreshadowing, their generative effect begins to unfold in tableau 2. The diegetic songs of tableau 1 have not merely foretold subsequent narrative events, but *caused them to come into being*. Whereas the diegetic songs in tableau 1 have a prescriptive character, i.e. they project certain narrative events into the future of the narrated plot, Sadko's diegetic song in tableau 2 is

[2] A *druzhina* is a term for retinue of warriors or fellow travelers who accompany a figure of high-ranking nobility on military or mercantile expeditions. The word is derived from *drug* ("friend," "accomplice"), suggesting that the *druzhina* is a tightly-knit, voluntarily associated group seeking a common goal rather than a military unit bound by a service obligation. *Druzhina* is a term that is frequently encountered in the Russian chronicles in the early medieval period to describe a military brigade. I will leave it untranslated as there is no English equivalent that captures the nuances of its meaning.

of a retrospective nature; it recounts the end of tableau 1. At the beginning of tableau 2, Sadko sings of his banishment from Novgorod (which occurred at the conclusion of tableau 1). His mournful singing entices Volkhova from the depths of Lake Ilmen; she then pledges her eternal love and promises to produce golden fish out of Lake Ilmen to ensure Sadko's wealth and prosperity. The Sea King then appears and summons Volkhova and her retinue back to the depths. Thus by recounting the narrative events of tableau 1 in diegetic song, Sadko has in effect produced the next phase of the plot in tableau 2—the entrance of Volkhova and the Sea King. The narrative events of the first tableau, when sung in the form of diegetic song, have generated the ensuing plot event: Volkhova's infatuation with Sadko. Sadko's music, in other words, has not served a merely ornamental purpose; rather, it constitutes a crux of the narrative sequence.

Enchanted by the Sea Princess, Sadko is then inspired to sing a song to the Novgorodian townspeople in tableau 4 that tells of his encounter with Volkhova and boasts of her promise to grant him golden fish from Lake Ilmen. Sadko's song, as in tableau 2, recounts prior narrative events and in turn incites the subsequent development of the plot. In response to the song, the Novgorodian merchants make a bet with Sadko: if he can produce the golden fish, then they will hand over their mercantile enterprises to Sadko, and he will become the richest man in Novgorod. The merchants lose the wager, and Sadko sets sail with his *druzhina* as a wealthy *bogatyr'*, enacting the foretold narrative events of Nezhata's and his own diegetic songs in tableau 1. To conclude tableau 4, Nezhata declaims a song about a nightingale, whose singing ability wins the favor of the Sea King. Captivated by his song, the Sea King promises to grant the nightingale golden fish. The song describes the nightingale as making a wager with the local merchants, who lose when golden fish appear in the fishermen's nets. In other words, Nezhata's song recounts the prior events of tableaux 2 and 4 with the image of the nightingale personifying

Sadko. Later in the opera, Sadko is directly referred as a nightingale. Thus the folkloric world of bylinic song has merged with the actuated narrative events of the opera. Here Rimsky-Korsakov appears to comment on how the fictive worlds of the *byliny* can shape and transform the public's perception of reality.

In tableau 6, Sadko descends to the seabed and sings for the Sea King, who is so impressed with his singing ability that he grants Sadko his daughter's hand in marriage. They are married, though a saintly apparition intercedes; it declares the Sea King's dominion over the seas to be at an end, and summons Sadko and Volkhova back to the upper world. The apparition decrees that Volkhova will transform into a river that will connect Novgorod with the sea. He urges Sadko to direct his song toward Novgorod and to sing praises of the city rather than singing for the Sea King and his underwater realm. In tableau 7, Sadko recounts his adventures on the seabed to the assembled Novgorodian townspeople, who are astounded to find a newly-formed river running through Novgorod. Thus Sadko's singing prowess, rather than his mercantile exploits overseas, has won the favor of the heavenly powers and ensured Novgorod's economic prosperity for centuries to come. Nezhata concludes the opera with a song advising the townspeople to preserve Sadko's story as a token of remembrance for future generations. This final diegetic song brings the narrative into the present moment, implying that through the continuation of the tradition of the *byliny*, stories such as Sadko's have lived on throughout the ages and reached new audiences such as those present for the opera.

Since one of the principal themes of *Sadko* is the Orphic power of song to transform nature and affect what transpires in the corporeal world, diegetic music takes on a particular agency within the narrative structure. In tableau 7, Sadko calls attention to the Orphic capacity

of music. Not surprisingly, Sadko's avowal of the power of song occurs during one of his diegetic passages (in tableau 7):

> I, Sadko, am only good at singing:
> However, glorious Novgorod is greater than me.
> I wandered in distant parts.
> I sang, played all over the earth.
> Beasts and birds gathered,
> Grass and trees bent to listen,
> And princesses came together.
> Fast rivers converged
> With Volkhova, the pure princess,
> With Volkhova, the deep river.[3]

Here Sadko renders the Orphic subtext of the opera explicit by describing his song as captivating nature and, ultimately, causing the formation of the Volkhov River. The appearance of the river is perhaps the most succinct illustration of narrative events occurring in response to or as a result of diegetic songs. The diegetic music acts as a kind of fulcrum of the narrative, where events are foretold, actualized, and retold.

3. Narrative diegesis

The term diegesis is more commonly found in scholarship on film music than on opera. Introducing the distinction between diegetic and nondiegetic passages within *Sadko* perhaps requires a pause for descriptive qualification. Indeed there are passages in the opera where it is not entirely clear whether the music may be delineated as diegetic or nondiegetic, i.e. as heard by the onstage characters as well as the audience, or merely by the audience. One of these instances is at the conclusion of the opera, when the saintly apparition intervenes to put an end to Sadko

[3] N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov, *Sadko: opera-bylina v 7 kartinakh* [Sadko: Opera-*Bylina* in 7 Tableaux], with an introduction by Iv. Remezov, edited by M. I. Imas (Moscow: Izdanie upravleniia teatrami NKP RSFSR), p. 151.

and Volkhova's undersea nuptial procession. The onstage characters heed the apparition's advice to put an end to the proceedings and make their way toward the upper world, and thus they have clearly heard him; however, it is not clear whether the apparition's advice is heard *as music*. The apparition's music is based on an Orthodox hymn, serving a marked contrast to the preceding music of tableau 6, which intersperses diatonic and octatonic inflections that are associated with Sadko and Volkhova, respectively. The common operatic illusion that the characters do not hear one another's singing as music is brought onto uncertain terrain here. Since the piece has so frequently interspersed diegetic and nondiegetic singing, and since the diegetic songs have proven to play an active role in the major narrative events, the inclination is to perceive the apparition's music as diegetic song. However, in contrast to other instances of diegetic music, there are no definitive markers of the apparition's music as being diegetic.

In most instances in the opera, the boundary between diegetic and nondiegetic music is remarkably distinct. There is generally little doubt as to whether the onstage characters hear a particular song as music. The clear delineation in the opera between diegetic and nondiegetic music acts as a contrast to diegesis in film, where, as Robynn Stilwell postulates, there can be a "fantastical gap," i.e. a liminal and uncertain space, between diegetic and nondiegetic passages.[4] The diegetic songs in *Sadko* are usually prompted by other characters, especially in the first tableau. The diegetic music begins in tableau 1 upon the chorus of townspeople's urging of Nezhata to "Tell us, o singer, about the times of old."[5] At the conclusion of Nezhata's song, Sadko strikes up a tune in response to the townspeople's request to hear a song glorifying

[4] Robynn J. Stilwell, "The Fantastical Gap between Diegetic and Nondiegetic," in *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema*, ed. by Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer, and Richard Leppert (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 184-202.

[5] Rimsky-Korsakov, *Sadko: opera-bylina v 7 kartinakh*, p. 67.

Novgorod. Following Sadko's first aria and his banishment from the town, the elders call the *skomorokhi* to the foreground to amuse the crowd. The moments of diegesis are recognizable at once to the audience, because the stage directions indicate that Nezhata and Sadko are to play the gusli during their bylinic arias. In each of their diegetic passages, they take up the gusli and figuratively strum it, providing a scenographic analog to the occurrence of onstage narration. During these passages, the orchestral textures imitate the strumming of the gusli with protracted arpeggios and delicate pizzicato sections in the strings. The orchestration as well as the stage direction of the diegetic passages thus is meant to reinforce the perception that the songs occur within the course of the onstage action.

Aside from the question of when the diegetic music occurs, more complicated questions present themselves as to whose perspective the diegetic narration represents, and to whom the song is directed. Regarding narrative viewpoint, Simon Morrison inquires: "Irrespective of the scene, character, or number in question, the listener is sent back to the same beguiling questions: from whose – or what – perspective is the drama unfolding?"[6] Recalling Asaf'ev's observation of a bardic narrator lurking behind the scenes and inserting other bardic narrators into the story, the binary of perspective and actuality is constitutive of the opera's narrative structure. In the instances of diegetic music, the framed nature of the narrative is brought into high relief. The question of which characters may be considered reliable narrators, and how the diegetic music generates empathy and self-identification on the part of the audience with particular characters comes to the fore.

[6] Simon Morrison, "The Semiotics of Symmetry, or Rimsky-Korsakov's Operatic History Lesson," *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Nov., 2001), pp. 265-266.

Stilwell's article "The Fantastical Gap between Diegetic and Nondiegetic" introduces an interpretive paradigm for diegetic music (in film) that can be usefully applied to these questions. She argues that "just as diegetic and nondiegetic, foreground and background are neighboring but not parallel axes, so are empathy and anempathy and their close neighbors, subjectivity and objectivity."[7] This axis is not schematic in associating diegetic music with subjectivity and nondiegetic music with objectivity; rather, it is fluid in assessing how diegetic music generates the audience's empathy and anempathy with particular characters and plot situations. Indeed, in many instances of diegetic music in *Sadko*, the constructs of subjectivity and objectivity appear to be indistinct, or perhaps interchangeable, depending on factors of whose perspective one considers the song to represent, and whom one thinks it is meant to persuade.

The only subjectivity that is represented within the diegetic music is that of Sadko; his is the only "I" that makes an appearance in the diegetic music of the opera. Sadko's diegetic arias may not be considered to be entirely subjective, however, since by the end of the opera he takes on a symbolic status as a representative of the glory of Novgorod, the city's mercantile successes, and the triumph of song over the dominion of the Sea King. His diegetic music seems directed not only at obtaining the audience's favor for himself, but also for what he represents: the Orphic power of song, and the efficacy of folkloric symbols at communicating paradigms of national identity and communal self-identification. In other words, his "I" does not merely represent himself; it elicits the audience's empathy, and secures their favor with his plight and purpose. The audience is unquestionably meant to empathize with Sadko; he is, after all, the protagonist.

[7] Stilwell, "The Fantastical Gap between Diegetic and Nondiegetic," p. 190.

At times, however, it seems that Sadko's authority over his own story is called into question by Nezhata, who acts as Sadko's narrator within the narrative, and the *skomorokhi*, who lampoon Sadko's ambitions and incite the audience's laughter, which is directed (ostensibly) at him. The presence of other narrators within the narrative frame provides multilateral accounts of Sadko's story which generally prove more prescient or omniscient than Sadko's own perspective.[8] Therefore the hero's limitations are exposed by the other narrators, though his triumphs are also actualized and redoubled through their narrative accounts. Nezhata and the *skomorokhi* draw boundaries within Sadko's perspective on himself, though also function to accentuate his status.

The sense of a lack of centralized narrative governance in the opera is heightened by the fact that Nezhata and Sadko are both exclusively preoccupied with Sadko's story. Rather than contradicting each other, their narratives appear to supplement each other and balance each other out in a kind of narrative zero-sum game. Neither one appears to relate a more reliable account than the other; however, Nezhata appears to have a more synoptic view of the course of narrative events. The Sadko-Nezhata binary plays into the numerous dualistic and symmetrical elements of the opera as described in chapter 1. While he does not specifically address the Sadko-Nezhata binary in the ensuing passage, Morrison remarks on the effect of such binary relationships on the opera's narrative construction:

> Radically…Rimsky-Korsakov declined to construct one side of the binaries as the speaking self, as base or ground, and the other as figure, object or alien. Instead, all are marked in the score as representations, formulated, as it would appear, by a master voice that has entirely absented itself from the music. Representer and represented, individual

[8] Rimsky-Korsakov's inclusion of Nezhata as a framing device within the narrative is reminiscent of the figure of Baian from the *Tale of Igor's Campaign*. The composer gestures overtly toward this resemblance by paraphrasing Baian's opening soliloquy from the *Igor Tale* in Nezhata's first song, the "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich."

> and collective, enter into an alternating relationship where each replaces the other as speaker. The opera, as a consequence, appears not to have a governing narrative authority.[9]

Though he does not mention Asaf'ev's quote, Morrison appears to allude to it in his reference to a "master voice that has entirely absented itself from the music." Thus by Morrison's account, the effect of the master voice on the narrative is to diminish the exclusive authority of each narrator, including the master voice itself, by introducing binaries such as Sadko and Nezhata. The undisclosed bardic narrator appears to reverse constructions of self and other, narrator and narrated, and subjectivity and objectivity.

Rimsky-Korsakov's inclusion of multiple narrative voices in the opera may be considered to be an instance of Bakhtinian heteroglossia. Recalling the composer's claim that "The opera-*bylina*'s recitative, primarily that of Sadko, is distinctive in the sense of the uniformity of its internal structure. This sort of recitative is not conversational language, but rather the conventionally regimented bylinic narration (*skaz*) and intonation.[10] Thus Sadko's narrative and declamatory speech is meant to be distinct to his character, just as Nezhata, the *skomorokhi*, and the townspeople's speech have their own distinctive markers. Rimsky-Korsakov's specific mention of *skaz* invites a Bakhtinian reading of the narrative voices in the opera. The multiple narrators constitute a kind of heteroglossic structure of narrative perspectives, which compromises the authority of any one narrator in a manner akin to Dostoevsky's novels. In effect, it is not only the recitative sections of the characters, but also the diegetic arias that likewise serve to distinguish their narrative voices.

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[9] Morrison, "The Semiotics of Symmetry," p. 265.

[10] N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov, *Letopis' moei muzykal'noi zhizni* [A Chronicle of My Musical Life] (Moscow: Muzyka, 1980), pp. 85-86.

4. Narrative alliances

Nezhata's opening song, the "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich," foretells the main plot events as discussed above. Nezhata's song is then followed by Sadko's diegetic aria about his aspiration to join the Novgorodian merchant ranks. Neither the audience, the characters onstage, nor Sadko (who is not present for Nezhata's song), are aware that Nezhata's *bylina* will turn out to encapsulate certain elements of Sadko's story. As it turns out, these two songs are related in a kind of reverse cause-and-effect relationship: Nezhata narrates the effect, and Sadko incites the cause. Nezhata, it would seem, acts as a kind of third-person narrator who knows the future sequence of events and narrates from within the plot of the story. One possible interpretation of Nezhata's presence in the opera, therefore, is as Asaf'ev's bard behind the scenes. Chapter 1 has provided a different interpretation of this question, though Nezhata's prescience would lend a certain credibility to the notion of him as the central narrative authority.

The fact that Nezhata sings only at the behest of the townspeople, however, suggests that there are greater narrative power dynamics at play within the story. Nezhata is, in a sense, Sadko's narrator, but he is beholden to other narrative voices within the opera, namely the merchant elite. His perspective, therefore, must be analyzed as narrating Sadko's story *to them*. Rather than Nezhata functioning as an extension of Sadko's narrative voice, he acts instead as the townspeople's narrator of Sadko's story. Rimsky-Korsakov appears to have fashioned Nezhata's character in imitation of minstrels who were commonly a part of the retinue of medieval Russian aristocrats. Though Nezhata's songs would represent the closest accounts to objectivity on Stilwell's subjective/objective axis of diegesis, he is nonetheless partial to the Novgorodian merchants. In fact, he represents a curious paradox; as Sadko's narrator, he

recounts Sadko's story to the townspeople who have just witnessed these same narrative events unfold. Complicating the picture is the fact that the chorus of townspeople also functions as a narrative voice. Thus Nezhata is a kind of extension of the narrative voice of the crowd, encapsulating the perceptions and opinions of the public in diegetic song. As Vladimir Marchenkov summarizes, "Sadko always stands out from the crowd whereas Nezhata is always close to the chorus and never contradicts it."[11] Nezhata's songs as a rule are not lyrical, and never call attention to his "I" as the speaker. They are instead directed outward as projections and recollections of Sadko's story to the townspeople and the audience.

Observing Nezhata's alliance with the townspeople and the merchant elite, Asaf'ev calls Nezhata "the exponent of (the merchant elders') political ideals."[12] He associates the elders with "power monger(ing),"[13] which suggests that Nezhata stands in some sort of opposition to Sadko, since the latter aspires to be in the position of the elders, and they rebuke him. Nezhata is, however, in essence Sadko's narrator within his own tale. Nezhata's alliance with the merchants in other words must be seen as coloring his narrative take on Sadko. Given that, in the diegetic songs, Nezhata narrates to, and at the behest of, the merchant elders suggests that his narrative of Sadko indeed has to suit their ideals. It should be recalled here that the opera was premiered by the Mamontov Private Opera, a company which was funded by the mercantile successes of the railway tycoon Savva Mamontov. Though he is the narrative voice of the merchants, Nezhata's

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[11] Vladimir Marchenkov, "The Orpheus Myth in Modernity: Rimsky-Korsakov's Opera Sadko," in "The Orpheus Myth in Musical Thought of Antiquity, the Renaissance, and Modern Times" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1998), p. 147.

[12] B. V. Asaf'ev, "The Problem of a City Made Visible," in *Symphonic Etudes*, ed. and trans. by David Haas (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008), p. 100.

[13] Ibid.

stance on Sadko nonetheless appears to be empathetic; he is, after all, a fellow impecunious bard. Nezhata in effect attempts to elicit the merchants' and the audience's favor for Sadko. By attempting to bolster Sadko's status to the merchants (both onstage and in the audience), Nezhata's diegetic music functions in two ways: firstly, to generate sympathy for Sadko and his goal of entering the merchant ranks, and, secondly, to illustrate the Orphic power of art, the transformative ability of song to affect the social structure.

5. The superimposition of bylinic worlds

The impression of Nezhata as a third-person narrator is furthered by the fact that Sadko and Nezhata appear together onstage only once: during the final tableau, when all of the narrative voices come together to sing the praises of Novgorod. Sadko is not present for Nezhata's bylinic accounts of his past and future in tableaux 1 and 4. His absence during these crucial narrative songs suggest that he, as the principle bardic voice of his own *bylina*, is in effect enacting the narrative elsewhere while his story is being told to the townspeople and the audience. Thus while Sadko *lives within* the *bylina* and narrates it from within, Nezhata stands outside of Sadko's bylinic narrative frame and shapes the story *extrinsically* according to the perceptions of the crowd. The bylinic fictive world that Nezhata supplies within Sadko's *bylina* is in effect superimposed onto Sadko's subjective account of his own narrative trajectory. The fictive world depicted in Nezhata's songs offers a measure of comparison and contrast that serves to relate Sadko's tale to other stories known to the townspeople and the audience, such as the "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich." Nezhata's diegetic songs constitute a bylinic story world that exists outside of Sadko's imagination, and instead within the collective folkloric imagination of the crowd. Nezhata's *byliny* are deployed within the story in order to frame and contextualize

Sadko's tale according to comparable accounts of folk heroes. Nezhata's songs both refract Sadko's story onto other bylinic fictive worlds, and reflect these other *byliny* onto Sadko.

The fact that Nezhata's songs also have an active agency on the events in the narrative (as discussed at the beginning of this chapter) suggests that these two fictive worlds, i.e. the solipsistic and self-aggrandizing domain of Sadko's songs, and the selfless bardic contextuality of Nezhata's songs, are engaged in a kind of dialogue or mutual relationship. Thus the narratives of both bards within the story, Nezhata and Sadko, have a generative effect on the cumulative story; Nezhata's songs prefigure and interpret Sadko's tale, and Sadko's songs enact and embody Nezhata's foretellings. In this sense both bards participate in the Orphic theme of art's intercession upon the chain of events. Morrison in fact calls Nezhata the "Orphic double" of Sadko.[14] Sadko's songs bring about miraculous events and serve to alter the Novgorodian landscape through the creation of a river, while Nezhata's songs call attention to the authority that the public ascribes to bylinic legend. These legends shape the townspeople's perception of Sadko, which in turn plays a part in Sadko's own narrative trajectory.

Another detail that demonstrates the interrelatedness of Nezhata and Sadko comes from the cast list. Rimsky-Korsakov describes Nezhata as a "young gusli player from the town of Kiev" (*molodoi gusliar' iz Kiev-grada*).[15] Sadko is indicated as a "gusli player and singer in Novgorod" (*gusliar' i pevets v Novegorode*).[16] The description of Sadko as being "in Novgorod" (as opposed to "from Novgorod") appears to imply that Sadko is not necessarily native to that

[14] Morrison, "The Semiotics of Symmetry," p. 274.

[15] Rimsky-Korsakov, *Sadko: opera-bylina v 7 kartinakh*, p. 63.

[16] Ibid.

city—a feature that is consistent with the Sadko *bylina* included in Danilov's collection.[17] In his opening aria, Sadko mentions that he is the son of Sur Volzhanin, which suggests that he is associated with the Volga. Nezhata's origin, by contrast, is specified as Kievan. In other words, neither of the principle *in situ* narrators are actually from Novgorod (though Sadko is portrayed as living there).

Nezhata and Sadko's non-Novgorodian origins could be considered to have implications for their situatedness within the narrative as well as their perspective on the narrative events. The fact that Nezhata is native to Kiev suggests that his view of Novgorod is as an outsider. His songs regarding the glory of the city and its mercantile successes, such as those in tableau 7, are in effect non-partisan; they are related from the perspective of an outside observer. Since Nezhata is a guest in Novgorod, his role as the city's resident tunesmith is dependent on, and probably arose from, his ability to curry favor with the populace through his singing and storytelling ability. In the diegetic songs such as the "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich" in tableau 1, Nezhata is in effect playing to the crowd's predilection for heroic stories of conquest, much like the one that will unfold in the narrative of the opera.[18] In the song of the nightingale in tableau 4, Nezhata reflects the townspeople's perception of the miraculous event that has just transpired (i.e. the appearance of the golden fish) through the prism of a folk tale. In this

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[17] Kirsha Danilov, *Drevnie rossiiskie stikhotvoreniia* [Ancient Russian Poems], ed. by A. F. Iakubovich, vol. 6 (Moscow and Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1977), pp. 32-36.

[18] The "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich" is in fact, like Nezhata, of Kievan origin. Therefore the Kievan *bylina* is inserted within a Novgorodian *bylina* much in the way that Nezhata is inserted within Sadko's narrative. In a manner similar to Nezhata's tandem relationship with Sadko, the Kievan *bylina* functions to project certain elements of Sadko's story into the overarching narrative trajectory. For more on the *bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich, see Roman Jakobson, "The Vseslav Epos," in *Russian Epic Studies*, ed. by Roman Jakobson and Ernest. J Simmons, (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1949), pp. 13-86.

instance, Nezhata functions as an interpreter as well as a narrator of the plot, in that he presents the curious appearance of the golden fish as an occurrence within a bardic story that is *not about Sadko*, but instead about a nightingale. This plot event, of course, has just transpired within the framework of another *bylina*, that of Sadko. Thus Nezhata's outsider status also grants him an outsider's perspective from the standpoint of which he relates mythic stories to the peculiar happenings in Novgorod. The townspeople were present for the miraculous event; however, Nezhata's song functions as their collective viewpoint. Thus the diegesis in this case serves as a window into the townspeople's perception of the narrative events as well as a bylinic interpretation of those events sung back to them through an outsider's perspective. The song, as in tableau 1, presents a *bylina* within a *bylina*, forming a multi-tiered frame of bylinic narratives.

The fact that Sadko lives in Novgorod, but is not necessarily from the city, also has important narrative implications. Like Nezhata, Sadko is a foreigner; he, however, is more closely entwined within the economic and social fabric of Novgorod. Though both Nezhata and Sadko are narrators, Nezhata always remains on the periphery of the narrative events, while Sadko is central to them. Sadko seeks to join the merchant ranks of Novgorod, whereas Nezhata is portrayed without any discernible identity aside from serving as the mouthpiece of the *byliny*. As a foreigner, Sadko aspires to attain the status of the merchants that bring Novgorod renown. Thus Sadko's diegetic aria in tableau 1 (which will be analyzed more closely in the following chapter), in which he sings of his desire to be among the merchant class and to become wealthy and prosperous, must be interpreted in light of his status as an outsider not only in social standing, but as a non-native Novgorodian.

Brian Reeve refers to Nezhata's role in the opera as a "trouser role," in that he is a male character written for a mezzo-soprano.[19] In most productions of Sadko, the Nezhata role is played by a female singer. Rimsky-Korsakov's choice of a mezzo-soprano voice for Nezhata's role appears to be a reflection of the character's age; he is termed in the cast list a "young gusliar'" (*molodoi gusliar'*). Thus in lieu of a young boy playing Nezhata's part, the role is generally played by a female singer. Nezhata is in fact referred to in pronominal form once only, and it occurs in the third-person singular "he" (*on*) in one of his own songs. This, along with his stage costume, is the only way that the audience is to know that he is to be considered a male character. Even his name, with its concluding vowel "a," suggests in Russian that he is of the female gender.

Reeve postulates that Nezhata's gender ambiguity is meant to reflect the fact that bardic singers were not of a specific gender as a rule, and in fact were predominantly female.[20] Rimsky-Korsakov could have made Nezhata's gender indeterminate, he argues, in order to emphasize that the bardic singers who originally devised and sang the *byliny*, and whom he quotes in Nezhata's diegetic songs, could have been either men or women. Nezhata's gender ambiguity could also be seen as figuring within the dynamics of his narrative voice. Nezhata, from the audience's standpoint, neither belongs to a discernible gender nor, in a sense, belongs to any of the other characters or social strata of the opera. It has been established above that Nezhata serves as a spokesperson for the merchants' view of Sadko, while his own viewpoint is deliberately concealed. Nezhata is a mouthpiece for the merchants, though he narrates the story

[19] Brian Reeve, "Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's Use of the *Byliny* (Russian Oral Epic Narratives) in his Opera *Sadko*" (PhD dissertation, University of Nottingham, 2005), p. 174.

[20] Ibid., p. 175.

of a figure (Sadko) who resides outside of the merchant class (at least at first). Nezhata in effect acts as a narrative intermediary; he is Sadko's third-person narrator who tells Sadko's story to the townspeople through other bylinic tales such as that of Volkh Vseslav'evich, while Sadko functions as a first-person narrator and engages directly with the townspeople in order to enact his own narrative of personal ambition. Nezhata's intermediary status describes why he stands at a remove from Sadko by narrating his story through the "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich." Since he is identified more closely with the merchants' voice, he cannot name Sadko specifically yet because Sadko is not a member of his intended audience; Nezhata's job is to narrate heroic mercantile deeds of old, and Sadko does not belong to the heroic mercantile class as of the first tableau. By the concluding tableau, once Sadko's singing has assured the future mercantile success of Novgorod through the creation of the Volkhov River, Nezhata refers to Sadko by name:

> Let it be known that by his singing, Sadko
> Has enticed a deep river
> For the glory of Novgorod.
> A path is laid to the deep blue sea,
> To far reaches.[21]

This part is likewise sung by the town elders and the retinue of foreign merchants, suggesting not only that Nezhata is to be associated with these other narrative voices, but also that Nezhata and these other characters are united in praising Sadko's deed. Thus in the first tableau, Nezhata, as Sadko's narrator to the townspeople, must frame his story within another *bylina* which speaks of the heroic triumphs of Volkh Vseslav'evich in lieu of naming Sadko, an impoverished *gusliar'*, as a future hero.

[21] Rimsky-Korsakov, *Sadko: opera-bylina v 7 kartinakh*, p. 150.

6. The "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich"

The "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich" is an extract from Kirsha Danilov's collection of *byliny*, which Rimsky-Korsakov specifies as one of his source materials in the introduction to the score.[22] The composer notes that this *bylina* "was taken directly from the folk epos."[23] This admission supports the idea that Nezhata is intended to speak in the language of the townspeople, narrating Sadko's story through the lens of established bylinic heroes. The story describes the life and heroic exploits of Volkh beginning with his birth and concluding with his conquering of the Indian kingdom (*indeiskoe tsarstvo*). Volkh, Nezhata sings, was born of a human mother, Marfa Vseslav'evna, and a serpent, Tugarin the Fierce. At his birth, the sea roiled, animals took shelter, and the Indian kingdom trembled. At the age of 12, young Volkh lifted an enormous leaden cudgel, assembled a brave *druzhina*, and set off to India. There he and his *druzhina* conquered the kingdom, and Volkh installed himself as the new king (*tsar'*).

While the song is not a verbatim rendering of the narrative trajectory of Sadko, certain thematic resemblances can be deduced. The reference to the sea calls to mind Sadko's seafaring expedition in tableau 5. The description of animals taking cover contrasts with Sadko's song in tableau 7, where he narrates how all manner of wildlife gathered to hear his music on his travels. Volkh's feats of strength can be compared to Sadko's musical skill. Both Volkh and Sadko assemble *druzhiny* and depart for far-flung destinations (Sadko in fact considers sailing to India to seek a mercantile alliance, but opts for Venice instead). Whereas Volkh conquers the Indian

[22] Danilov, *Drevnie rossiiskie stikhotvoreniia*, vol. 6, pp. 32-36.

[23] N. A. Rimsky-Korsakow, *Sadko: Romantische oper in sieben bildern* (Piano-vocal score), M.P. Belaieff edition (London: Boosey & Hawkes, Ltd., 1896), p. 1430.

kingdom by force, Sadko ends the reign of the Sea King by captivating him in song and marrying his daughter.

The "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich" inserts a frame within the broader narrative framework of the bylinic opera as if exemplifying to the audience how such tales were conventionally told. As outlined in chapter 1, certain critical appraisals described this song as a moment of stasis within the narrative. As it is carefully delimited from the previous and succeeding sections of music (as will be analyzed below), the song takes on the quality of a folkloric exhibition: a museum display intended to recreate the manner in which *byliny* were sung at town gatherings in bygone times. Nezhata's aria feels quotational; in a literal sense, it *is* quotational in that the crowd asks him to sing a song of old, but also in a metaphorical sense, in that it presents a miniature folk drama within the structure of a larger folk drama.

Nezhata's *bylina* within a *bylina*, and its elements of foreshadowing, brings to mind the distinction between *fabula* (story) and *siuzhet* (plot), a mainstay of Russian formalist narratological criticism.[24] In effect, the narrative events that Nezhata recounts about Volkh

[24] Russian formalist critics introduced a distinction in narratological studies between the *siuzhet*, or plot, and the *fabula*, or story. For most formalists, the *siuzhet* denotes the sequence of narrative events as they occur within the linear course of the plot's unfolding. The *fabula* denotes the chronological sequence of narrative time contained in the story, which may or may not correspond to the sequence in which the events were reported in the *siuzhet*. For instance, Raskol'nikov's childhood recollection of witnessing a horse being beaten to death in *Crime and Punishment* would be placed earlier in the *fabula* than in the *siuzhet*, as it occurs at the beginning of the chronological span of the narrative, though it acts as a flashback within the sequence of events in the plot. In *Sadko*, the narrative contents of Nezhata's "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich" occur later in the *fabula* than in the *siuzhet*. In the *siuzhet*, the song is placed before Sadko even makes an entrance, though it alludes to certain elements of Sadko's story that will occur later in the *fabula*. For more on the distinction between *fabula* and *siuzhet*, see Viktor Shklovsky, *Razvertyvanie siuzheta* [The Unfolding of the Plot] (Petrograd: OPOIAZ, 1921), and B. V. Tomashevsky, *Teoriia literatury: poetika* [Literary Theory: Poetics], 2 vols. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1927).

Vseslav'evich will transpire over the course of the entire opera through the story of Sadko. Nezhata's song occurs before Sadko's enters; thus certain elements of his story are told before he appears on the stage. Nezhata's song, in other words, succinctly portrays the whole *fabula* – the entirety of the narrative in a chronological span outside of the real time of telling – at the beginning of the *siuzhet*, the chain of events in the order that they are narrated to the audience. Thus in its moment of stasis within the operatic *siuzhet*, the "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich" rapidly foretells the entire scope of the *fabula*.[25] The recounting of the age-old folk tale of Volkh Vseslav'evich in the first tableau in fact functions as a projection into the future of the plot.

In this manner, Rimsky-Korsakov creates different levels of narrative time which correspond to the instances of diegetic music. These different domains within the narrative time of the opera are concomitantly inhabited by different narrators. It is primarily the diegetic passages of Nezhata that contain these refractions of narrative time into other temporal spaces. Nezhata's songs represent the merging of Sadko's story with other *byliny*, as if to install Sadko within a pantheon of timeless bylinic heroes. Nezhata thus resides outside of the real time flow

[25] By contrast, Nezhata's song in tableau 4, which recounts Sadko's winning favor with the Sea King and obtaining golden fish, occurs earlier in the *fabula*, but later in the *siuzhet*. This diegetic song summarizes the preceding events of the tableau to the extent that it seems almost superfluous, or "static," from a narrative standpoint. It functions, however, to anticipate the appearance of the Sea King and to offer a snapshot of the dual world ontology of the opera. It makes the unseen, underwater realm a presence that is felt and known, and it identifies the Sea King as a factor in the narrative events that have transpired. The song is in essence etiological: it summarizes the cause of the appearance of the golden fish, it identifies the unseen presence causing the miraculous events, and it explains the preceding events to the townspeople who are in a state of disbelief. It also seems to allow the townspeople and the audience to process what has just happened in the narrative, to pause to appreciate the otherworldly and fantastical nature of what has occurred. It is an aside from the *siuzhet*, but it is an important part of the *fabula*. The song also offers another narrative take on the preceding events to contrast that of Sadko; the audience would perhaps suspect that all of this business about golden fish, Volkhova, and the Sea King was Sadko's fantasy or dream without Nezhata's song in effect verifying what has occurred.

of the operatic *siuzhet*, and instead demonstrates his exclusive mastery over the *fabula*. The extraneous or static quality of Nezhata's presence in the *siuzhet* is in turn contrasted with his total control over the *fabula*. Nezhata never speaks directly to any of the characters, and does not participate in any of the inter-character drama within the narrative. He, however, presides over the entire course of the narrative from his opening song. It is in a temporal sense that he functions as a third-person narrator; just as an omniscient narrator recounts past events from the vantage point of the present, Nezhata narrates Sadko's future at the opening of his *bylina*. His omniscience, however, is compromised as a character within the confines of the *siuzhet*—his moments of narration, i.e. his diegetic songs, occur within the real time flow of the operatic plot. He therefore represents a curious combination as a narrator who foretells the *fabula*, apparently knowing the ensuing course of events, but who is present for the unfolding of the *siuzhet* as it occurs. It appears that Rimsky-Korsakov intends for the diegetic songs themselves to create and actualize these different temporal levels, a notion that plays into the Orphic theme of the power of music over the natural order. It is in this sense that the diegetic music has a generative effect on the narrative that overshadows the will or individual agency of the narrators.

Another way of interpreting this refraction of narrative time is provided by Carolyn Abbate: "Diegetic genres, with their surviving narrator, play both with *Erzählzeit*, the time it takes the narrator to tell, the time of reading, and *erzählte Zeit*, the expanse of time that is told about."[26] Here Abbate sketches a template for reading narrative time in diegetic music that corresponds to the distinction between *fabula* and *siuzhet*, with *erzählte Zeit* functioning as the *fabula* and *Erzählzeit* standing in for the *siuzhet*. According to Abbate's scheme, the narrative

[26] Carolyn Abbate, "What the Sorcerer Said," *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Spring 1989), p. 228.

content of Nezhata's "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich" belongs to *erzählte Zeit*, the synoptic course of events covered in the narrative. The placement of the diegetic aria, however, is within *Erzählzeit*, the sequence in which the narrative events unfold. The different paradigms of *erzählte Zeit* turn the focus to the act of narrating, the process of narration itself—they highlight the tellers of the tale instead of obfuscating the teller. This is perhaps one explanation for why Nezhata is, in a sense, embedded within the *siuzhet* of the opera: the different levels of narrative time call attention to his narration as a kind of self-fulfilling prophesy. The *erzählte Zeit* in turn functions as an extension of Nezhata's narrative voice rather than being related by an unseen, omniscient narrator.

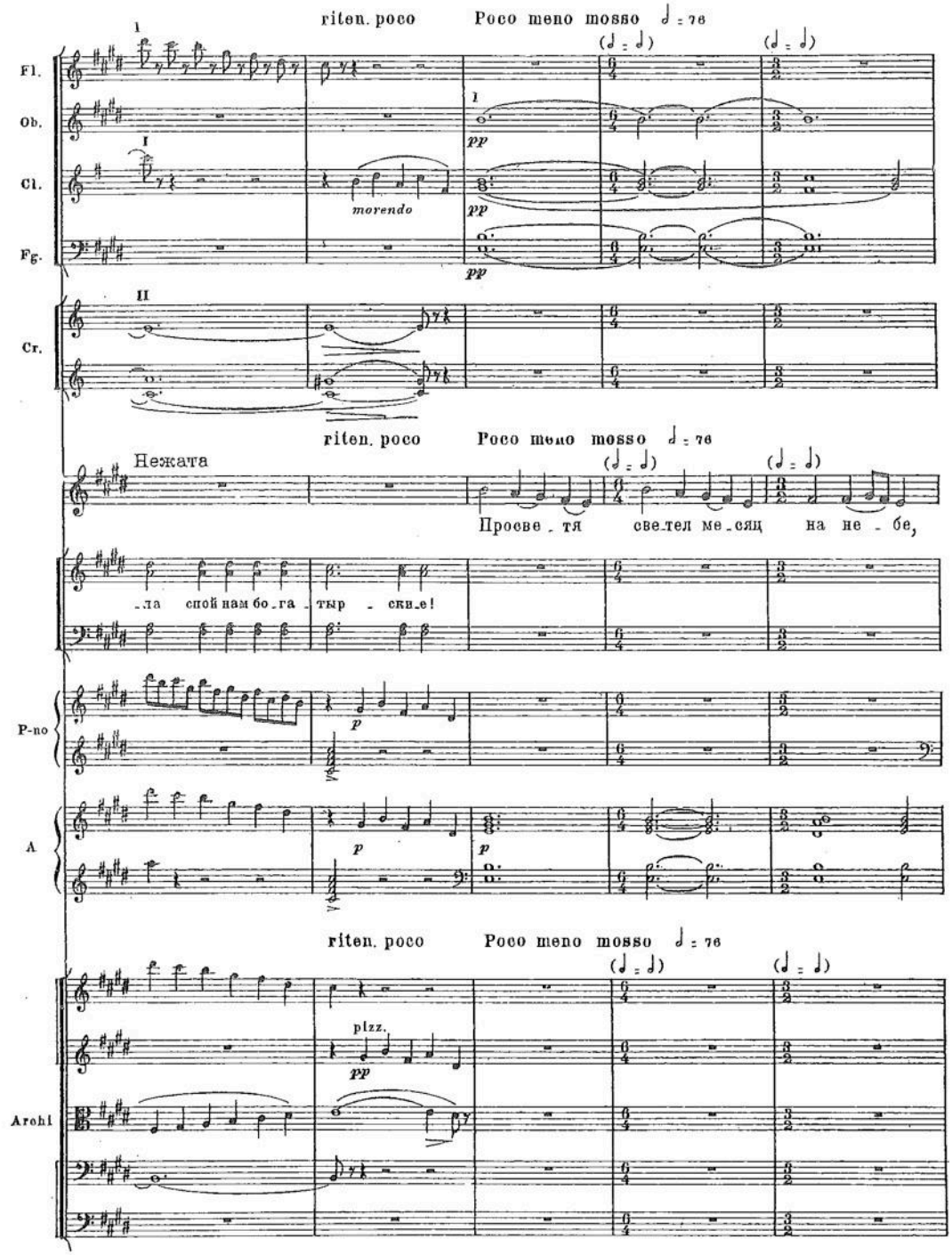
The shift in narrative time that occurs in the diegetic music corresponds to a shift in meter and rhythm. The chorus of townspeople's parts in the first tableau are primarily in triple meters such as 3/4 and 6/8. In Nezhata's "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich," the meter alternates between 3/2 and 6/4. Thus the triple meters of the choral sections become in effect doubled in the diegetic music. Nezhata's song is correspondingly delimited from the preceding choral sections according to a metrical variation.[27] It is as if the meter has expanded in order to emphasize the breadth of narrative time that is being covered in the song. The real time flow of the narrative that has been established in the choral sections has in a sense ceased, and bylinic time – the long, drawn-out time span of a folk epic – has commenced. The bylinic triple meters have been anticipated and framed by the related triple meters in the choral sections; in Nezhata's song, they

[27] The metrical turn to 3/2 and 6/4 is preceded by a short section of 2/2 marked *L'istesso tempo*. The meter here functions similar to the 6/8 which precedes it. This brief section serves as a transition to bylinic time in which Nezhata is called upon to sing a song of old by two of the merchant elders.

have simply been extended, as if a wide-angle lens has been applied. The story of Volkh Vseslav'evich is thus narrated within the more expansive metrical frame of bylinic time.

During Nezhata's song, the meter frequently alternates between the two triple meters. Metrical changes are a common feature of the source music from which Rimsky-Korsakov derived this and other bylinic songs in the opera.[28] The consistent fluctuation between 3/2 and 6/4 – the change sometimes occurs every other measure, as shown in the example below – leads to a sense of unevenness of narrative time. The melodic structure of the verses may be broken down into three-measure units within which the metrical variation occurs (see measures 3 through 5 on page 73 provided below). In each melodic unit, the first measure is in 3/2, the second measure is in 6/4, and the third changes back to 3/2. In each repetition of the melodic form, the opening measure is again in 3/2, which forms two consecutive measures of the same meter: the last measure of the preceding melodic unit and the first measure of the following one. The 6/4 measure is in other words bookended by two 3/2 measures. The insertion of the 6/4 meaure within the 3/2 measures functions to change the harmonic emphasis of the descending scale. The pitches of the first 3/2 measure and the ensuing 6/4 measure are identical. In the 3/2 measure, the A and the F# fall on the strong beats, forming two appoggiaturas against the tonic chord, E major. The A occurring on a strong beat gives the descending scale a feeling of the dominant seventh, BAF#, over the tonic. In the 6/4 measure, the A occurs as a weak passing tone within the span of a third, B-G#, which is followed by another third span, G#-E. Thus in 6/4 the melodic line constitutes pure tonic arpeggiation; the descent spans the major scale from the fifth scale degree to the tonic. The 6/4 measure inserted after the 3/2 measure creates a sense

[28] Reeve, "Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's Use of the *Byliny* (Russian Oral Epic Narratives) in his Opera *Sadko*," pp. 33-39.


riten. poco
Poco meno mosso
morendo
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Fg.
Cr.
Нежата
Просве_тя свет_ел ме_сяц на не_бе,
_ла спой нам бо_га_тыр_ски_е!
P-no
A
pizz.
Archi

of fluctuation in the narrative time by slowing down the harmonic rhythm. The appoggiaturas in the 3/2 measure create tension (i.e. the suggested dominant seventh chord) calling for a resolution, thus implying a sense of forward motion toward the tonic. The pure tonic arpeggiation, by contrast, creates a sense of stasis; the descending scale constitutes a pause in the forward motion of the harmonic rhythm.

Given the re-framing of the choral triple meters into more expansive bylinic triple meters, and the vacillation between 3/2 and 6/4 in Nezhata's song, the *bylina* has in effect brought the narrative into a different temporal space. Rimsky-Korsakov's insertion of the bylinic triple meters within a preceding triple meter structure has created a sense of the past blended into the present. In a letter to Vladimir Belsky from 1895, amid his composition of *Sadko*, Rimsky-Korsakov provides oblique insight into this gesture of superimposing the past upon the present: "(The boyar) Shaklovityi (in Musorgsky's opera *Khovanshchina*) dubs himself the 'futureness of the present,' but I seem to prefer being the 'presentness of the past' or 'the pastness of the present' – as you like it."[29] The sense of merging of the past with the present, or the present with the past, is clearly embodied by Nezhata's diegetic music. Nezhata's song occurs in the real time of the *siuzhet*, or *Erzählzeit*, but encapsulates the wide scope of the *fabula*, or *erzählte Zeit*. Correspondingly, the bylinic triple meters, which may be associated with the *fabula*, expand the previously established triple meters of the *siuzhet* in the choral sections. The "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich," a folkloric tale of old, has in this manner been streamlined within the consecutive unfolding of the *siuzhet*. Complicating the sense of narrative time conveyed by this

[29] N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov, *N. A. Rimskii-Korsakov: zhizn' i tvorchestvo* [N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov: Life and Works], vol. 4 (Leningrad and Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1933-1946), p. 70. Quoted from Morrison, "The Semiotics of Symmetry," p. 271.

bylina is the fact that it is a legend narrated in the past tense that foreshadows the future narrative events of the opera. The song therefore occupies a curious narrative space of recounting the past in the present unfolding of the *siuzhet* while simultaneously foretelling the future of the *fabula*.

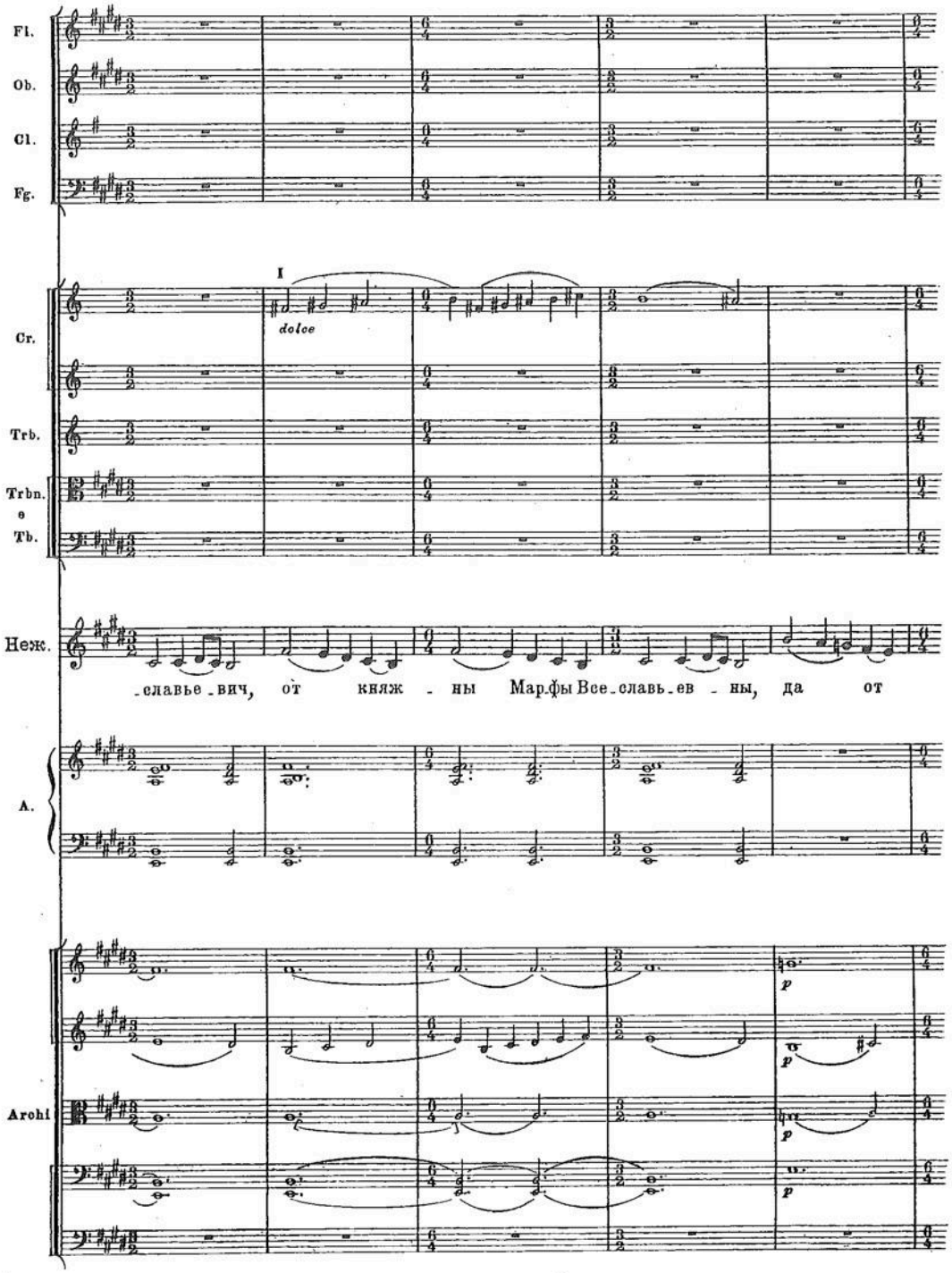
The shift to bylinic time is accompanied by a change in tempo in addition to meter. Following a prolonged *allegro* section at the opening of tableau 1, the "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich" is marked *moderato assai*. Thus bylinic time not only expands the metrical frame of the preceding section of music, but eases its rhythmic pace. The shift in tempo has a kind of lulling effect, as the music abruptly takes on a more contemplative quality. Reeve adds that "Indications of speed such as lento and largo also predominate throughout the opera, and it is these expansive tempi and meters which give to the work its characteristic quality of long-drawn-out epic narration."[30] The change in tempo is perhaps another reason that Nezhata's opening aria has often been perceived as static; it slows both the narrative and rhythmic pace that has been established in the opening section. While it indeed serves as a break in the action, the slower tempo is effective at transitioning the narrative to a different temporal space that suits the time frame of the story, i.e. the distant past. The recollection of bygone times takes on a hypnotic effect with the inclusion of these slow tempi, as if to call attention to the passage of time itself in the music.

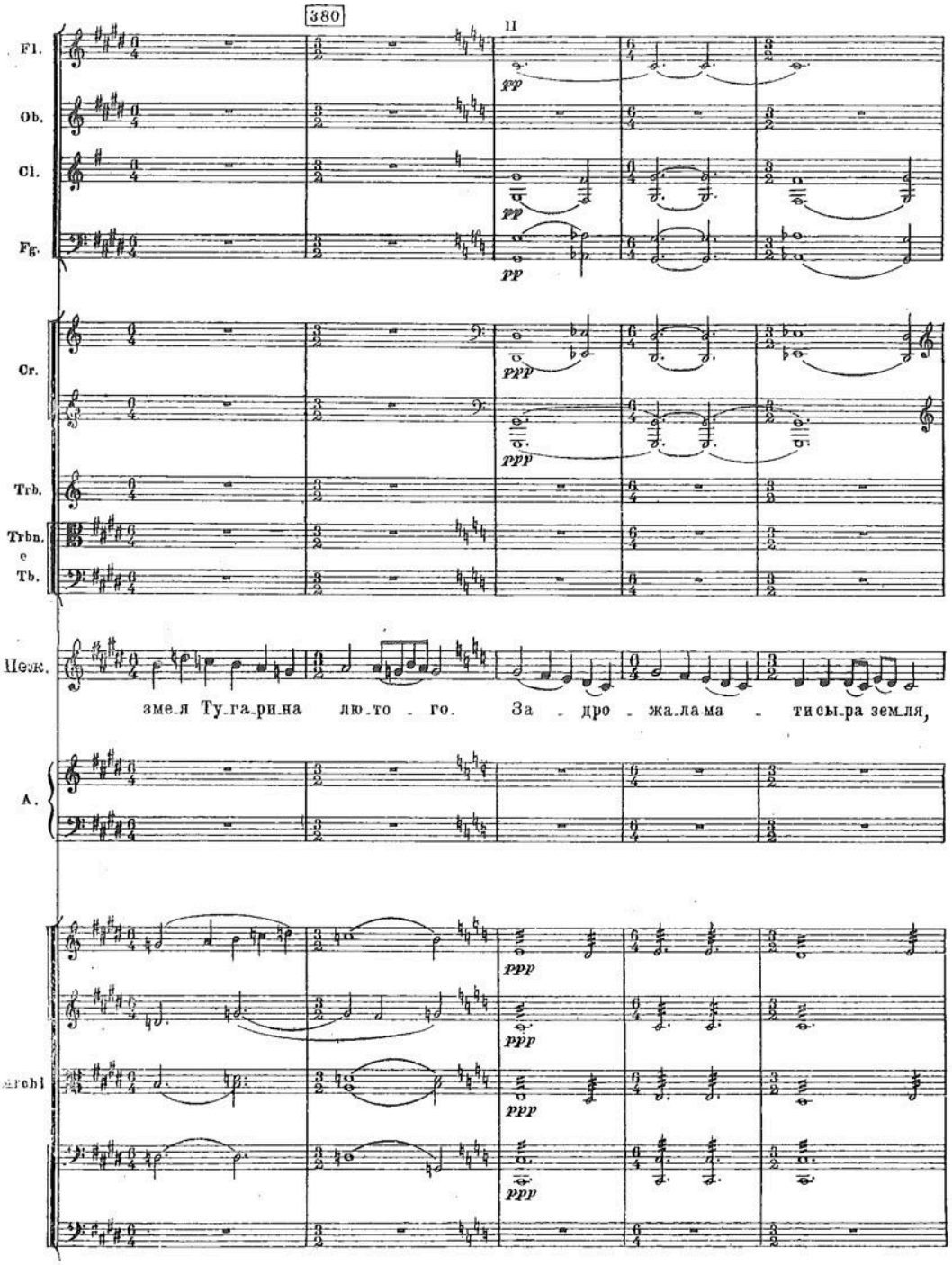
Certain aspects of the harmonic content of the "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich" serve to reinforce the refraction of narrative time that occurs in the song. Using neo-Riemannian harmonic theory, the harmonic relationships can be explained as a sequence of triads which are

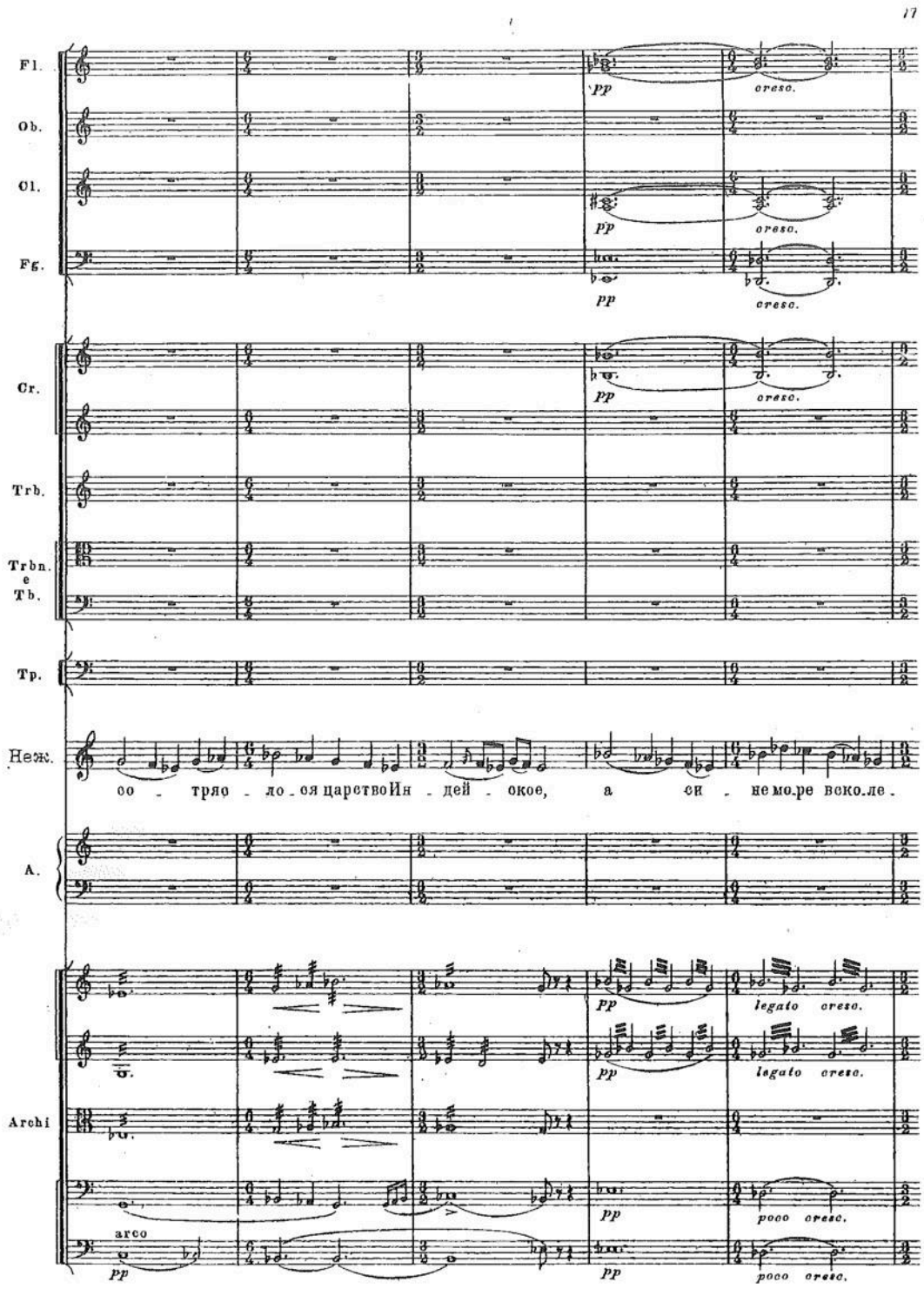
[30] Reeve, "Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's Use of the *Byliny* (Russian Oral Epic Narratives) in his Opera *Sadko*," p. 163.

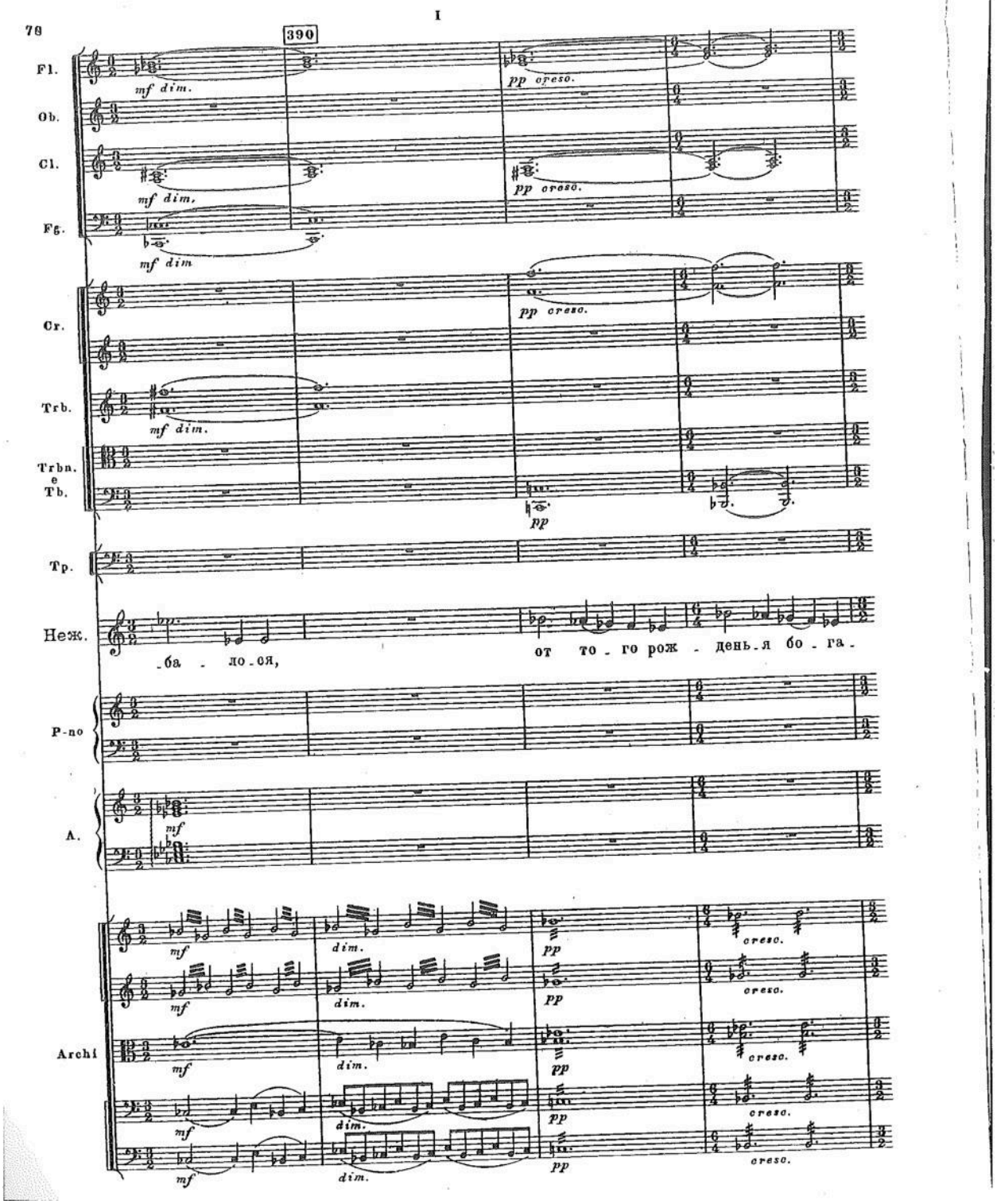
transformed through "parsimonious" voice leading.[31] In measure 5 on page 75 in the example below, the tonic chord, E major, changes to E minor, its parallel. One measure later, the E minor pivots to G major, its own relative. Within the span of three measures, the chord progression has transitioned from E major to its parallel minor, and then from the E minor to its relative major, through parsimonious voice leading. That is, the chords in question have been transformed by half-step contrapuntal motion rather than root progression. The G major then acts as a dominant chord, shifting the continuing progression to C major in measure 381. After this dominant transformation, the parallel transformation recurs: C major transitions to its parallel minor, C minor, in measure 384. Like the relative transformation from E minor to G major that occurred previously, the C minor then pivots to its relative major, Eb, in measure 385. Both relative transformations, from E minor to G major, and C minor to Eb major, occur within one measure of the parallel transformation. The Eb major then leads to another parallel transformation, to Eb minor, in the same measure. The cumulative result is that two sequences of parallel and relative transformations have been created around a C major chord. The main chordal polarity of the excerpt, E major / C major, can be explained as the result of a parallel transformation plus a dominant transformation: E major becomes minor, and then its third anticipates a dominant transformation to C major. (This pattern of interlocking transpositions is reminiscent of the constructional patterns that will be discussed in chapter 3 with regard to Volkhova's melody.)

[31] The application of neo-Riemannian theory to the "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich" is indebted to the analytical work of Richard Cohn in "Maximally Smooth Cycles, Hexatonic Systems, and the Analysis of Late-Romantic Triadic Progressions," *Music Analysis*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (March, 1996), pp. 9-40; see also "Neo-Riemannian Operations, Parsimonious Trichords, and Their 'Tonnetz' Representations," *Journal of Music Theory*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Spring, 1997), pp. 1-66.


Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Fg.
I
dolce
Cr.
Trb.
Trbn.
e
Tb.
Неж.
-славье-вич, от княж - ны Мар.фы Все-славь-ев - ны, да от
A.
Archi
p
p
p
p


380
II
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Fg.
pp
Cr.
ppp
Trb.
Trbn.
e
Tb.
Пеж.
змея Тугарина лютого. За дрожала мать сыра земля,
A.
Orchl
ppp


Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Fg.
Cr.
Trb.
Trbn. e Tb.
Тр.
Неж.
oo - тряло - ло - ся царствоИн - дей - окое, а си - немо.ре веко.ле.
A.
Archi
pp
cresc.
legato
poco
arco


I
78
390
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Fg.
Cr.
Trb.
Trbn. e Tb.
Tp.
Неж.
P-no
A.
Archi
mf dim.
pp cresc.
-ба - ло-ся,
от то - го рож - день-я бо - га -

There are several possible interpretive stances with respect to these neo-Riemannian transformations.[32] The interplay between relative and parallel minors here most saliently reflects the coexistence of the two realms of narrative time, *Erzählzeit* and *erzählte Zeit*, in the song. The parallel transformations can be taken to allude to the duality of present and future temporal domains occurring simultaneously in the diegetic music. Nezhata's song occurs in the course of the real-time unfolding of the *siuzhet*, yet encapsulates the future events of the *fabula*. This temporal parallelism is mirrored by the parallel transformations. The rapidity of the shift from the parallel transformations to a second, relative, transformation only one measure later accentuates the juxtaposition of narrative time frames. Much as the present of the *siuzhet* and the future of the *fabula* are closely related to one another, and exist in a cause-and-effect relationship, the relative transformations are inextricably linked, and constitute an etiological sequence. Rimsky-Korsakov's use of parallel and relative transformations in Nezhata's song reinforces the sense of the diegetic music as a bifurcated narrative and temporal space.

In measure 390, the "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich" alludes directly to the opera's main theme, the "sea music" of the opening measures of tableau 1. This eighth-note motive likewise becomes associated with Sadko's seafaring journey in tableaux 5 and 6. The recapitulation of this motive in the low strings during Nezhata's song serves to link the narrative of Volkh Vseslav'evich with that of Sadko. It provides an example of musical foretelling within the textual foreshadowing of the diegetic song. The fact that the motive occurs directly after

[32] For Cohn's hermeneutic takes on neo-Riemannian transformations, see "Hexatonic Poles and the Uncanny in *Parsifal*," *Opera Quarterly* 22.2 (2006), p. 230; see also "Uncanny Resemblances: Tonal Signification in the Freudian Age," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57.2 (Summer 2004), pp. 285-323; and "Peter, the Wolf, and the Hexatonic Uncanny," in *Tonality 1900-1950. Concept and Practice*, ed. by Phillip Rupprecht, Ullrich Scheideler, and Felix Wörner (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2012), pp. 47-62.

Nezhata utters the line "And the deep blue sea began to roil" (*A i sine more vskolebalosia*) connects the maritime topos of Sadko's story with an incidental observation within Nezhata's song. This single measure thus bridges the theme of the overture with the story of Volkh Vseslav'evich and the theme of Sadko's seafaring expedition.

Aside from the motivic allusion to the opera's main theme (the "sea music"), the "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich" is a kind of world unto itself within the score. The critic E. M. Petrovskii, in discussing the song, notes that the repeated melodic motive from Nezhata's opening aria does not function as a leitmotif that is developed later in the opera, but instead has a more decorative function. In other words, Nezhata's song does not necessarily factor into the musical narrative at large, as it "does not have a particular scenographic image or movement."[33] The song functions ornamentally in terms of the music, but structurally in terms of the narrative. One way that narrative seems to function in music is self-referentially, as an extension of what could be considered organic unity: a theme is recapitulated, a motive is repeated. In other words, something that occurs earlier in the piece recurs, albeit perhaps not verbatim. These repetitions in turn serve as markers of distance of various sorts within the musical narrative (between the dramatic events that have transpired since the theme or motive first occurred) in order for the listener to recall the previous iteration. The repetitions can reveal the hand of the narrator as an organizing intelligence behind the narrated events, and simultaneously give the impression of a kind of grand design unfolding chronologically. The narrative component of organic unity, i.e. developing variations sequentially within the piece, is the domain of *Erzählzeit*—the real time of narrative unfolding of the *siuzhet*. As Nezhata's song pertains more to the synoptic *fabula*, the

[33] E. M. Petrovskii, "Tematicheskii analiz opery 'Sadko'" [A Thematic Analysis of the Opera *Sadko*], *Russkaia muzykal'naia gazeta*, No. 9 (Sept., 1898), pp. 791-2.

musical language of the diegetic song is bracketed off from the previously established thematic components. In its encapsulation of the *erzählte Zeit* of the narrative, the song is delineated musically from the *Erzählzeit* of the piece's thematic construction.

With the elements of organic unity less pronounced in Nezhata's song, the flow of *Erzählzeit*, along with the listener's impression of a grand design lurking within the piece, significantly alters. The listener is instead left with pure linear surface, or perhaps, in narrative terms, less of a preterite verb tense within the music. Thus perhaps these static passages in *Sadko* are moments when the piece is not self-referential, when it enters into a present-tense narrative space at the cost of developing elements of the musical language in subsequent sections of music. The fact that the diegetic song is delimited musically from the rest of the piece further reinforces its status as a kind of museum exhibition of bylinic storytelling. Its tempo markers, time signatures, and narrative content all place it within a frame, as if cordoning it off from other musical and narrative events to allow the onstage characters to momentarily function as spectators.

7. Conclusion

The diegetic microcosm encapsulated in Nezhata's songs represents multiple dimensions of narrative time occurring simultaneously. Nezhata's intermediary status as a narrator who is beholden to the merchant elite though sympathetic to Sadko and his ambitions complements the multidimensionality of his narrative voice. As a character who speaks only in diegetic song to the assembled crowd both on stage and in the audience, Nezhata functions as both a character and a narrator. As a character, his narratives play in to the real-time unfolding of the operatic

plot, or *siuzhet*. As a narrator, his songs relate Sadko's adventures to other bylinic tales and comprise a synoptic portrait of the entire plot, or *fabula*.

Four principle functions of the "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich" may be deduced. Firstly, the song immerses the audience within the fictive world of the *byliny*. It exemplifies the legendary and mythic material that the opera is based on, narrating a tale of a hero who wields a half-ton cudgel, assembles a *druzhina*, and marches to foreign lands. Moreover, it places a narrative focus on bygone times and stories of old, much like the story of Sadko into which the bylinic frame is inserted. Secondly, the song foreshadows certain elements of Sadko's story, providing a synopsis of the *fabula* within the real-time unfolding of the *siuzhet*. Thirdly, with Nezhata functioning as the townspeople's narrator of Sadko's tale, the song introduces a template for political and martial authority that relates to Novgorod's status as a prosperous mercantile town. Nezhata's opening *bylina*, as well as his other songs, provide symbols of musical self-identification for the townspeople. They serve to reify the ideals of the populace, and narrate their own identity back to them. Fourthly, the song establishes the venerability of the bard, the authority that the Novgorodian public ascribes to song. That is, it touches upon the Orphic theme of music affecting the natural world and influencing the course of narrative events that will recur throughout the opera. In the following chapter, the discussion will turn to the Orphic dimensions of Sadko's diegetic songs.

Chapter 3—

The Solipsistic Hero:

Narrative and Discursive Authority in Sadko's Opening Aria

1. Introduction

Chapter 2 sketched several paradigms for interpreting the narrative functions of the diegetic music of Nezhata. Functioning as a third-person narrator of the *fabula*, Nezhata simultaneously appears within the operatic *siuzhet* as a narrator who is embedded within the plot. His diegetic music occurs within the real-time flow of the *siuzhet*, while foretelling and recounting a larger scope of narrative events which is contained in the *fabula*. Corresponding to this expanded temporal space of the *fabula*, the metrical structure of Nezhata's opening "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich" represents a protraction in both narrative and musical time. Nezhata's diegetic music contains microcosms of the entire narrative within the sequential unfolding of the plot.

While his narrative voice is in a sense an extension of the townspeople's viewpoint, Nezhata is exclusively preoccupied with Sadko's story. His task is essentially to foretell and recapitulate the events of Sadko's life to the townspeople and the audience, who either have witnessed or will witness these events transpire in the course of the operatic *siuzhet*. As he is beholden to the townspeople (and the audience), and narrates only *to them* (i.e. not to Sadko), Nezhata interprets Sadko's adventures through the lens of other bylinic characters such as Volkh Vseslav'evich, in tableau 1, and the nightingale, in tableau 4. Nezhata, that is, speaks in the demotic language of folk tale and popular mythology, recounting Sadko's tale through the prism of folk stories that would already be familiar to them. The narrative voices in the opera are in

certain senses allied; these alliances are exemplified by Nezhata and the townspeople, on the one hand, and, on the other, Nezhata and Sadko.

While Nezhata's narrative voice is allied with Sadko, this alliance does not seem to be mutual. Sadko, in fact, appears to be completely unaware of Nezhata until the final tableau, when all of the narrative voices appear onstage together to sing the praises of Novgorod. Sadko is not even present onstage for Nezhata's featured moments in the opera such as his diegetic songs in tableau 1 and 4. Thus Sadko in effect does not hear the diegetic narration that evidently applies to him. The dual accounts of the narrative events, those of Nezhata and Sadko, are superimposed onto one another, unfolding in parallel motion. These parallel narrative worlds meet only unilaterally from Nezhata to Sadko, but not bilaterally from Sadko to Nezhata. It is in this sense that Nezhata functions as Sadko's third-person narrator within his own story; Sadko remains unaware of the presence of another narrator while he proceeds to narrate his own story in the form of diegetic song. To Sadko, his bardic presence is authoritative, and he is the only teller of his tale.

This chapter investigates the narrative dynamics of Sadko's diegetic music. The chapter will begin by assessing Sadko's construction of his own identity and his own narrative trajectory through diegetic song. As all narrative events in the opera relate to him and are filtered through his perception, the following section will interpret the dramatic conflict of the opera as in essence an internal conflict within Sadko. The discussion will relate this feature of the dramatic content to select commentators' perceptions of stasis or "minimal dramatic acuteness," per Tsukkerman

(as discussed in chapter 1).[1] The chapter will then proceed to analyze the narrative dynamics of Sadko's opening aria.

2.1. Objectifying the subject

Whereas Nezhata's narrative may be understood as a third-person limited account of Sadko's story, Sadko's narration is related from his subjective "I." Sadko is both the subject of his narrative voice and the object of his narration. While Nezhata's narrative voice spans toward the objective side of Stilwell's subjective/objective axis of diegetic narration (as discussed in chapter 2), Sadko's voice constitutes the subjective side. His diegetic music communicates his identity and sense of self, and incites important occurrences in his narrative, such as his encounters with Volkhova and the Sea King. He is the narrative center of the opera, while the peripheral characters figure only within the trajectory of his tale. In fact, other narrative voices in the opera, such as Nezhata and the *skomorokhi*, are almost exclusively preoccupied with him.[2] Their diegetic music almost without exception relates to Sadko in some way, and functions to fill out Sadko's story.

All of the narrative events in the opera in fact occur in relation to, or projected through, Sadko. His is the only first-person subjectivity, the only "I" constitutive of a defined self who

[1] V. Tsukkerman, "O siuzhete i muzykal'nom iazyke opery-byliny *Sadko*" [On the Plot and the Musical Language of the Opera-*Bylina Sadko*], in *Muzykal'no-teoreticheski ocherki i etiudy* [Music-Theoretical Essays and Etudes], vol. 1 (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1970), p. 503.

[2] The exception to this idea that the peripheral narrators contribute only to Sadko's story is perhaps the diegetic aria of the *skomorokhi* at the beginning of tableau 4, in which they sing the praises of hops and advocate a carefree life of merrymaking and drunkenness.

also acts as a diegetic narrator.[3] In turn, the focal point of the audience, and the object of its empathy, is Sadko. The exclusive presence of Sadko as a cognizable self as well as a narrator is perhaps one explanation for why the passages involving characters such as Nezhata and the *skomorokhi* are frequently perceived as narrative asides. The scenes when Sadko does not occupy center stage appear to play a less functional or narratively motivated role, as they do not, overtly, at least, involve him. (As discussed in the last chapter, however, these scenes play an integral part in the unfolding of the narrative at large.) By contrast, the scenes involving Sadko are in a sense solely concerned with the development of his character. One could contend that there are no secondary characters, and certainly no sub-plots, in the opera, since all of the characters have some measure of relatedness to Sadko and some role to play in the enactment of his narrative. While there are arguably no secondary characters, there are clearly secondary *narrators* such as Nezhata and the *skomorokhi*. It is in this sense that the narrative of the opera takes on the meta-quality of being about the act of telling itself: Sadko is the exclusive subjective presence within his own story, while the secondary characters in fact function more as ancillary narrators. They do not interact with the hero so much as observe and comment upon him. Their narratives seem to reinforce the centrality of his plight and purpose, and offer added contextuality and perspective onto Sadko's own narrative accounts.

The figure of Sadko's wife, Liubava, is illustrative of this notion that other characters have gravitational pull only within the orbit of Sadko's narrative. The bulk of tableau 3 is taken up by Liubava's aria of lament at Sadko's protracted absence. One could perhaps argue that Liubava constitutes another subjective presence in the opera, as she speaks in the first person.

[3] Liubava Buslaevna and Volkhova likewise speak in the first person; however, they do not narrate diegetically.

Her grief, however, is presented as a result of Sadko's departure first to Lake Ilmen to cavort with Volkhova, and, in tableau 4, to foreign destinations in search of mercantile plunder. Her subjectivity is in a sense refracted through Sadko's narrative. Moreover, her laments go unrecognized by the principle narrative voice; Sadko is preoccupied only with bringing his own ambitions into being. Liubava does not *narrate* in the first person, but reacts to the whims of the first-person narrator.

The notion that all of the characters and narrative events in some way relate to and are filtered through Sadko is one sense in which the opera reflects its designation as a folk epic. Sadko's story is self-contained; the narrative events have no consequence other than to him and the actualization of his desires. The fantastical realm of the undersea kingdom and the heavenly apparition that appears at the conclusion intervene solely on his behalf, as if the numinous world exists merely to monitor Sadko's progress from behind the scenes and assist him in his endeavors. The fantastical characters, in other words, appear to be exclusively concerned with the outcome of Sadko's pursuits. Byron Almén offers a description of mythic narrative that contextualizes this theme of self-containment within Sadko's world:

> Mythic narrative invokes characters, settings, and/or themes with numinous cultural significance, situating these elements in an idealized, hyper-real manner…Personal narratives are psychological constructions—adaptive strategies of individuation partly or entirely free of conscious awareness—that endow life experience and self-image with significance.[4]

Sadko's narrative in fact seems to combine the properties that Almén assigns to mythic and personal narratives. Sadko's story is clearly mythic in its bylinic sources and its depiction of otherworldly realms and figures, though his narrative is also personal in that these elements can

[4] Byron Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2008), p. 38.

easily be construed as psychological constructions. The mythic realm indeed seems to function as a projection of Sadko's personal narrative, since the entities which are portrayed as being outside of Sadko's consciousness inexplicably have access to his inner psychological state.[5] The sea princess Volkhova is clearly an idealization in the manner of a mythic narrative, but she likewise functions as an embodiment of heterosexual male desire, an externalization of psychological longing. Sadko's personal narrative seems to take on mythic proportions as his ambition exceeds his lowly social status and his desires exceed his nuptial obligations. The significance of the mythic events, conversely, is strictly personal, in that their significance has a bearing only to Sadko.

In his merging of the mythic and the personal, Sadko occupies both the surface and the depth, the text and the subtext, the background and the foreground of the opera's narrative dimensionality. A blurred line between internality and externality is constitutive of the opera's narrative design. These dualities exist in a dynamic and fluid relationship that continually call into question the categories of perception and actuality. As Simon Morrison remarks, "Sadko…suffers from psychosis: his narrative, the tale that he is ostensibly telling, talks back to him."[6] Chapter 2 introduced a way of reading these dual categories within the narrative, positing that whereas Nezhata resides somewhere outside of Sadko's bylinic world and looks in from a separate vantage point, Sadko *lives within* his own *bylina* and narrates it from within. The tale that talks back to him, in other words, originates from other narrators such as Nezhata, who

[5] Almén's comments likewise apply to the depiction of Novgorod. The townspeople's unified narrative voice, their lack of factionalism, and the apparent harmony of the social structure constitute an "idealized, hyper-real" portrayal that (corresponds to his description of mythic narrative) is more beholden to myth than actuality.

[6] Simon Morrison, "The Semiotics of Symmetry, or Rimsky-Korsakov's Operatic History Lesson," *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Nov., 2001), p. 265.

nonetheless provide parallel or supplementary accounts of Sadko's story. There are both two different modes of narrative time, *fabula* and *siuzhet*, corresponding to the two principle narrators, and two dimensions of narrative actuality. (Not to mention that there are two separate but interrelated ontological realms in the story, a feature which seems to reflect the dimensionality of perspectives on Sadko.) Whereas Nezhata's diegetic music is pure *fabula*, Sadko's diegesis is exclusively *siuzhet*. Within his own *bylina*, Sadko enacts his own trajectory on a linear plane, and experiences the narrative events in a chronological sequence. Outside of his narrative purview, Sadko exists in a timeless world of bylinic heroes, heroic deeds and misdeeds, and triumphs and pitfalls that his story both relates to and comments upon.

The duality of internality and externality, perception and actuality, arises from the fact that Sadko is both the subject and object of his own narration. As these two realms of *fabula* and *siuzhet* interact and factor into one another, the mythic becomes blended with the personal. In his diegetic music, Sadko is the narrator of his own heroic tale. His is the subjective "I" that expresses longing and ambition, pain and remorse, wonder and exultation. The vehicle for his subjective expression is his music, as he is of course a bard and *gusliar'*. His diegetic songs, since they are heard by the other characters in addition to the audience, constitute musical objects that factor into the narrative dynamics of his story. In other words, the embodiment of his subjectivity, his diegetic music, is an artistic object that affects the course of the narrative proceedings. As discussed in the previous chapter, the diegetic music plays an active role on the course of the narrative events and can even be seen as possessing a generative agency on the outcome of the narrative. Sadko's subjectivity, when externalized in the form of diegetic song, in turn shapes and manifests the unfolding of his own story. In a somewhat tautological manner, Sadko objectifies his sense of self in the diegetic songs, and the diegetic songs correspondingly

generate the external narrative events of his story. His internality thus becomes the externality that he experiences and subsequently internalizes. He is the object of the narration, though in his diegetic music, he is the subject of his own narrative. In effect Sadko experiences his own subjective expression as the sequence of narrative events that unfold as a result of his diegetic music.

As the Russian Orpheus, Sadko's songs take on a life of their own in the external world as musical objects of enchantment and narrative potentiality. To illustrate this process of Sadko's subjectivity becoming the narrative objectivity that he in turn experiences, a brief synopsis may be given. At the conclusion of tableau 1, Sadko is banished from Novgorod for singing a song that narrates his hypothetical achievements were he to become a merchant. He then sings at the shores of Lake Ilmen, whereupon his song entices Volkhova to appear from the depths of the lake. His singing ability causes her to fall in love with him, and she grants him golden fish to fulfill his mercantile dreams. When he is summoned to the seabed in tableau 6, the Sea King reports that he has heard of Sadko's renowned musical skill. Sadko then sings for him and earns his favor and his daughter Volkhova's hand in marriage. The nuptial proceedings invoke a heavenly apparition, who enjoins Sadko to sing for the benefit of Novgorod. Thus Sadko's aspirational song in tableau 1, for which he is initially rebuffed, sparks a chain of events that results in him becoming the most powerful merchant, as well as the most revered tunesmith, in Novgorod.

2.2. External and internal tensions

This dynamic of internality and externality, and the ambiguity that it creates between perception and actuality, is illustrated by the role of Volkhova. The presence of Volkhova in the

narrative calls to mind whether the audience is to regard the character as a figment of Sadko's imagination or simply as a part of the folkloric realia of the opera's fictive world. Her otherworldly nature raises the question of whose perspective she is viewed from: is it Sadko's alone, or is she to be understood as one of the mythic and fantastical entities of the folkloric world which Sadko inhabits? Her appearances raise doubt as to whether she is merely a manifestation of Sadko's consciousness. They likewise call Sadko's reliability as a narrator into question. Volkhova, in other words, exemplifies the tension between internality and externality in the narrative that is the result of the ambiguity of Sadko's own narrative voice.

Volkhova, as well as the other mythical characters, interact solely with Sadko. Clearly there is meant to be ambiguity as to whether the underwater scenes occur only in Sadko's dreams. In tableau 2, Volkhova promises to produce golden fish from Lake Ilmen to make Sadko a wealthy merchant. When Sadko returns to the town square in tableau 4 and boasts of witnessing a "miracle of miracles, a wonder of wonders," the townspeople laugh at him and wager that no golden fish will appear in their nets.[7] As the nets are cast, Sadko hears Volkhova singing to him. Since her voice is not heard diegetically by the other onstage characters, the audience is made to assume either that Volkhova's singing occurs in Sadko's imagination, or perhaps it is only Sadko who hears the siren song. The musical language of the interlude is bracketed off from the real-time flow of the narrative much as Volkhova's voice is disembodied, emanating from offstage. In this brief variation of musical idiom, the narrative has suddenly transitioned from the progressive course of the *siuzhet* into a snapshot of Sadko's inner world.

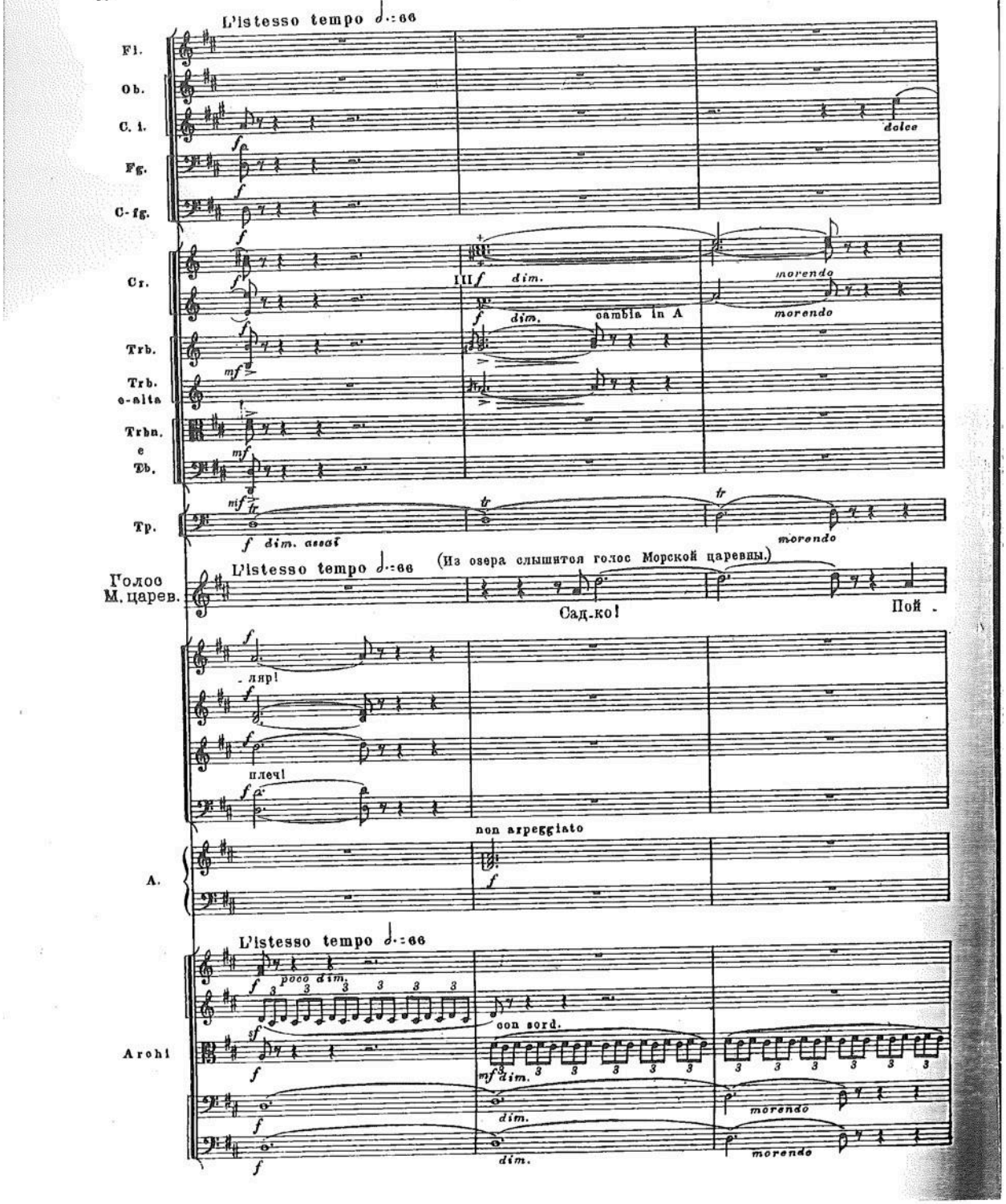
[7] N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov, *Sadko: opera-bylina v 7 kartinakh* [Sadko: Opera-*Bylina* in 7 Tableaux], with an introduction by Iv. Remezov, edited by M. I. Imas (Moscow: Izdanie upravleniia teatrami NKP RSFSR), p. 107.

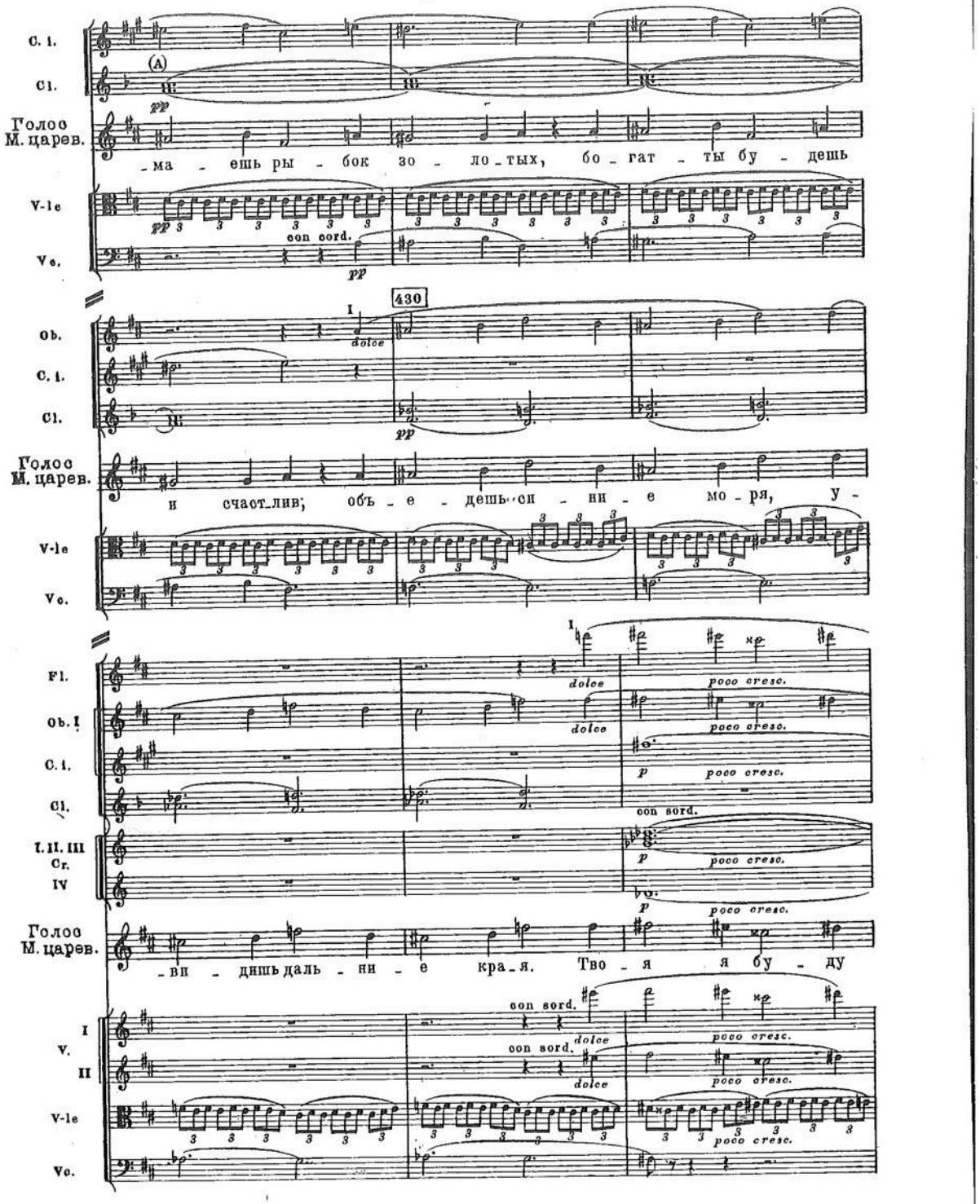
Sadko's fantasy is confirmed as reality, however, when the golden fish appear in the net at the conclusion of Volkhova's brief interlude.[8]

Volkhova's passage is characterized by an octatonic melodic cell (G sharp, A sharp, and B natural) which moves by the transposition of minor thirds. F sharp and A natural are diatonic elements that have been inserted as decorative neighbors. In measure 430, the cell shifts from B natural up to D natural, beginning a second octatonic collection of A sharp, B natural, and D natural. Another minor third transposition of the cell occurs in measure 432, as the D natural moves up to F natural, introducing a third octatonic group of C sharp, D natural, and F natural. The octatonicism of the melodic line is indicated by its modularity and symmetry. The bassline reinforces the interpenetration of the octatonic and diatonic elements by exhibiting imitative polyphony. The passage's admixture of octatonic and diatonic elements suggest that the fantasy world here pierces through the reality of the quotidian world. This admixture reflects the fact that Volkhova's voice is heard offstage, and thus she is not physically present at this juncture, though her voice overwhelms Sadko's consciousness.

The intercession of Volkhova's octatonic musical language within the diatonic realm of the Novgorodian chorus alludes to a juxtaposition of Sadko's fantasy and reality. The two, however, have turned out to be one in the same. From a narrative standpoint, Volkhova's octatonic idiom suggests that Sadko's fantasy conjures the actuality of the bylinic fictive world

[8] The indeterminacy of Volkhova's appearance within or extrinsic to Sadko's consciousness is again brought to the fore later in the narrative. After Sadko's underwater nuptial ceremony to the sea princess in tableau 6, tableau 7 opens with Sadko sleeping on a rock, as if to suggest that the contents of the previous tableau had occurred in a dream. The narrative events of tableau 7, however, indicate that Volkhova is to be understood within the objective realm of the narrative. The saintly apparition's injunction to Volkhova to dissolve into a river for the benefit of Novgorod's merchants has miraculously come true.


L'istesso tempo ♩.=66
Fl.
Ob.
C. i.
Fg.
C-fg.
Cr.
Trb.
Trb. e-alta
Trbn. e Tb.
Tp.
dolce
dim.
cambia in A
morendo
dim. assai
Голос М. царев.
(Из озера слышится голос Морской царевны.)
Сад-ко!
Пой -
-ляр!
плеч!
non arpeggiato
A.
poco dim.
con sord.
Archi
dim.


C. I.
Cl.
Голос М. царев.
-ма - ешь ры - бок зо - ло - тых, бо - гат - ты бу - дешь
V-le
Vc.
con sord.
430
Ob.
C. I.
Cl.
и счаст-лив; объ - е - дешь си - ни - е мо - ря, у -
V-le
Vc.
Fl.
Ob. I
C. I.
Cl.
I. II. III Cr.
IV
dolce
poco cresc.
con sord.
Голос М. царев.
-вп - дишь даль - ни - е кра - я. Тво - я я бу - ду
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V-le
Vc.
con sord.
dolce
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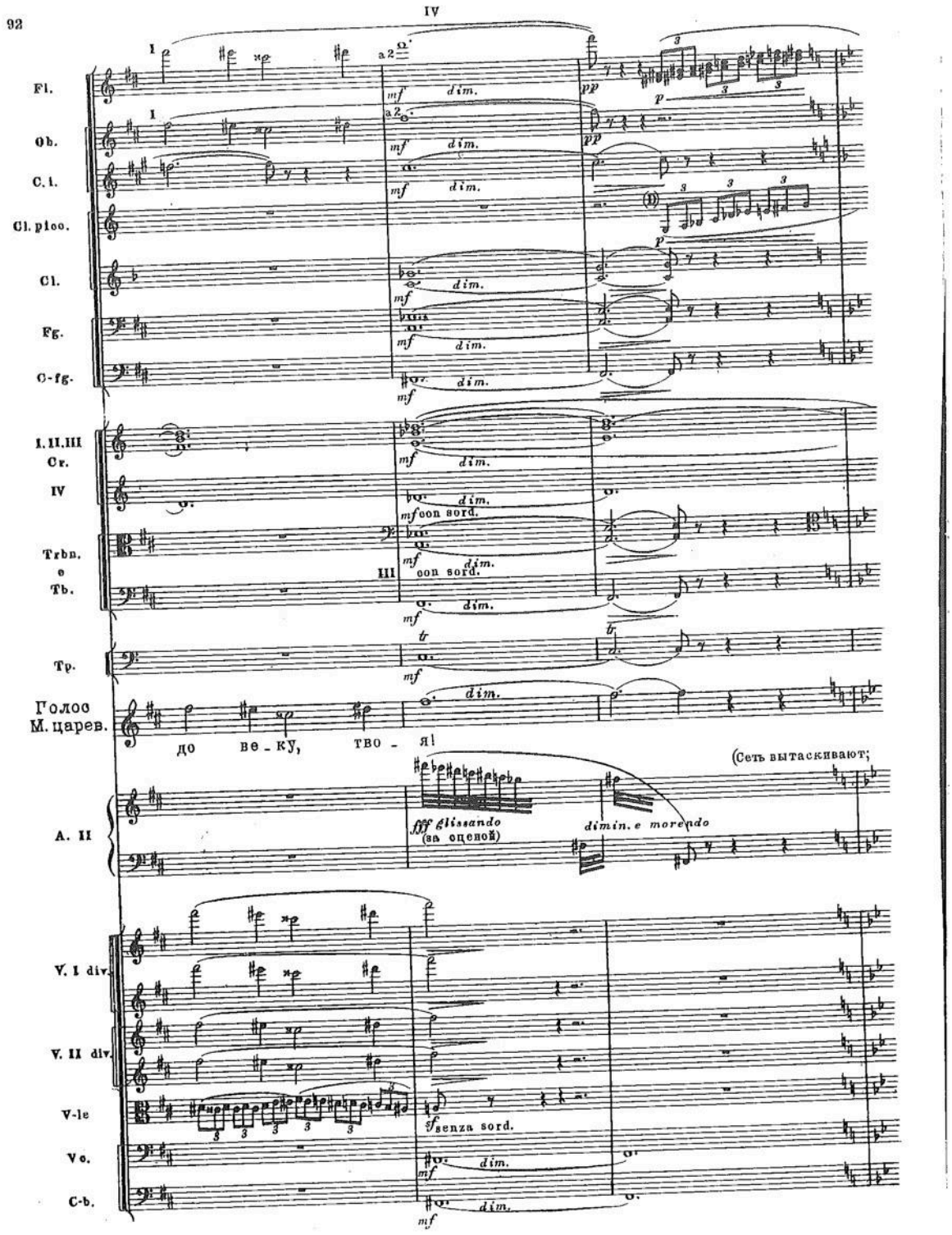
92
IV
Fl.
Ob.
C. i.
Cl. picc.
Cl.
Fg.
C-fg.
I, II, III Cr.
IV
Trbn. e Tb.
Tp.
Голос М. царев.
до ве-ку, тво-я!
(Сеть вытаскивают;
A. II
V. I div.
V. II div.
V-le
Vc.
C-b.
dim.
mf
pp
p
a 2
I
III
con sord.
ff glissando (за оценой)
dimin. e morendo
senza sord.

that he inhabits. As both the narrator and actor in his own story, his imagination constitutes both the illusory and actual dimensions of the narrative events. The fulfillment of Volkhova's promise of golden fish from Lake Ilmen indicates that the underwater fantasy world that she inhabits is in fact part of the broader fantasy world of the *bylina*. These two realms have become merged through the mediation of the hero Sadko; his fantasy is constitutive of bylinic reality, and his reality is a projection of folkloric fantasy. It is in this sense that the mythic topos of the story is an extension of Sadko's personal narrative, and his personal narrative projects a mythic fantasy world that then becomes actualized.

Rimsky-Korsakov provides some insight into the blurred line between subjectivity and objectivity represented by Volkhova in a passage from his memoirs:

> By 'fantasy' or 'imagination' we mean a distinct activity of the soul which we perceive as dependent, as it were, on the combined action of several psychic centers; the psychological state resulting from this activity is called, in turn, *contemplation*, described as sensuous thinking. Contemplation evokes in us the representation of beauty.[9]

Volkhova can easily be construed as an embodiment of "sensuous thinking," an evocative "representation of beauty." She is an object of Sadko's contemplation who is also conceivable as a subjective projection of his psychological state. What nudges her to the objective side of the coin is the fact that she can be seen as a kind of anthropomorphization of nature. She, of course, emanates from an underwater realm and eventually turns herself into a river at the conclusion of the piece. Sadko's fantasy, in other words, ultimately becomes an object of mercantile utility. She is a product of Sadko's fantasy that becomes a natural landmark, a body of water. Sadko's

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[9] Vladimir Marchenkov, "The Orpheus Myth in Modernity: Rimsky-Korsakov's Opera Sadko," in "The Orpheus Myth in Musical Thought of Antiquity, the Renaissance, and Modern Times" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1998), pp. 140-1. Quoted from N. A. Rimskii-Korsakov, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*. *Literaturnye proizvedeniia i perepiska* [Complete Collected Works. Literary Works and Correspondence], vol. 2 (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1963), p. 63. (Marchenkov's translation has been lightly emended.)

consciousness thus constitutes both the fantasy world and the natural topography of the fictive world of the opera.

Sadko's diegetic music accordingly can be read as expressions of subjectivity that verge on solipsism. Much as Sadko's fantasy both projects and actualizes the events of the narrative, his diegetic songs have a generative effect on the narrative trajectory. In a manner similar to Nezhata's diegetic songs, Sadko's diegesis projects narrative events into the broader *fabula* from a locus within the real-time unfolding of the *siuzhet*. Sadko's diegetic songs both retell (in the case of his aria in tableau 2) and foretell (his opening aria of tableau 1) the course of the narrative. Functioning as his own narrator within his own story, Sadko must play the dual role of the narrator and the experiential subject. The solipsistic quality arises from the fact that his consciousness comprises both the subjective and objective realm of the narrative events. The domains of perception and actuality within the story are both essentially *his*. Sadko even refers to himself in the third person, as if serving as an objective narrator of his own tale:

> Indeed Sadko has been enchanted by some kind of spell.
> Indeed there was no place for him,
> The drunken guests made fun of him.
> O you, beautiful princess!
> Am I your bridegroom? Are you my bride?[10]

Here Sadko reflects on his first encounter with Volkhova as if from afar. He regards his enchantment as occurring under a spell, as if it did not happen to him, but to someone else altogether. He then assumes the role of his own narrator, recounting the events of tableau 1 that led up to his meeting with Volkhova. His use of the third person here reinforces his state of disbelief as to whether it was he who experienced them. When his attention turns again to Volkhova, his narrative voice shifts again to the first person. He addresses her as if she is

[10] Rimsky-Korsakov, *Sadko: opera-bylina v 7 kartinakh*, p. 95.

present with him at that moment, again alluding to the ambiguity of whether or not she is a figment of his imagination. Thus amid Sadko's third-person narration of himself, his narrative lens refracts back to his subjective experience. Sadko's telling of his own narrative, in turn, brings up the question of his reliability as a narrator.

Rimsky-Korsakov's parenthetical stage directions in the libretto reveal Sadko's dual functionality as a character and a narrator in several instances. In tableau 2, Volkhova entreats Sadko to sing her a song and he obliges. When Volkhova, having weaved Sadko a wreath, approaches him with her gift, Sadko interrupts his diegetic song in two places, slipping into a different narrative mode. The parenthetical directions here indicate that in these interruptions Sadko sings "about himself" (*pro sebia*). In these moments, where he appears to switch from a first-person narrator to a third-person narrator commenting upon his own inner state, he declares: "My spirit is captivated!...My mind clouds over!"[11] These exclamations are interspersed within the song that Sadko uses to woo the sea princess; they function as moments of self-reflection, as snapshots of Sadko's subjectivity inserted into song that occupies the focal point of the stage action. In tableau 3, when Sadko returns home to his wife, he reflects to himself ("as if to himself" [*kak by pro sebia*]): "Has a miracle really happened to me? / Or have I slept little and seen much?"[12] Both instances exemplify moments of subjective narration, i.e. depictions of Sadko's inner state, that are inserted within the narrative unfolding.

3. The irrealis narrative mode

[11] Ibid., pp. 85-86.

[12] Ibid., p. 95.

The townspeople constitute another narrative presence in the opera, one that is not necessarily beholden to Sadko's perspective. Their narrative voice, like that of Sadko, leans toward the subjective side of Stilwell's axis, appearing in the form of the first-person plural "we." While there is little doubt as to whether the townspeople could be, like Volkhova or the Sea King, projections of Sadko's consciousness, they nonetheless exist only in relation to Sadko and his aspirations and ambitions. The townspeople represent a unified subjectivity, though they are nonetheless stratified in their social ranks and hierarchized from top (the merchants) to bottom (the *skomorokhi*). They constitute another conscious presence to counter Sadko's subjectivity. As such, they function both to oppose and to affirm Sadko's narrative at various points in the opera. They serve as an additional narrative voice that provides a kind of sounding board for the narrative events, a source of collective opinion on what has transpired. As Asaf'ev points out: "From a collective standpoint, the chorus becomes the bearer of *skaz*, i.e. a living embodiment of collective choral lyricism, either summarizing results, discussing what has occurred, or glorifying the higher powers together with the hero-narrator."[13] In effect, they constitute a unified body that Sadko is pitted against, though eventually joins.

The townspeople primarily serve as an oppositional force to the realization of Sadko's ambitions until the conclusion of the opera. By countering Sadko, they ultimately facilitate the triumph of his aspirations and confirm his status as a figure of local repute. In tableau 1, Sadko sings a diegetic aria in which he reveals his desire to become a merchant like those present at the townspeople's feast. Upon Sadko's entrance, he promises to tell a tale of old in song:

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[13] Asaf'ev, "Muzyka Rimskogo-Korsakova v aspekte narodno-poeticheskoi slavianskoi kul'tury i mifologii" [The Music of Rimsky-Korsakov from the Standpoint of Folk-Poetic Slavic Culture and Mythology], *Sovetskaia muzyka* [Soviet Music] (Moscow: Sovetskii Kompozitor, 1946), no. 7, p. 76.

I bow to you, respected merchants!
Give me your blessing to tell an old tale
Or to sing a bold song.[14]

His subject matter the story of his own mercantile ambitions, suggesting that he opted for "a bold song." This theme is entirely fitting, as he is speaking here as the narrator of his own tale and summarizing what in effect will occur over the course of the *fabula*. At first the townspeople welcome him, as he has entered under their auspices and assured them that he will provide the requested song. His song is bylinic in that it adopts many of the typical stylistic features that characterize the language of the *byliny*, such as bylinic verse and anaphora.

The choral section from the conclusion of Nezhata's song to Sadko's appearance is in the highly unusual meter of 11/4. In his memoirs, Rimsky-Korsakov calls this meter the "eleven-beat chorus" (*odinnatsatidol'nyi khor*), adding that uneven meters such as these are distinctive features of Russian folk music.[15] The collective voice of the townspeople, therefore, is represented by what Rimsky-Korsakov considers to be an example of the meters found in the bylinic sources. Reeve, however, notes that 11/4 meters are nowhere to be found in Rimsky-Korsakov's source texts for the opera.[16] The composer's choice of meter here derives from the number of syllables in the lines of text. It was a common practice of the performers of the *byliny* that the length of the melodic line would be determined by the number of syllables in the line of

[14] Rimsky-Korsakov, *Sadko: opera-bylina v 7 kartinakh*, p. 70.

[15] Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, *Letopis' moei muzykal'noi zhizni* (Moscow: Direkt-media, 2015), p. 284.

[16] Brian Reeve, "Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's Use of the *Byliny* (Russian Oral Epic Narratives) in his Opera *Sadko*" (PhD dissertation, University of Nottingham, 2005), p. 181.

text.[17] Thus Rimsky-Korsakov appears to be emulating what the meter *would have been* for comparable lines in the original bylinic texts.

Each line of text for these choral sections has eleven syllables; the lines are declaimed syllabically with one syllable per quarter note. The time signature here corresponds to the number of syllables in each line of text, which are each set to the duration of a quarter note. This structural feature, in which "it is the textual line, rather than the music, which is the definer of the rhythm of the declamation," is found in Rimsky-Korsakov's source texts.[18] Many transcribers of the *byliny* represented uneven syllabic lines such as these by placing them within more conventional meters that nonetheless fluctuated according to the length of the vocal line.[19] (These fluctuating meters are encountered with some regularity in the opera, as discussed in connection with Nezhata's "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich" in chapter 2.) The vocal line in such transcriptions is spread over several bars rather than adjusting the bar length according to the length of the vocal line. In the instances of the 11/4 meter, Rimsky-Korsakov simply opts to replicate the 11-syllable lines of text in each bar, rather than subdividing the declamatory line into more conventional meters. The representation of the declamatory lines as 11/4 is a text-forward choice rather than an attempt to situate the vocal lines within common Western meters.

Much as in Nezhata's "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich," which directly precedes Sadko's entrance, the introduction of another narrative voice is accompanied by a metrical change. In Sadko's opening address to the crowd in the passage cited above, the meter shifts to 3/2: the

[17] Ibid., p. 82.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., pp. 73-74.

same meter that dominated Nezhata's diegetic aria. The meter then shifts back to 11/4 as the townspeople urge him to

> Sing to us of the glory of Novgorod,
> Of colorful clothing, of fine steeds,
> Of success, of valiant strength,
> Of our priceless treasury of gold
> And of our wives, our white swans![20]

Prompted with a theme for his song, Sadko then begins his diegetic aria. In his first three lines, the time signature returns to 3/2, the meter that is used for Sadko's entrance (see measure 3 on page 108). In these lines, Sadko respectfully addresses the assembled merchants:

> Ho, merchant traders,
> Respected merchants!
> Each boasts in his own way:[21]

The final line precedes Sadko's description of how he would boast were he to be a member of the merchant class, i.e. what "his own way" of boasting would be. Before he proceeds with his description, however, Sadko pokes fun at the merchants' way of life. From measures 514-522 (see example below), he paraphrases the five lines quoted above that were sung by the merchant fraternity in 11/4:

> One boasts of gold treasure,
> Another boasts of a fine steed,
> A fool boasts of his young wife,
> A wise man of his old father.
> There is nothing for me to boast of
> Except my gusli and my songs,
> Which were given to me by my father,
> By Sur Volzhanin.[22]

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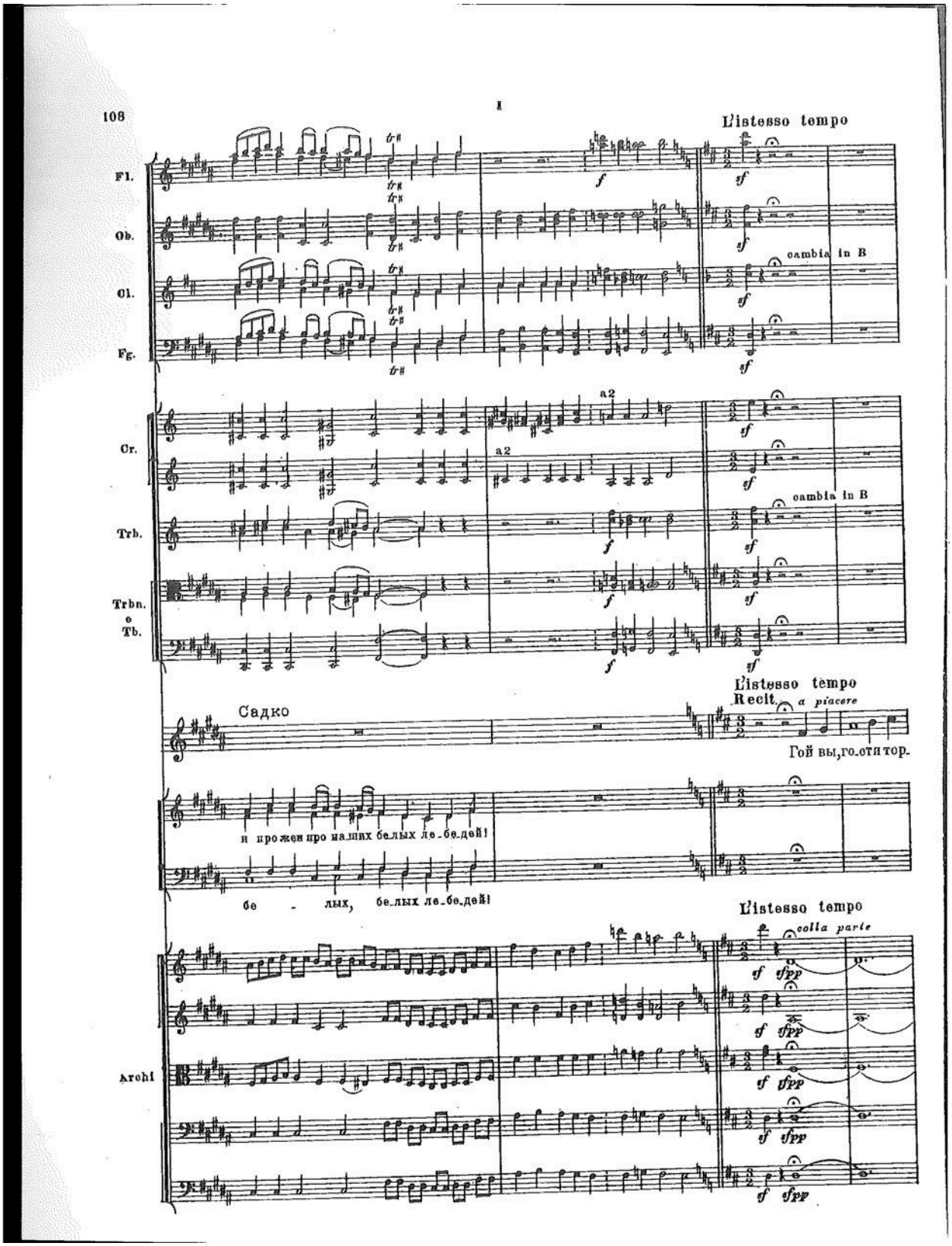
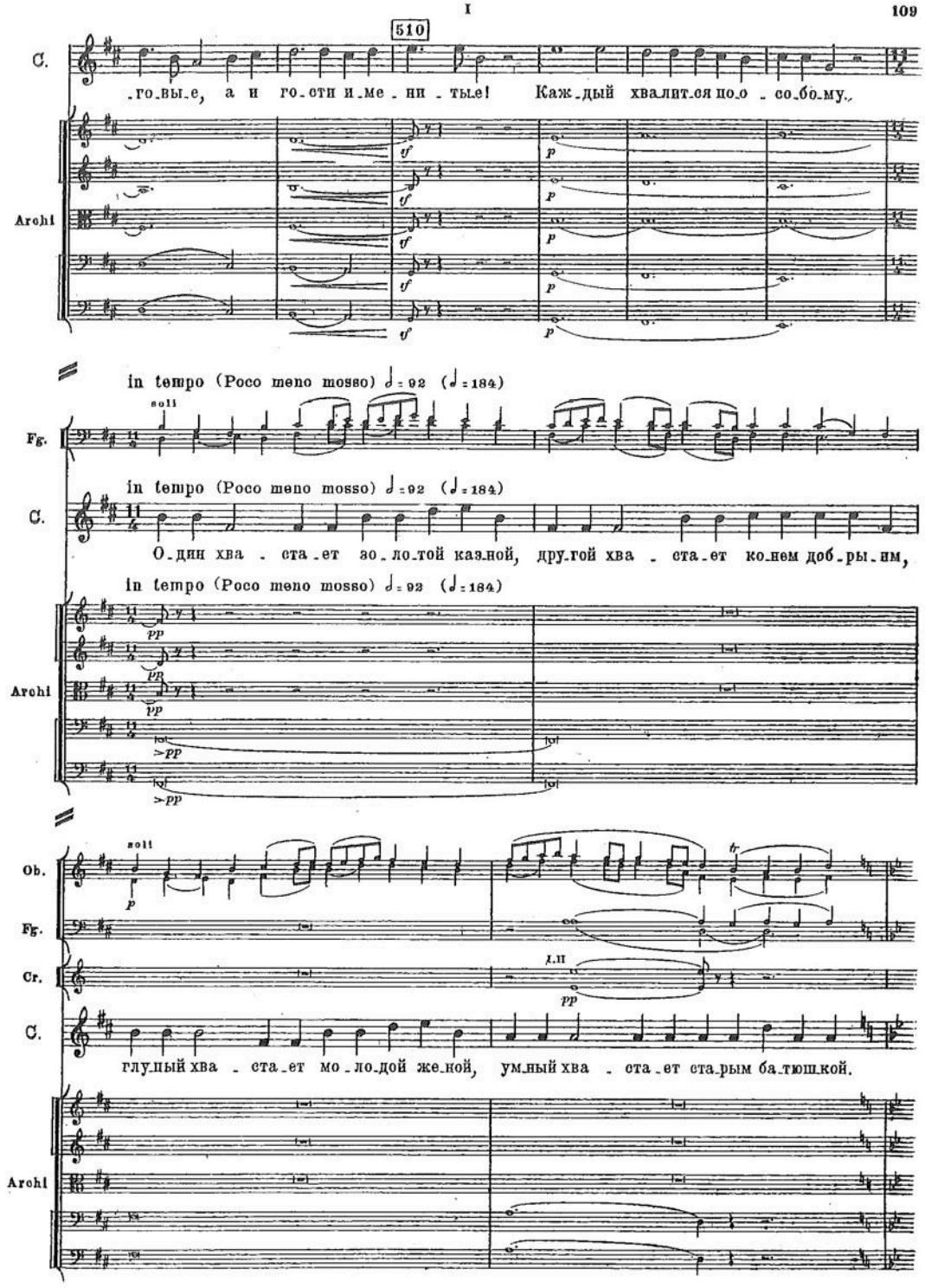
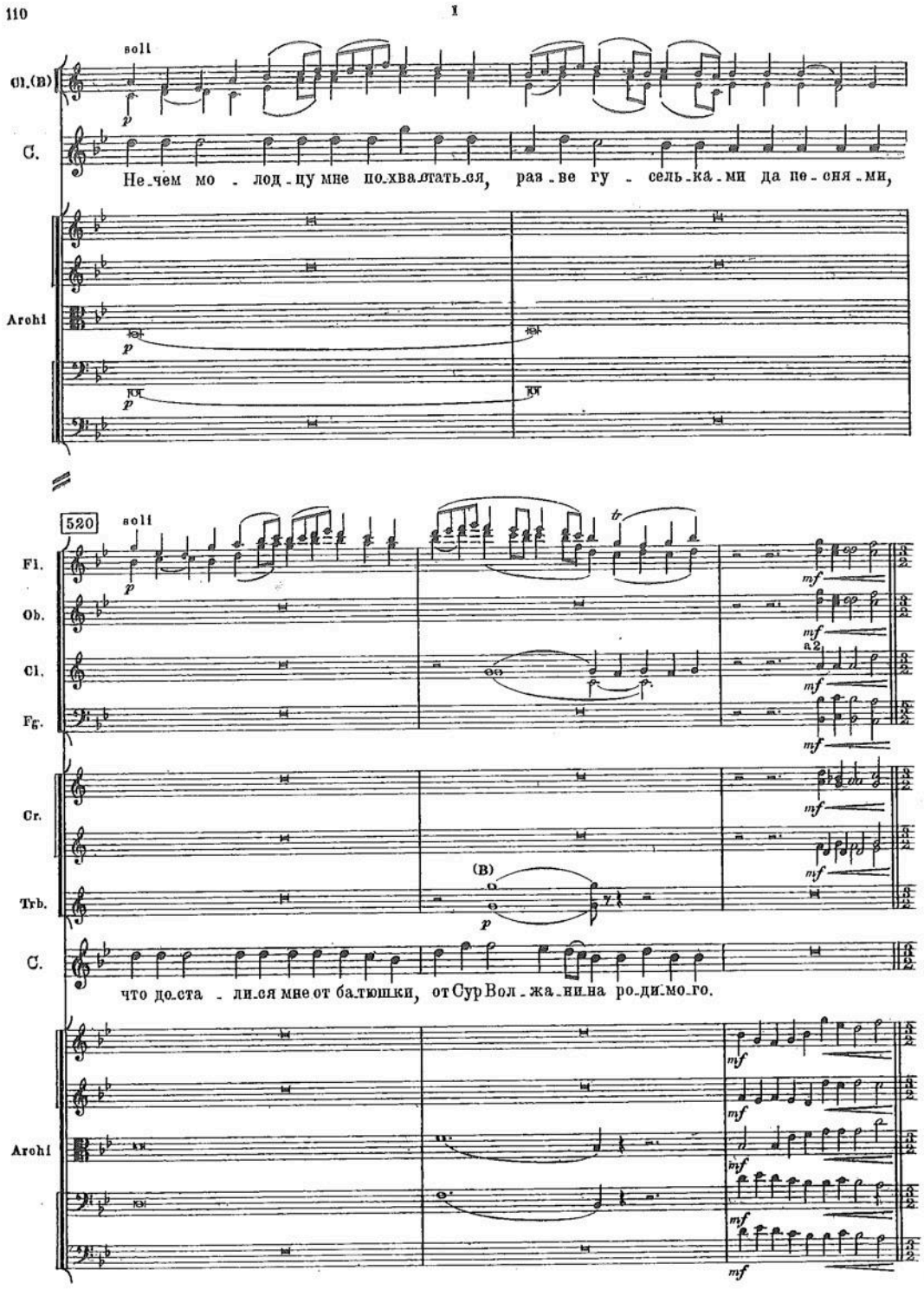
[20] Rimsky-Korsakov, *Sadko: opera-bylina v 7 kartinakh*, p. 70.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.


108
L'istesso tempo
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Fg.
cambia in B
Cr.
a2
Trb.
Trbn.
e
Tb.
Садко
Recit. a piacere
Гой вы, го-сти тор-
и прожен про наших белых ле-бе-дей!
бе - лых, бе-лых ле-бе-дей!
Archi
colla parte
sf sfpp


510
C.
.го_вы_е, а и го_сти и_ме_ни_ты_е! Каж_дый хва_лит_ся по_о_со_бо_му.
Archi
in tempo (Poco meno mosso) ♩. = 92 (♩ = 184)
soli
Fg.
in tempo (Poco meno mosso) ♩. = 92 (♩ = 184)
C.
О_дин хва_ста_ет зо_ло_той каз_ной, дру_гой хва_ста_ет ко_нем доб_ры_м,
in tempo (Poco meno mosso) ♩. = 92 (♩ = 184)
Archi
soli
Ob.
Fg.
Cr.
I.II
C.
глу_пый хва_ста_ет мо_ло_дой же_ной, ум_ный хва_ста_ет ста_рым ба_тюш_кой.
Archi


I
soli
Cl.(B)
C.
Не_чем мо_лод_цу мне по_хва_лять_ся, раз_ве гу_сель_ка_ми да пе_ся_ня_ми,
Archi
520
soli
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Fg.
Cr.
Trb.
(B)
C.
что до_ста_лись мне от ба_тюшки, от Сур Вол_жа_ни_на ро_ди_мо_го.
Archi

In these lines, the meter of Sadko's bylinic declamation shifts to 11/4: the same meter that has been established previously by the chorus. Sadko appears to be imitating the declamatory style of the merchant townspeople whose class he aspires to join. The imagery of this section is drawn from the townspeople's request of how they would like to be glorified in song; they sought to hear praises for their "gold treasure," "fine steed(s)" and "young wi(ves)." Instead of singing their praises, Sadko appears to be making a mockery of the townspeople's values.

The lines of text in which Sadko paraphrases and mocks the townspeople's points of pride in 11/4 contain 10 syllables, whereas the townspeople's 11/4 measures contain 11 syllables. It is as if Sadko falls just short in his imitation of their declamatory idiom. Whereas the townspeople's 11/4 measures contain 11 syllables of text syllabically declaimed in 11 quarter notes, Sadko's 11/4 measures contain 10 syllables of text with 9 quarter notes and one half note. Thus one syllable has a duration of a half note while the rest are quarter notes. Across Sadko's whole 11/4 section, the half note occurs on the third beat of the measure. In the first four lines of Sadko's 11/4 measures, the half note falls on the word "boasts" (*khvastaet*). In other words, the syllable that is drawn out by the half note is the stressed syllable in *khv**a**staet* ("boasts"). The Russian text is reproduced below with the syllables which receive the half note underlined:

Один хв<u>а</u>стает золотой казной,
Другой хв<u>а</u>стает конем добрыим,
Глупый хв<u>а</u>стает молодой женой,
Умный хв<u>а</u>стает старым батюшкой.
Нечем м<u>о</u>лодцу мне похвастаться,
Разве г<u>у</u>сельками да песнями,
Что дост<u>а</u>лися мне от батюшкой,
От Сур В<u>о</u>лжанина родимого.[23]

[23] Ibid.

The added duration of *khvastaet* seems to accentuate Sadko's mockery of the merchants' points of pride. The repetition of this word, and its identical placement within the third, fourth and fifth syllables of each of the first four lines, likewise convey Sadko's jest at the merchant's values. Sadko appears to call attention to their boastful pride as being vain and empty.

The insertion of the 11/4 measures within Sadko's aria could be seen as having several narrative functions. Firstly, as the narrative is full of tellings, foretellings, and retellings, the 11/4 measures serve as a recollection of the townspeople's narrative voice through the lens of another narrator. Sadko enters the first tableau as a character, and then immediately assumes the role of a narrator. As a character he is, of course, a bard; as he switches to a narrative role in the diegetic song, he is simultaneously fulfilling his role as a character. In his song, he recounts the symbols of mercantile values that have just been presented (fine steeds, pretty wives, boundless wealth), albeit from the perspective of an outsider to the mercantile class. Secondly, Sadko's mockery of the merchants provides a contrast to what, to this point in the plot, has been an uncontested collective voice. He casts a different light on symbols of mercantilism which so far have been lauded. Though the song embodies his desire to attain the status of the merchants, he presents a critical view of the merchants' way of life. Thirdly, his imitation of their declamatory idiom paradoxically serves to set Sadko apart from the townspeople. His ironic paraphrase of their boastful pride suggests that he views himself as superior to them in some way. Through mimicking them, he actually stands apart, holding his own take on the mercantile life in higher esteem.

Sadko's first diegetic song simultaneously criticizes the merchants' way of life and voices his desire to be considered among them. He is called upon to sing their praises, but instead he sings of his own intention to become like those who have made Novgorod

praiseworthy. His song about his aspiration of becoming a merchant also serves as a description of Novgorodian mercantile life. The story that he is asked to tell about the glories of Novgorod, however, is actually about him. In contrast to the merchants, Sadko declares that he "would not live by old ways and customs":

> If I had a gold treasury,
> If I had a brave *druzhina*,[24]
> I would not sit around in Novgorod,
> Would not live by old ways and customs,[25]

By contrasting his own mercantile ambitions to the Novgorodian merchants' values, Sadko functions as a narrator of the mercantile way of life. In relating his own subjective fantasy, he simultaneously comments upon the broader state of mercantile affairs in Novgorod. His opening song functions to sketch Sadko's subjectivity along with the social milieu that he attempts to situate himself within.

As Sadko is, at this point in the *siuzhet*, an impecunious bard, his ambitions are understood as hypothetical projections. His fantasy will become a reality in tableau 4 with the appearance of the golden fish and his winning of the wager with the Novgorodian merchants. While, unlike Nezhata, Sadko does not convey a sense of foreknowledge of the *fabula* in his diegetic song, his intentions are nonetheless fulfilled in the broader scope of the narrative. The hypothetical nature of his ascent to the mercantile class is communicated in his first diegetic song in a series of verbs in the subjunctive mood. The excerpt of the text quoted above serves as a brief snapshot of the subjunctivity of the song. In fact, these lines are merely the beginning; each line in the remainder of the song (40 in all) contains a subjunctive verb describing what

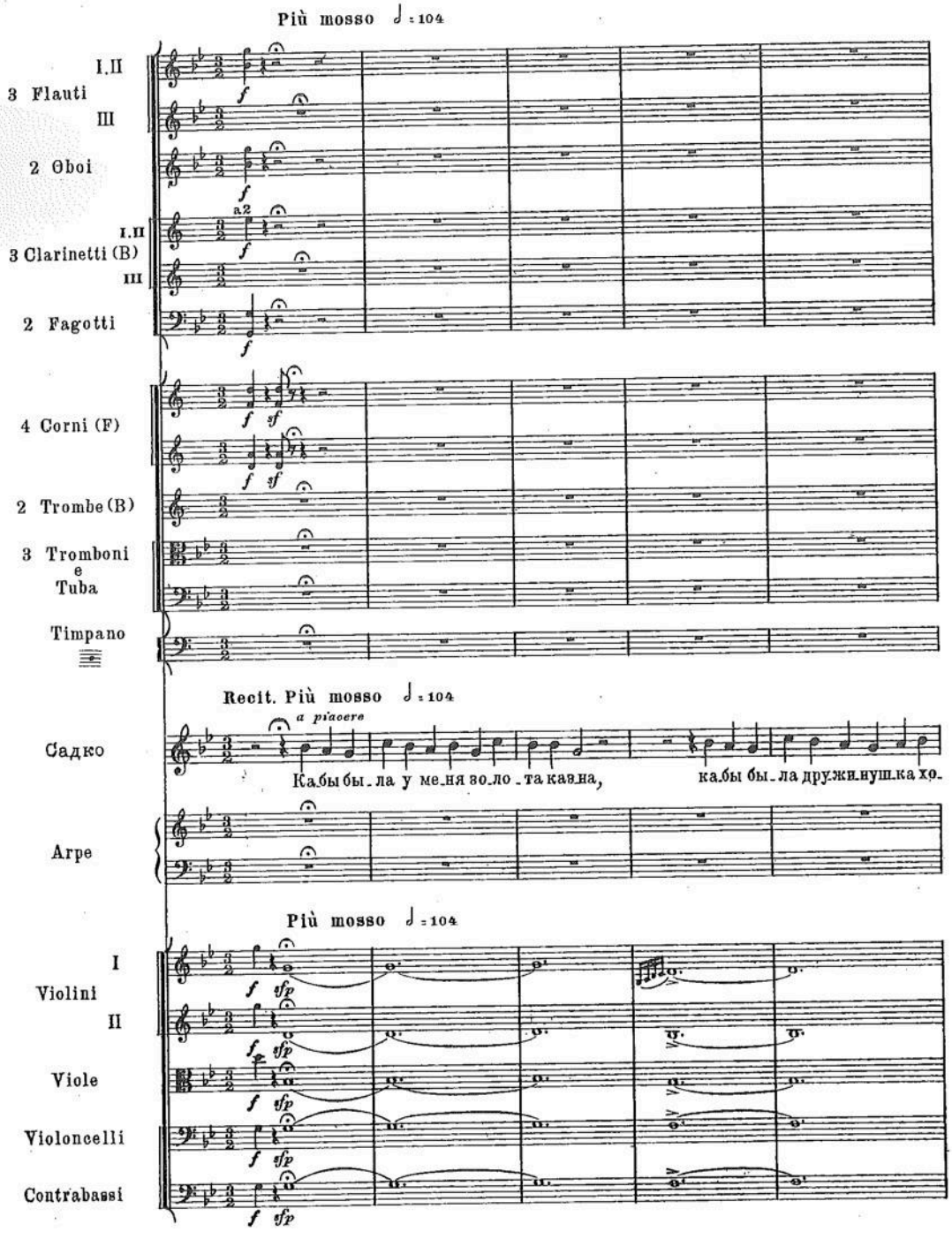
[24] On the meaning of *druzhina*, see note 2 in chapter 2.

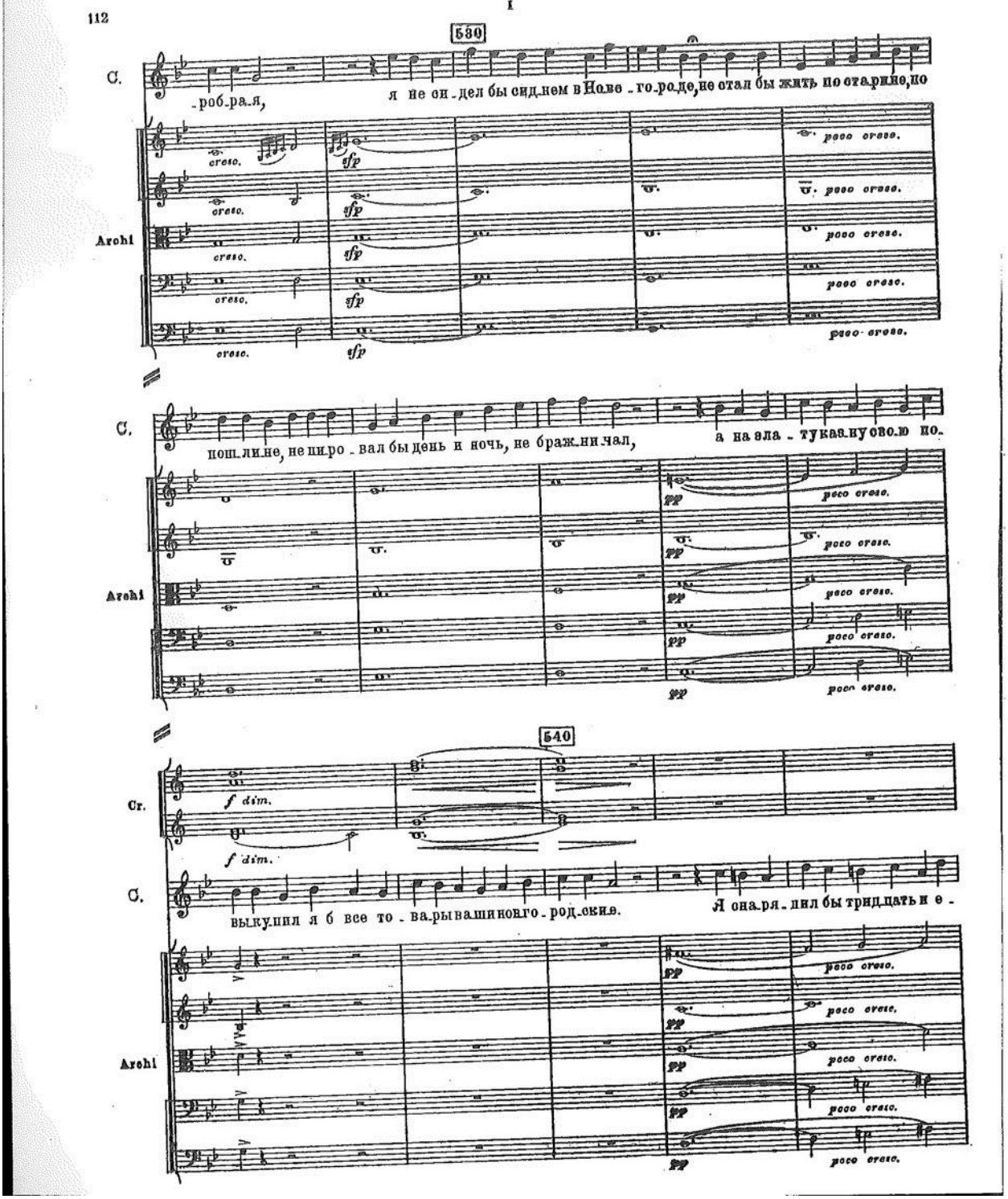
[25] Rimsky-Korsakov, *Sadko: opera-bylina v 7 kartinakh*, p. 70.

Sadko *would* do *were he* to become a merchant. The subjunctives both convey Sadko's fantasy, and place his narrative in an entirely indeterminate and hypothetical chronotope, in which verbs have ceased to communicate tense, and instead communicate mood. The cause and effect structure of the *siuzhet* has yielded to a liminal space of Sadko's inner world. The narrative enters a state of suspension, in which Sadko's subjectivity assumes the foreground while the real-time unfolding of the plot stands in the balance. Recalling the common critical appraisal of stasis in the narrative structure of the opera, the diegetic song constitutes a static moment, in which Sadko's self-description takes precedence over dramatic sequencing.

As Sadko begins the series of subjunctive lines, the harmonic rhythm begins to slow down. The harmonic movement in this section has all but frozen; the first three measures of the aria stay on a G minor chord, the tonic (see measures 1-3 on page 111 below). In the fourth measure, the bass voices descend to F natural, forming an G minor chord in third inversion. The bass voices then descend again to E flat in a C minor chord in first inversion, though the resolution from the third inversion G minor chord to the first inversion C minor chord does not occur for another two measures. It is as if the passing chord has been temporarily suspended in time, prolonging the resolution. The bass note then descends again to a D natural in a G minor chord in second inversion before descending yet again to C natural and forming a C minor chord. The chord progression has thus taken 10 measures to cadence from the I to IV chord. The voice leading in the bass has provided the sole motivation for the harmonic movement in the passage. As Sadko begins his proclamations in the subjunctive, the narrative and the harmonic rhythm both enter a static phase. The voice leading in the bass suggests motion; however, the various inversions of G minor act as a pedal point, anchoring the harmonic movement on the tonic. The pedal point seems to expand the sense of time that the passage conveys, perhaps projecting

Речитатив и ария Садки




530
C.
-роб-ра-я,
я не си-дел бы сид-нем в Ново-го-ро-де, не стал бы жить по старине, по
cresc.
sfp
poco cresc.
Archi
пош-ли-не, не широ-вал бы день и ночь, не браж-ни-чал,
а на зла-тука-ну свою по-
pp
540
Cr.
f dim.
C.
выкупил я б все то-ва-ры ваши ново-род-ские.
Я она-ря-дил бы тридцать и е-

Sadko's narrative into the future when his wishes of mercantile success will come true. In a manner similar to Nezhata's aria, the commencement of bylinic storytelling is accompanied here by a form of expanded time. The entrance into the narrated world of the *byliny* constitutes a moment of stasis in the harmonic rhythm of the music in addition to the real-time unfolding of the operatic *siuzhet*.

The torpidity of the harmonic movement here seems to correspond to the subjunctivity of the text. As Sadko issues bold proclamations of what he would do as a merchant, the accompaniment appears to stand aghast. The fact that the voice leading occurs in the bass voices gives the harmonic movement a compulsory quality, as if the motion is unwanted, though it is being pulled along obligatorily by a gravitational force. The descent in the bass gives the passage a degree of dramatic descent, as if Sadko, amid his critique of the merchants' way of life, is plunging further and further into the mire of the townspeople's scorn. The G minor passing chord in third inversion that lasts for two measures exemplifies the sense of stasis within the passage. Since the passage foregrounds mood rather than dramatic action, its slow harmonic movement has an atmospheric quality. As Sadko's narrative voice enters a hypothetical realm, the music seems to abandon its discursive potency, instead taking on a coloristic hue. The minimal harmonic movement thus seems to reflect the lack of verbal action in the text. With all of the verbs appearing in the subjunctive mood, they have ceased to describe cause and effect. Rather than conveying temporal structures such as sequence and duration, the subjunctive verbs are unhindered by temporal actuality; they instead describe irrealis potentiality and subjective fantasy. Sadko's hopeful projections are correspondingly accentuated by a minimization of harmonic movement. As the temporal situatedness of the narrative enters uncertain territory, the temporal motion of the harmony slackens its pace.

4. Discursive control

The subjunctivity of Sadko's opening song has a social underpinning. Sadko readily acknowledges that he represents a lower social stratum from the merchants who implore him to narrate the glory of their deeds. This affirmation is made not in a tone of humility, but of envy. Therefore his narration, which is ostensibly on their behalf (but is actually for and about him) is not well received. The crowd responds to his song by essentially putting him in his place; one of the merchant elders declares plainly: "You are a simple *gusliar'*, not a merchant."[26] Unlike later in the opera, when Volkhova, the Sea King, and the saintly apparition praise his musical ability, his opening song is met with scorn by the townspeople. The crowd hear him as mocking their way of life *rather than aspiring to be like them*. In fact, Sadko is entreating them to join their ranks using the only means at his disposal—his song. They regard his plea as insolence rather than flattery. Indeed Sadko takes a critical stance, especially at the beginning of the song, but the message is clear: he wants to ascend the social order and become a wealthy merchant.

Sadko's narrative stance has in other words entirely missed the mark—he is perceived as a critic rather than an admirer. Whereas the townspeople react favorably to Nezhata's "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich," Sadko's song leads to his banishment from the town. In Bakhtinian terms, Sadko's narrative discourse, or *skaz*, is not that of the townspeople; he does not speak in the same bylinic idiom as their narrator, Nezhata. Though his song occurs in response to their request to sing their praises, he narrates their triumphs as a tale of his own unfulfilled dreams. His song is *about him* and his lowly status, though he sings it under the pretense of a song about Novgorodian heroism. Unlike Nezhata, who, as discussed in chapter 2, narrates on behalf of the

[26] Ibid., p. 74.

townspeople, Sadko, as the first-person narrator of his own *bylina*, narrates on his own behalf. While Nezhata narrates Sadko's story to the merchants in the demotic idiom of bygone times and heroic triumphs, Sadko narrates his story *to himself* in a hypothetical vein. The subjunctivity of his song likewise carries a tinge of optativity, as it conveys the sense of a wish or hope. As Sadko's song is about his fantasy rather than Novgorodian realia, the abbot responds to it by stating to the crowd: "Do you not see, respected guests? / He wants to seize power over Novgorod."[27] In other words, in singing of his desire to join the merchant ranks, Sadko has inadvertently given the impression that he seeks to overthrow and preside over the mercantile fraternity. Instead of narrating on their behalf, Sadko has related a tale of self-aggrandizement and unbridled ambition.

The irony of Sadko's song is that he thinks that he is singing to and for the townspeople. Sadko believes that he is telling a tale of heroic deeds in the manner of Nezhata. In one sense, his desire to accumulate of wealth and power is entirely in keeping with Novgorodian mercantile values. In their recitative that opens tableau 1, the townspeople declare that it is its self-made men, its merchants, that make Novgorod great. The merchants exclaim that

> We have no great boyars,
> We have no venerable princes,
> We have no formidable warlords.
> In great Novgorod,
> Each is his own master.[28]

Thus Sadko's tale of personal triumph and overcoming the odds is consistent with the credo of "Each is his own master." In the absence of princes, boyars and warlords, it is the merchants

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., p. 67.

who assume the powerful ranks. Sadko, however, is rebuked for asserting these same entrepreneurial values.

It is Sadko's seizure of control over the narrative that has led to his rebuke. His assertion of discursive control over the townspeople by spinning his desires as an example of Novgorodian heroism is in fact a greater threat to the political and social order than his fantasies of acquiring mercantile wealth. In singing his opening diegetic song, Sadko's discursive power has exceeded his social status as a petty *gusliar'*. He has in effect become the narrator as well as the narrated, the subject and object of the narration. As a bard, his role in the social order is to be a narrator of the heroic deeds of old; he is to sing at the behest of those who are greater in status and wealth than him. It is Nezhata who fulfills this role—he recounts epics of folk heroes such as Volkh Vseslav'evich and the nightingale to a crowd that demands age-old tales of heroism and conquest. Sadko, however, displaces the power structure by inserting his heroic ambitions into an established storytelling format. By making himself the focal point of his *bylina*, Sadko has compromised the authority of the elders and disregarded the venerability of their pantheon of heroes. Moreover, Sadko declares that were he to be a merchant, he "would not sit around in Novgorod, / Would not live by old ways and customs."[29] It should be recalled here that the subject matter of the *byliny* was often based on figures of local and national repute. By declaring himself to be the subject of a *bylina*, he is making a claim to legitimacy as a bylinic hero. His role is to sing about other respected figures from the past, though he has sung about himself and his disregard for the old ways and customs.

Sadko's tale is one of ascent within the social order. The crowd scenes of tableaux 1, 4, and 7 present a microcosm of Novgorodian society circa the twelfth century. As a tale of upward

[29] Ibid., p. 70.

mobility, the opera presents a rank and file portrait of the social milieu rather than a description of a particular class. As discussed in chapter 1, opening the opera with a Novgorodian crowd scene appears to have been Vladimir Stasov's idea. Stasov proposed to Rimsky-Korsakov to

> …begin the opera with a feast scene—not a stereotypical operatic one of the formulaic princely or imperial variety, but of a completely different, entirely new variety in the operatic world. What I have in mind is a Novgorodian feast, a republican or democratic one, so to speak, where there is neither a master, or prince, or king, but merely merchants of equal status, and masters of various sorts: warriors, their wives, daughters, all of them in different groups…some friendly and affiliated with one another, and some envious and adverse to one another.[30]

Stasov's suggestion was directly imputed into the opening passage that is sung by the townspeople, in which they declare that in Novgorod "Each is his own master."[31] Stasov's idea thus entailed leaving the upper echelon of the social structure out of the picture. This societal scheme would have only been plausible in Novgorod, which was ruled by the *boyar'*, or merchant, class and governed by a collective body of the town elite (the *veche*). Setting the opera in Novgorod in other words enabled Rimsky-Korsakov to present Sadko's fortune seeking as attainable within the existing social and economic structure of the period. (Sadko is able to ascend the social order by opposing it.)

The conspicuous absence of imperial authority and the egalitarian emphasis on upward mobility gestures toward a political reading of the opera. The fact that Sadko serves as a paradigm of national identity and communal self-identification that contravenes the existing order has a mildly subversive political subtext. Though Sadko ultimately reifies the social order by joining it rather than overthrowing it, he challenges its status quo and questions its system of

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[30] V. Tsukkerman, "O siuzhete i muzykal'nom iazyke opery-byliny *Sadko*," pp. 442-443. The original source is not cited.

[31] Rimsky-Korsakov, *Sadko: opera-bylina v 7 kartinakh*, p. 67.

authority. Sadko both undermines and reinforces the social structure through the power of his narrative songs. The rags-to-riches element of Sadko's story in a sense places him outside of, and perhaps superior to, the rank and file of the social milieu. The power dynamics of the narrative imply a bottom-up social hierarchy rather than a top-down one. The fact that Tsar Nicholas II rejected *Sadko*, refusing to have it premiered under imperial auspices, accentuates its political overtones.[32] The opera's premiere at the Mamontov Private Opera is in keeping with its theme and its glorification of mercantile ideals. Sadko's tale of status ascent and entrepreneurialism clearly resonated with the high time of mercantile capitalism in imperial Russia.

Rimsky-Korsakov's rendering of the Sadko *bylina* as a tale of the triumph of the individual over the social hierarchy is consistent with the aesthetic and political views of the literary critic Vissarion Belinskii, whose works Rimsky-Korsakov voraciously read in the course of his intellectual *Bildung* in the 1860s. It is probable that Rimsky-Korsakov encountered the story of Sadko initially through Belinskii, who expounded at length on the political implications of the Sadko tale in his review of Danilov's 1841 collection of *byliny*.[33] Belinskii championed the political and social dimensions of Russian Realism, advocating its civic mindedness and social consciousness. Given the portrayal of the full spectrum of Novgorodian society in the opera, a Realist dimension of Rimsky-Korsakov's take on the Sadko *bylina* is clearly discernible. The fantastical element, however, situates it as moving out of the era of Realism and into Symbolism. The full strata of the social structure are represented; however, they are

[32] Reeve, "Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's Use of the *Byliny* (Russian Oral Epic Narratives) in his Opera *Sadko*," p. 133.

[33] Ibid., p. 106.

aestheticized and set in a bylinic fictive world in the distant past. This paradigm is perhaps one way of reading Rimsky-Korsakov's comment from his introduction to the score that the opera depicts a "semi-folkloric, semi-historical epoch."[34] The opera sets forth a Realist political stance within a proto-Symbolist aesthetic and philosophical framework.

[34] N. A. Rimsky-Korsakow, *Sadko: Romantische oper in sieben bildern* (Piano-vocal score), M.P. Belaieff edition (London: Boosey & Hawkes, Ltd., 1896), p. 1430.

Chapter 4—

"The Curved Mirror":

The Diegesis of the *Skomorokhi* and Laughter as Social Critique

1. Introduction

The previous chapter established that Sadko generates the audience's empathy through his opening diegetic song, in which he exclaims his aspirations to join the Novgorodian mercantile class. By being lampooned by the *skomorokhi* and banished by the townspeople, Sadko has paradoxically gained the audience's favor. His diegetic song has lain bare his inner world replete with dreams of foreign travel and mercantile success, and his personal narrative has thereby become the focal point of the narrative at large. Sadko's narrative voice in a sense relativizes the other narrative voices in the opera, such as the townspeople, Nezhata, and the *skomorokhi* . As Sadko begins to exert discursive control over his own narrative by singing diegetically, the course of narrative events begins to assume the form of his fantasy. As a result of his discursive control, the other narrators function primarily to narrate the events that happen to and through him. Through this composite of narrative voices, the fictive world which Sadko and the other characters inhabit is transformed according to his inner vision.

Two other principle narrative voices in the opera, in addition to Nezhata and Sadko, belong to Duda and Sopel', the *skomorokhi*. This chapter will first provide a brief background on the *skomorokhi*, a professional class of entertainers who were, along with bards, performers of the *byliny*. The discussion will then turn to the musical and narrative criteria which distinguish the *skomorokhi*'s narrative voice from those of Nezhata, Sadko, and the townspeople. The chapter will conclude with a narratological analysis of the *skomorokhi*'s diegetic song in

tableaux 1 and 4, exploring the narrative alliances and divisions that are generated by their amusing critique of Sadko.

2. Background on the *skomorokhi*

The *skomorokhi* were itinerant entertainers in medieval and early modern Russia. Scholars have generally assumed that the Russian *skomorokhi* are of either Byzantine or Western European origin.[1] V. F. Miller notes their similarity to German *Spielmänner*, Byzantine itinerant musicians, and French *jongleurs*.[2] The first reference to the *skomorokhi* in the Russian chronicles dates to the eleventh century. This account of the activities of the *skomorokhi* affiliates them with Russia's pre-Christian past, noting their association with musical instruments such as horns (*trubi*) and the *gusli*, which were banned by the Orthodox Church.[3] The *skomorokhi* performed *byliny* to the accompaniment of the *gusli* as well as dramatic skits and dances.[4] For their performance of secular music and their connection with Russia's pre-Christian history, the *skomorokhi* were subjected to persecution by the Church. In 1648, Tsar' Aleksei

[1] Russell Zguta, *Russian Minstrels: A History of the Skomorokhi* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), p. 3.

[2] V. F. Miller, *Ocherki russkoi narodnoi slovesnosti: Byliny* [Essays on Russian Folk Literature: The *Byliny*] (Moscow: "I. D. Sytin," 1897), pp. 53-55.

[3] Zguta, *Russian Minstrels: A History of the Skomorokhi*, p. 3. For a discussion of other chronicle accounts of the activities of the *skomorokhi*, see N. Findeizen, "Skomorosh'e delo na Rusi" [The Affairs of the *Skomorokhi* in Rus'], in *Ocherki po istorii muzyki v Rossii s drevneishikh vremen do kontsa XVIII veka* [Essays on the History of Music in Russia from antiquity to the end of the Eighteenth Century], vol. 1 (Moscow and Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo muzsektor, 1928), pp. 145-170.

[4] The *skomorokhi* were likewise associated with flute-playing—another of their activities that connected them with Russia's pre-Christian history. The names of the two principle *skomorokhi* in *Sadko*, Duda and Sopel', mean "fife" and "reed-pipe," respectively.

officially proscribed the performances of the *skomorokhi* and banned their costumes and musical instruments.[5]

The *skomorokhi* retreated to far-flung regions of Russia, especially the far north, where, in the nineteenth century, folk song collectors such as Rybnikov and Gil'ferding observed that the recitation of *byliny* was still a living tradition. One of Rimsky-Korsakov's primary sources of the *byliny* was Kirsha Danilov's *Ancient Russian Verse* (*Drevniia russkiia stikhotvoreniia*), which contains folk songs that were collected from the Russian far north. As Brian Reeve attests, "It is usually considered that this collection derives from the transcription of the repertoire of a group of *skomorokhi*, since it contains a number of humorous songs of the type known to have been sung by these strolling players of ancient Russia."[6] Thus the repertoire of the *skomorokhi* comprise one of Rimsky-Korsakov's main sources of musical and textual material for the opera.

Afanas'ev, in his *The Poetic Views of the Slavs on Nature* (*Poeticheskaia vozzreniia slavian na prirodu*), discusses the involvement of the *skomorokhi* in seasonal festivals such as the *Rusalii*, a midsummer festival. He describes the *skomorokhi* as performing a priestly function at such festivals, in that they conducted ritual ceremonies involving music, song, and dance.[7] Rimsky-Korsakov, in his introduction to the score, specifically references Afanas'ev as

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[5] Ibid., pp. 15-22.

[6] Brian Reeve, "Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's Use of the *Byliny* (Russian Oral Epic Narratives) in his Opera *Sadko*" (PhD dissertation, University of Nottingham, 2005), p. 34.

[7] Z. I. Vlasova, *Skomorokhi i fol'klor* [The *Skomorokhi* and Folklore], ed. by S. N. Azbelev (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo "Aleteiia," 2001), pp. 21-52.

his source for the "fantastical aspect of the opera."[8] Given Rimsky-Korsakov's fascination with Russia's pre-Christian past, and his sourcing of Afanas'ev, one can safely assume that Afanas'ev's take on the *skomorokhi* factored into Rimsky-Korsakov's portrayal of them in the opera. The geographical distribution of the *skomorokhi* also accounts for their appearance in *Sadko*: they were primarily localized in the Northwestern region of Russia, and were particularly associated with Novgorod. Some scholars credit the *skomorokhi* as the first Russian dramatists.[9] Thus their appearance in Sadko, as well as in Rimsky-Korsakov's last opera, *The Golden Cockerel*, is a nod to the formative role of the *skomorokhi* in Russian drama. Stravinsky would later incorporate the *skomorokhi* into his ballet *Petrushka*, drawing similarly from the association of these itinerant performers with seasonal festivals such as *Maslenitsa*.

3. Metrical and temporal domains

In medieval Russia, the *byliny* were not only performed by bards, but also by the *skomorokhi*. The *skomorokhi* commonly performed at weddings and communal feasts.[10] Considering that both a wedding (in tableau 6) and a feast (in tableau 1) occur within the plot of *Sadko*, the appearance of the *skomorokhi* is in keeping with the types of events at which they performed in Russian history. The *skomorokhi* perform diegetic songs in tableaux 1, 4 and 7. They accordingly constitute another narrative voice in the opera in addition to Sadko, Nezhata, and the townspeople. As the *skomorokhi* were, in addition to bards such as Sadko and Nezhata,

[8] N. A. Rimsky-Korsakow, *Sadko: Romantische oper in sieben bildern* (Piano-vocal score), M.P. Belaieff edition (London: Boosey & Hawkes, Ltd., 1896), p. 143.

[9] A. A. Belkin, *Russkie skomorokhi* [Russian *Skomorokhi*] (Moscow: "Nauka," 1975), p. 110-163.

[10] Ibid., p. 110. See also Z. I. Vlasova, *Skomorokhi i fol'klor*, pp. 76-126.

professional singers of the *byliny*, the diegetic music of Duda and Sopel' can be considered bylinic performances within the operatic *siuzhet*. Their *byliny* present another take on Sadko's story, in that their diegetic songs are clearly about Sadko and the narrative events that he experiences and generates. Their narrative voices thus constitute a part of the heteroglossia of narrative voices in the opera.

Following Sadko's opening diegetic song, in which he voices his wish to join the merchant class, the merchants present at the feast rebuke him and banish him from the town. They urge him to retire to the shores of Lake Ilmen to sing in solitude. It is there that Sadko will encounter Volkhova for the first time as a result of his diegetic music. In contrast to the 3/2 and 6/4 triple meters that dominate Sadko's aria, the chorus of townspeople enter in 11/4. This is the same meter that has characterized the townspeople's parts from the conclusion of Nezhata's aria to the beginning of Sadko's aria. To lift their spirits and proceed with their merrymaking following Sadko's unpleasant departure, the townspeople call the *skomorokhi* to the foreground to dance and sing a joyous song. At the entrance of the *skomorokhi*, the 11/4 meter changes to 2/4—the first prolonged duple meter that is encountered in the opera thus far.

In tableau 1, the various narrative voices are distinguished metrically. The townspeople's parts are set to 3/4, 6/8, and 11/4 meters. The sections with the bardic singers, Nezhata and Sadko, are primarily in 3/2 and 6/4. The exception is when the meter of Sadko's aria switches to 11/4 as if mimicking the townspeople's metrical idiom. As the *skomorokhi* enter, the meter shifts yet again to 2/4. This meter persists to the end of the tableau. Thus each of the narrators of the tableau are assigned different meters, as if they occupy different temporal spaces within the narrative. The use of different metrical domains of the various narrators seems to reinforce their contrasting perspectives on Sadko.

The sections of the tableau featuring each narrative voice are likewise delineated by different tempo indications. The townspeople's part which opens the tableau is a prolonged *allegro* section. This is followed by Nezhata's "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich," which is marked *moderato*. The tempo of Nezhata's aria is variously slowed down, with indications of *poco meno mosso*, and brought back to *moderato*. The ensuing choral section is again marked *allegro*. Sadko's diegetic song is a prolonged *andante* section, which is followed by another *allegro* choral section. The tempo markers of the scene with the *skomorokhi* gradually increase the townspeople's *allegro*, with one *moderato* section interspersed. The sequencing of tempi and meters in this tableau is reminiscent of an Italian *scena*, with its two aria sections and a concluding *cabaletta* section. Tableau 4 likewise takes the shape of a *scena*, albeit with the inclusion of additional arias provided by the songs of the three foreign merchants.

In the diegetic songs of both Nezhata and Sadko, the tempo is decreased. In the case of Nezhata's "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich," the deceleration seems to correspond to the expansion of the framework of narrative time, as discussed in chapter 2. The similar change in tempo of Sadko's aria suggests that the slower tempi can be associated with the diegetic passages. As Reeve points out, "Indications of speed such as lento and largo also predominate throughout the opera, and it is these expansive tempi and meters which give to the work its characteristic quality of long-drawn-out epic narration."[11] As Sadko and Nezhata initiate the diegetic recitations of their *byliny*, the tempi decrease as if to emulate the widened temporal scope conveyed in the bylinic epics.

[11] Reeve, "Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's Use of the *Byliny* (Russian Oral Epic Narratives) in his Opera *Sadko*," p. 163.

The *allegro* of Sopel' and Duda's aria, which increases in tempo gradually throughout the song, however, presents a contrast. Given that the *skomorokhi* are called in by the townspeople to lighten the mood and prolong the feast, the *allegro* seems fitting. They play an entirely different narrative role than Nezhata and Sadko; correspondingly, the aura of profundity conveyed by the slackened tempi of Nezhata and Sadko's songs is replaced with a sense of lightheartedness and comedy conveyed by the *allegro* of the *skomorokhi*'s parts. Their section of dancing and diegetic song ends the tableau on a particularly energetic note. The tableau has opened with a *largo* section (the overture) and closed with a lively *allegro* section. Thus the tempi of the tableau accelerate and decelerate to accommodate the different characters' narrative voices; however, they have constituted an increasing arc from beginning to end. The tempi in a sense reflect the narrative content of the various passages while taking on an accretionary form overall. The ebb and flow of the narrative, i.e. its static moments, which are represented by the diegetic songs, and its processual moments, which are represented by the *allegro* choral sections, contains an analog in the fluctuating tempi of the tableau.

Much as in tableau 1, in tableau 7, the different narrative voices are assigned specific meters. At the opening of the tableau, Sadko and Volkhova have returned to the bank of Lake Ilmen after their undersea nuptial ceremony. Now wedded, they sing a duet in 6/4 time. Sadko then falls asleep on the bank, and Volkhova begins a brief narrative passage, exclaiming:

> My Sadko sleeps on the meadow,
> On the green bank,
> On the field embroidered with bulbocidium,
> On the green reeds;
> My gentle caress
> Has lulled him.[12]

[12] N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov, *Sadko: opera-bylina v 7 kartinakh* [Sadko: Opera-*Bylina* in 7 Tableaux], with an introduction by Iv. Remezov, edited by M. I. Imas (Moscow: Izdanie upravleniia teatrami NKP RSFSR), p. 144.

As Volkhova assumes a narrative voice, her meter switches to 4/8. Upon Volkhova's exit and dissolution into a river, Sadko's wife, Liubava, enters. Here she acts as a narrator by singing of her abandonment by Sadko:

> Oh, I am so miserable!
> It's so difficult for me!
> Lord, do not let anyone live in such insulting orphanhood,
> In such bitter widowhood.[13]

As Volkhova's narrative voice is replaced by Liubava's, the meter correspondingly changes to 3/8. Sadko is awakened by his wife's laments and begins to narrate to himself in the second person:

> Where are you, Sadko, good fellow,
> Where have you laid down to sleep?
> Have miracles befallen you in reality,
> Or have you dreamed prophetic dreams?[14]

During the passage above, the meter changes to 4/4. Thus each of the characters in the tableau are designated specific meters to distinguish their narrative voices.

In the ensuing passage, Sadko and Liubava are reunited. Following Sadko's section in 4/4, Liubava continues her cries of despair in 3/8, still unaware of Sadko's presence. Sadko hears her, exclaiming "Who do I hear crying, unleashing a river?,"[15] again in 4/4 time. Their 4/4 and 3/8 meters continue to alternate for their respective parts until they embrace one another, at which point both of their parts are in 4/4. As the chorus enters and discovers a new river flowing into Lake Ilmen, the meter again changes to 2/4. As each of the narrative voices – Nezhata,

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[13] Ibid., p. 145.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., p. 146.

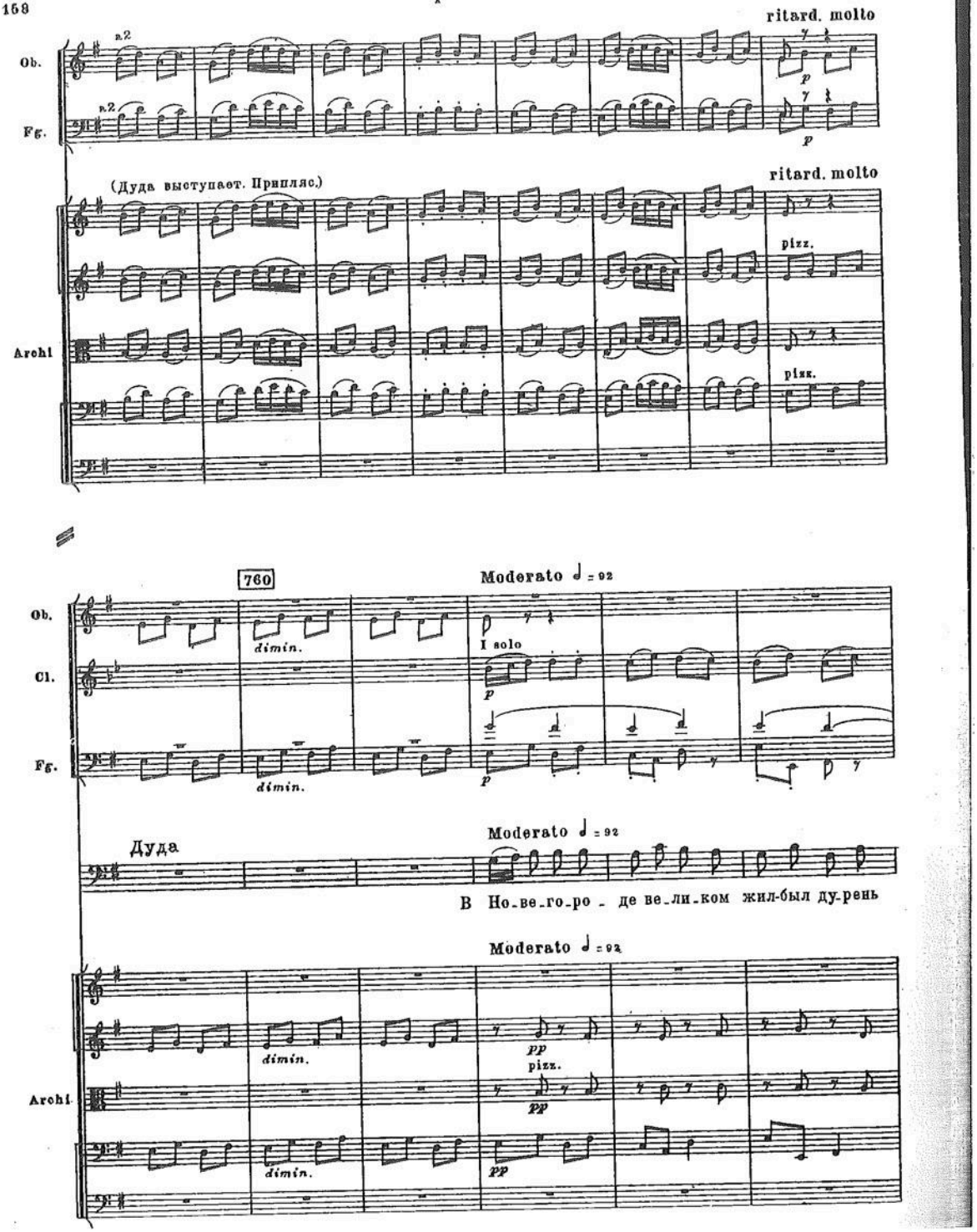
Sadko, Liubava, the *skomorokhi* – joins the chorus leading up to the finale, they correspondingly join in the 2/4 meter. Each of the narrative voices has abandoned their various metrical particularities and been assimilated into the chorus. The resolution of the narrative conflict results in all of the characters occupying the same temporal space. Sadko has returned to Novgorod and been reunited with Liubava, the merchants are appeased by the creation of the Volkhov River, and the Sea King has been vanquished. In turn, the narrative divisions within the plot, i.e. between Sadko and the merchants, Sadko and Liubava, and the undersea and surface worlds, have been resolved.

4.1. Infantilizing the hero

Thus it is a consistent feature throughout the opera that the different narrators are designated separate metrical domains until they join the 2/4 chorus in the finale. The four principle narrative voices are delineated according to metrical criteria. The temporal space that each of the narrators occupies reflects their specific narrative functions. Nezhata and Sadko, both bardic narrators, are delegated 3/2 and 6/4 meters. These meters accommodate the expansive lengths of historical time that are narrated by the *byliny*. In reciting their heroic tales of old, or, in Sadko's case, his own heroic tale, both bards project narrative events into the future of the *fabula*. The chorus of townspeople, who are characterized by their 11/4 meter in the first tableau, appear to constitute the present tense of the operatic *siuzhet*. The *skomorokhi*, however, function to narrate the past in their 2/4 allegro parts. Their *byliny* are of a different sort than Sadko and Nezhata's. The time frame of the past that they narrate is the *immediate* past, which is contrasted with the remote, heroic past of Nezhata's "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich." Their *byliny* serve to reflect upon the previous events in the *siuzhet* and cast them in a humorous light.

The *byliny* of Nezhata and Sadko and the *skomorokhi* are similar, however, in that they are all sung diegetically. Each of the narrators in the first tableau sings diegetic songs at the behest of the townspeople. Sadko's *bylina* sparks conflict by not serving the purpose intended by the crowd (which was to sing the praises of Novgorod; he sings of his own mercantile ambitions instead), while the *byliny* of Nezhata and the *skomorokhi* appease the crowd. The *skomorokhi* attempt to make light of the tense exchange between Sadko and the merchants by narrating the story, which has occurred only minutes before in the *siuzhet*, as a comic foible.

The recitation of the *bylina* by the *skomorokhi* is both musically and narratively contrasted with the recitations of Nezhata and Sadko. The text of the diegetic song of the *skomorokhi* is organized into verses varying between 4, 6, and 8 syllables. The syllables are multiples of the two quarter notes that make up each 2/4 measure of the song. The declamation of the verses is primarily syllabic, with only a few melismas interspersed. Duda's lines are predominantly made up of four eighth notes which each span a single syllable of text. The first six lines of Duda's part is organized into a period of five antecedent and consequent phrases in which the antecedent and consequent each span a single measure (see measures 762-771 in the example below). The two antecedent and consequent phrases at the end of the period are nearly identical; the only variation is in each antecedent phrase. The song lyric repeats the sixth line of the text in both of the concluding phrases. In measure 768, the antecedent phrase begins on a G natural eighth note and proceeds to a sixteenth note melisma, raising the G natural to a B natural. The consequent phrase begins on E natural and raises to F sharp. The next antecedent phrase, in measure 770, likewise begins on G natural and then raises to B; however, the sixteenth note melisma occurs on the first beat instead of the second. The consequent phrase is the same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Ob.
Fg.
a2
(Дуда выступает. Припляс.)
Archi
pizz.
arco
760
Moderato ♩ = 92
dimin.
I solo
Cl.
Дуда
В Но-ве-го-ро- де ве-ли-ком жил-был ду-рень
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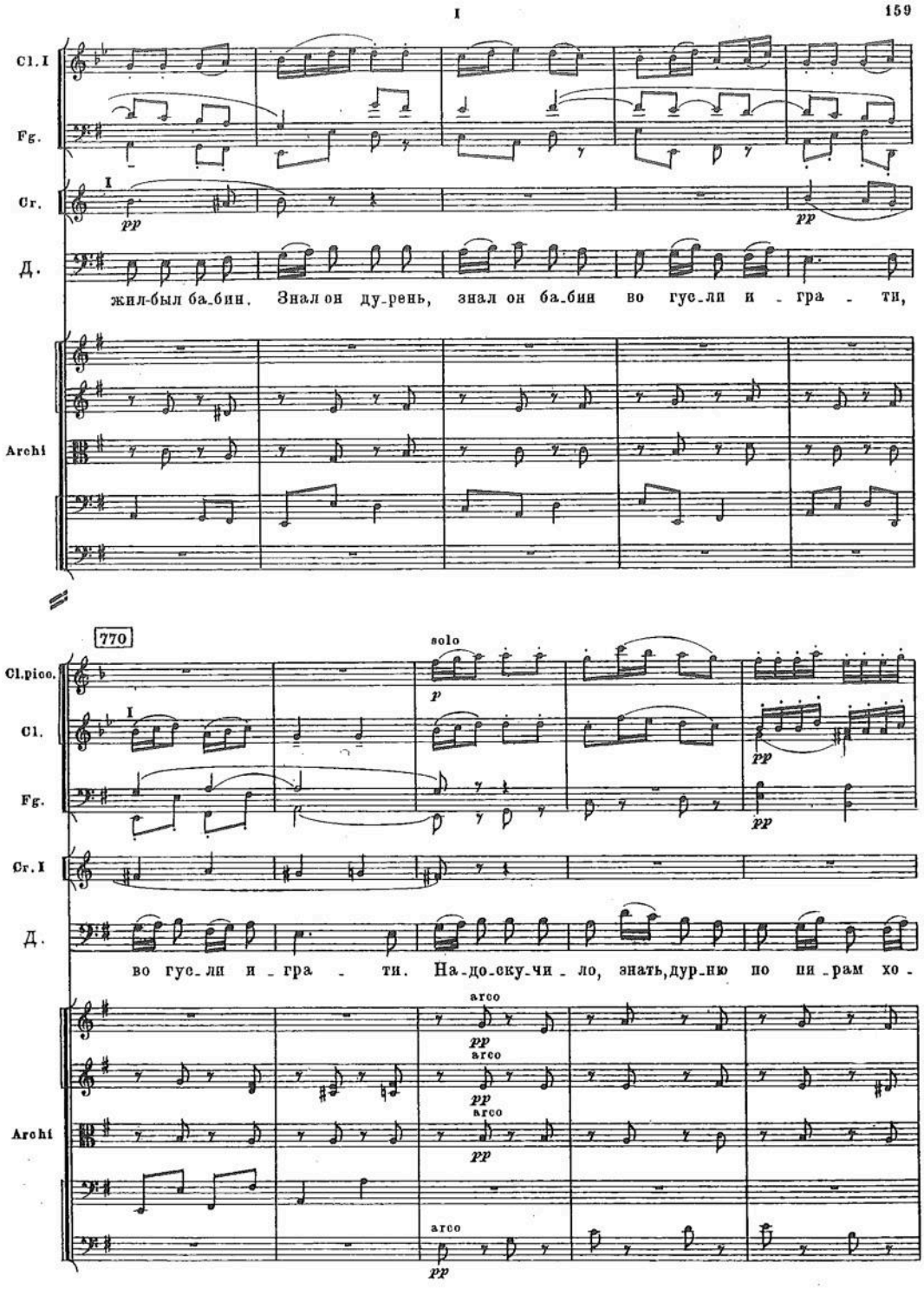
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rhythm as the previous consequent phrase (a dotted quarter note and an eighth note), though it stays on E natural instead of raising to F sharp.

In other words, the phrase structure of this opening section is remarkably schematic. Along with its minimal variation, the melodic line has a relatively curtailed trajectory, spanning from E natural to C natural. The limited contour of the melody, along with the syllabic declamation of the text, gives the song somewhat of a nursery rhyme-like quality. The sparse texture of this section reinforces its contrast to the rest of the tableau. The melodic structure here appears to reflect the fact that the *skomorokhi*, while a class of professional singers, were not virtuosi. In contrast to Nezhata and Sadko, whose melodic parts are not necessarily virtuosic, though more complex than those of Duda, the *skomorokhi* sing in a demotic idiom that is remarkably accessible. The repetition of the melodic lines has an incantatory quality, as if reflecting the *skomorokhi*'s role in ritual celebrations and folk festival rites. The repeated sequences of syllabically declaimed eighth notes has an almost entrancing effect. The chant-like declamation of the song accentuates the fact that the other *skomorokhi* are dancing and merrymaking during the song. The propulsive quality of the melodic line reinforces the significant amount of stage movement that is going on during the vocal number.

The forward motion of the melodic line is propelled by suspensions that occur on strong beats and resolve on weak beats. In measure 763, the consequent phrase ends with the melody descending a full step from B natural to A natural. The B natural occurs on the strong beat with the accompaniment providing a dyad (D natural and F sharp), suggesting a D major chord (the flat seventh chord; the tonic chord here is E minor). The suspended effect of the B natural occurring on the strong beat and resolving to the A natural on a weak beat seems to lead the vocal line into the next antecedent and consequent phrase. The suspension occurs again in the

repetition of this consequent phrase four measures later. The brief suspensions seem to propel the vocal line forward, as if accentuating and prolonging the dancing and merrymaking occurring onstage.

4.2. Retrospective diegesis

The demotic, almost chant-like idiom of Duda's aria gives insight into the narrative function of the *skomorokhi*. In a similar manner as Nezhata's opening aria, the *skomorokhi* are invited to sing by the town elders. Also like Nezhata, the *skomorokhi* must correspondingly sing *for them*. Their purpose is to refract the crowd's perspective on the events that have just transpired in the narrative. They attempt to encapsulate the townspeople's viewpoint while simultaneously presenting the preceding narrative events in a humorous light. Duda's song in essence narrates Sadko's exclusion from the group to the townspeople who have just excluded him. The *skomorokhi* function to solidify the collective opinion by making Sadko the object of ridicule and critique. Following Sadko's singing of his subjective fantasies of mercantile success, the *skomorokhi* objectify him by provoking the crowd's laughter at the far-fetched nature of his dream. Though the townspeople have already collectively banished Sadko and mocked his ambition, the diegetic song of the *skomorokhi* adds another layer of ridicule to Sadko's pleas in his aria. Duda's song allows the crowd to rally around the opinion that they have already formed of Sadko. With the lowly town minstrels calling Sadko a fool, his status is relegated even lower than them. The nursery rhyme-like quality of Duda's song seems to characterize Sadko's mercantile ambitions as infantile. Sadko is ousted by the townspeople, but the *skomorokhi* turn him into the laughing stock of the town, accentuating and reinforcing the public opinion of him.

The text of Duda's aria begins by positioning Sadko as a character in a fairy tale. Much as in Nezhata's diegetic song, Sadko is not specifically referred to. It quickly becomes apparent, however, that the "fool" (*duren'*) and "simpleton" (*babin*) is in fact Sadko:

> In great Novgorod,
> Once upon a time there was a fool,
> Once upon a time there was a simpleton.
> This fool knew,
> This simpleton knew,
> How to play the *gusli*.[16]

The fact that the character referenced here is a *gusliar'* clearly points to Sadko. It could, on the one hand, point to Nezhata, who is also a *gusliar'*; however, the fact that Sadko has just been lambasted by the Novgorodian people strongly suggests that the "fool" is Sadko. The text opens with the familiar fairy-tale topos of "Once upon a time…" (*Zhil byl*...). The demotic, almost child-like elements of the music thus reinforce the fairy-tale content of the text. In effect, another folk tale about Sadko has commenced; however, not in the heroic epos of Nezhata's "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich," but in the genre of a *skazka*, or fairy tale. Here Sadko is cast as a hopeless fool, a simpleton in a fairy tale.

Duda's aria constitutes a recapitulation of the narrative events that have just occurred:

> The fool was tired of going to feasts,
> The fool got the idea,
> The simpleton got the idea,
> Got the idea to trade.
> The fool started to boast
> That he would buy up all the wares,
> The bad and the good.
> But the fool has nothing in his wallet,
> Not even a single bit of money,
> Not the slightest kopeck.
> For this, the fool enraged
> The merchants, began to

[16] Ibid., p. 77.

Reproach them, curse them,
Teach them some sense.[17]

Thus while Nezhata and Sadko foretell and project the narrative events related to the Sadko, Duda (and later Sopel') recapitulate Sadko's story. Recalling chapter 1, it is precisely because of this recapitulation that the sections featuring the *skomorokhi* were deemed static by Tsukkerman and other commentators. The diegetic song of the *skomorokhi* does not necessarily further the plot in any significant way; rather, it recounts narrative events that have just occurred in the course of the *siuzhet*. It appears to play an ornamental role, functioning as an exhibition of the playful antics and the storytelling ethos of the *skomorokhi*. The unfolding of the drama and the development of the narrative plot have been momentarily paused in order to portray a scene of folkloric merrymaking. In an even greater sense than the diegetic music of Nezhata and Sadko, the parts of the *skomorokhi* appear to be inserted as museum displays of bylinic folkways and bygone traditions. They have a wistful quality, as if the audience is to admire them as quaint asides from the unfolding of the drama.

Sopel' resumes the narrative where Duda left off, describing Sadko's ridicule by the merchants, his banishment from the feast, and his departure to Lake Ilmen to sing in isolation. At the conclusion of Sopel's part, the narrative voice changes to the second person:

Will you not go, fool,
To Lake Ilmen to sit
To stare into the water,
To sing songs to the fish?
Should you, fool,
Start catching
Golden fish,
To get some money?[18]

[17] Ibid., pp. 77-78.

[18] Ibid., pp. 78-79.

At this point, Sopel's narrative begins to display an element of foreshadowing. The golden fish, which is presented here as a symbol of the futility of Sadko's plight, is precisely what grants him admittance to the merchant fraternity in tableau 4. Sopel's switch to a second-person narrative voice, in one sense, heightens the sense of ridicule that the song conveys. As the mockery of Sadko switches from a third-person to a second-person narrative voice, the function of the narration correspondingly changes. Suddenly Sopel's narrative begins to figure within the *fabula* and to project the ensuing part of the *siuzhet*. In the case of the Nezhata and Sadko's songs, as well as those of the *skomorokhi*, the narrative events of the *fabula* are communicated exclusively through diegetic music. While the chorus of townspeople constitute the real time of the operatic *siuzhet*, the diegetic music of the principle narrators constitutes the *fabula*. These bylinic fictive worlds are interspersed, much like the temporal spaces that the principle narrators occupy are delineated by different meters. Sopel's image of the golden fish simultaneously encapsulates the grandiosity and unattainability of Sadko's claims, and foreshadows the realization of his dream of entering the merchant class.

5.1. Objective amusement

The *skomorokhi*'s portrayal of Sadko as a fairy-tale simpleton contains a moralistic element. The moralistic element is in keeping with the fact that fairy tales generally contain an allegorical message. Duda and Sopel' cast Sadko as a villain, an outsider who is also a pretender to elite status. Their narrative take on Sadko exemplifies *what not to do*, i.e. it reifies the hierarchy of Novgorod's powerful elite by isolating and ousting him. Sadko's boasting and pretensions to enter the ranks of the elite is seen as overstepping the bounds of his social status. He is then lampooned by the lowest stratum of society, as if to solidify his exclusion. By making

Sadko the object of the town's ridicule, the *skomorokhi* have concomitantly created a collective moral perspective on him. Whereas Nezhata's "*Bylina* of Volkh Vseslav'evich" exemplifies a positive hero, the *skomorokhi*'s diegetic song turns Sadko into an antihero, a character who is antithetical to the established value system and status quo of Novgorod. They thus concretize the main narrative conflict of the opera, which is essentially a status-related struggle.

Despite their ancillarity to the overarching plot, the *skomorokhi* are integral as narrators. Duda and Sopel' refract narrative events in a more significant sense than they generate them. They are commentators on the narrative, not instigators of the narrative events. Throughout the opera, they predominantly narrate in the third person; in their first diegetic song, Sadko is of course not named, but is referred to as the "fool" or "simpleton." Like Nezhata, the *skomorokhi* stand aside from the respectable guests at the feast, and only occupy the foreground upon request. They function to observe the narrative events and refract them in a humorous light for the onstage characters as well as the audience. Their diegetic songs present the perspective of bystanders to the narrative events, and outsiders to the social milieu portrayed in the opera.

The *skomorokhi* would accordingly be placed on the objective side of Stilwell's subjective/objective axis of diegetic music. They remain detached from the narrative proceedings, only entering when called upon, and never directly interacting with any of the other characters. Sadko's songs are clearly related from his point of view; his subjective "I" is present, and his songs are about his wishes and adventures. In his first aria, it is understood that he is baring his inner self for all, audience and other characters alike, to hear. Nezhata and the *skomorokhi* comprise the objective axis. Nezhata, as discussed in chapter 2, only serves as the mouthpiece of other characters in the opera, notably the townspeople. His songs relate "the wisdom of the ages;" they formulate a sense of Novgorodian identity and allow the crowd of

townspeople to cohere as a group. The *skomorokhi* recapitulate the crowd's opinion and offer the townspeople an objectivized version of their own reactions that brings them amusement. Their songs in a sense form a consolidated platform of the townspeople's take on what occurs in the narrative. The songs of the *skomorokhi* constitute the crowd's reaction narrated back to them.

The *skomorokhi* function to bolster the townspeople's pride in their own opinion; their songs objectify the object of their scorn and derision (Sadko) and permit them to laugh *through* the *skomorokhi at* Sadko. Though the audience and the onstage characters are meant to laugh at their diegetic songs and dances, the laughter is understood as being directed at Sadko, not at the *skomorokhi* themselves. The songs are prismatic, in that they reflect a general, "objective" opinion back onto the only subjectivity (Sadko's) that is represented in the narrative. The fact that the songs place Sadko as the object of their derision, however, places a dividing line between the crowd represented in the narrative and the audience. The audience's empathy is unquestionably with Sadko. The *skomorokhi*'s songs therefore constitute a juncture between the intrinsic audience of the diegetic song (i.e. the characters onstage) and the extrinsic audience (i.e. the listeners). The extrinsic audience is meant to laugh at the song, and thus at Sadko; however, the audience is nonetheless meant to identify with him. In this sense the audience is divested of the scorn and ridicule for Sadko on the part of the townspeople, and experiences the narrative of the *skomorokhi* from a more dispassionate angle. This is one of the senses in which the *skomorokhi*'s diegetic songs carry the quality of an antiquarian exhibition. They present to the audience a suspension in the dramatic plot, as well as a reprieve from its empathetic affiliation with Sadko. The comic relief that the *skomorokhi* provide not only relieves the audience from the tension within the plot, but also of its investment in Sadko's story. It allows them to laugh at

Sadko through the *skomorokhi*, although Sadko is the object of their affection. Thus the objectivity of the *skomorokhi*'s narrative voice reflects not only their lack of direct involvement in the plot, but Duda and Sopel's ability to separate the audience from its emotive alliance with Sadko as well.

5.2. "The curved mirror"

It is Sadko's lowly status as a mere *gusliar'* that the *skomorokhi* lampoon. While they poke fun at him for his outlandish pretensions to wealth and mercantile success, the focus of their humorous critique is his social status:

> The fool started to boast
> That he would buy up all the wares,
> The bad and the good.
> But the fool has nothing in his wallet,
> Not even a single bit of money,
> Not the slightest kopeck.[19]

In calling Sadko's poverty to the minds of the townspeople, Sopel' restores discursive control to the townspeople. He reminds them of their superior social standing and incites collective ridicule of Sadko's inferior status. The diegetic song in a sense restores discursive order after Sadko's disruption of the status quo. In fact throughout the opera the *skomorokhi* are a source of playful critique that serves to reinforce the status quo. Asaf'ev explains that the *skomorokhi* constituted

> …an extremely important "critical" element in the structure of ordinary life and the state of Ancient Rus. It is the curved mirror, the satire of social relations, a kind of public opinion, a sort of press. They were a bribable folk, holding their noses to the wind, looking out for the predominant influence of one or another political party or individual agent; nevertheless, not even the least shift of the barometer in the realms of politics, religion, and morality could elude their vigilant eye, while with their keenly attentive

[19] Ibid., p. 77.

> language, they remarked on every life disturbance, giving vivid expression to everything of significance.[20]

Asaf'ev's remark about the *skomorokhi*'s satire of social relations seems particularly appropriate with regard to Duda and Sopel's first aria. Their performances verge on the burlesque in their satirical exaggeration of Sadko's foibles and social blunders. In contrast to Nezhata, the *skomorokhi* remain gleefully unaffiliated with any of the narrative voices. Their narrative alliance exists solely among themselves. Their role is to subject any pretensions of supremacy to amusing critique.

The *skomorokhi* thus constitute an independent source of critique that is not beholden to the elite stratum of Novgorodian society. It should be recalled here that the *skomorokhi* were considered to be of non-Russian origin. Therefore their critique of Sadko in tableau 1, and, in tableau 4, of the pilgrims, emanates from the perspective of outliers to the Novgorodian social milieu. Similar to Nezhata and Sadko, the *skomorokhi* are not native to Novgorod. Thus their narration of the quotidian events of Novgorodian life does not promote or bolster any of the other narrative voices, but instead undermines each of them selectively. Their narrative voice forms a frame much as Nezhata's does, in that they are able to comment on the narrative proceedings from a disengaged perspective.

The diegetic song of the *skomorokhi* at the beginning of tableau 4 illustrates their independence from other narrators' spheres of influence. The tableau opens with a scene featuring a group of wandering pilgrims, who sing a *bylina*-esque tale of falsehood and truth personified as two warring beasts. The townspeople recognize this tale as being from the *Dove*

[20] B. V. Asaf'ev, "The Problem of a City Made Visible," in *Symphonic Etudes*, ed. and trans. by David Haas (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008), p. 100.

Book (*Golubinaia kniga*), which is listed in Rimsky-Korsakov's introduction to the score as one of his textual sources for the opera. Duda then interjects with

> You, Novgorodian merchants
> And visiting merchants!
> Why bother about falsehood and truth?
> Better to hear about spring hops.[21]

Duda then proceeds to sing in praise of drunkenness and merriment. The sense of the song is that the influence of hops overwhelms the dominance of other systems of authority:

> Hops go strolling along the outcrop,
> And spring hops boast of themselves:
> There is nothing better than I,
> There is nothing more powerful than I.
> […]
> They all know me, little hops,
> Boyars and princes love and respect me,
> Merchants praise and honor me.
> Without little hops no wedding can be celebrated;
> In hops they fight, in hops they live in harmony.[22]

The merchant elders throughout this first part of the tableau are preoccupied with how to restore order after Sadko's impudent song challenging their authority in tableau 1. The unaffiliated nature of the *skomorokhi*'s narrative voice is demonstrated by their flippancy toward established authority. Duda and Sopel's avowal of the power of hops relativizes the political and social order. Hops, in other words, embody their form of social critique; Duda and Sopel' intoxicate the crowd with laughter directed toward the social structure itself. The *skomorokhi* serve to entertain the entire populace; by their dancing and singing they lead the townspeople to a kind of collective intoxication, in which all strata of society participate.

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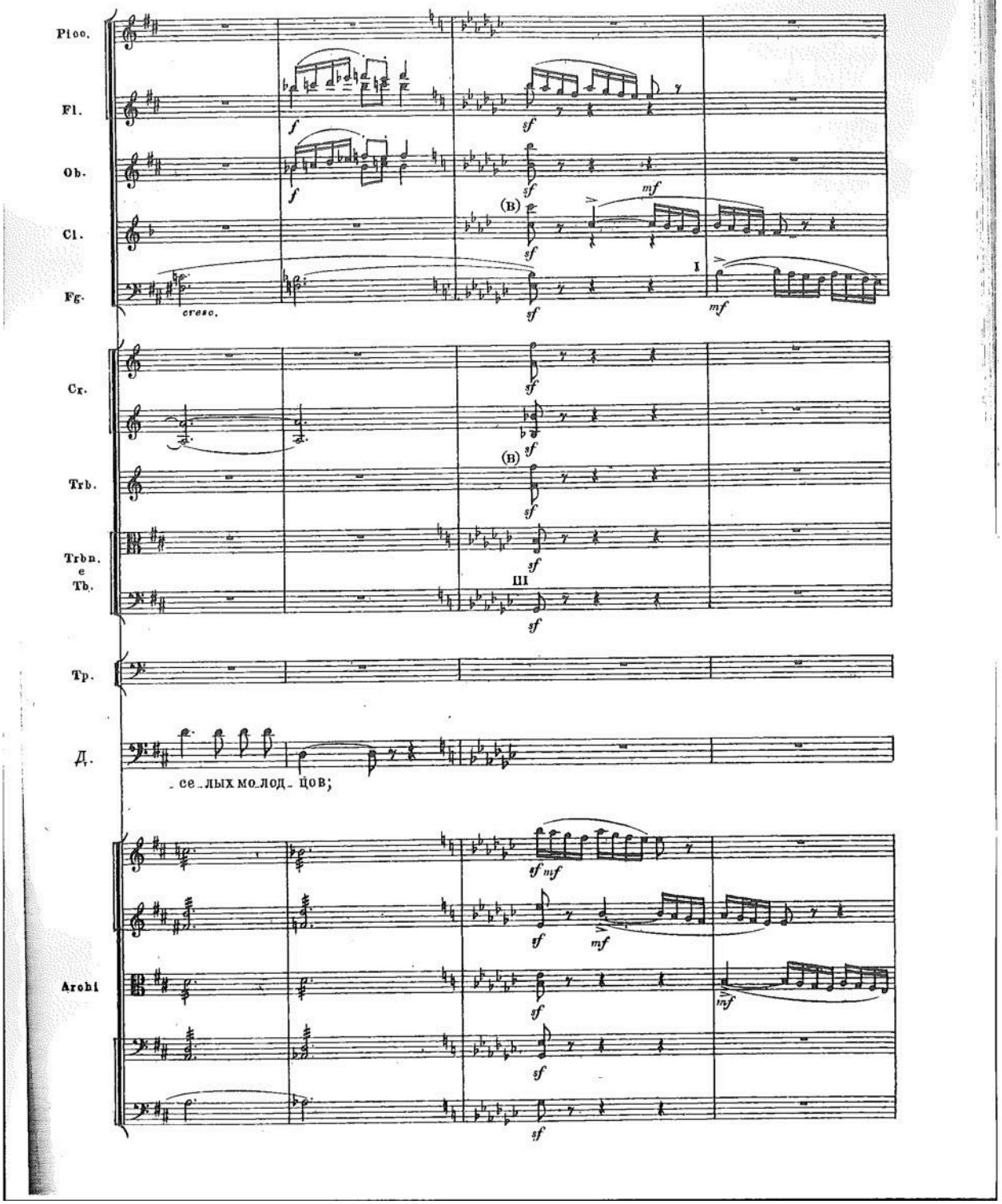
[21] N. A. Rimsky-Korsakov, *Sadko: opera-bylina v 7 kartinakh*, p. 100.

[22] Ibid., p. 100-101.

Throughout Duda's diegetic song, a descending sixteenth-note figure is repeated which seems to reinforce the leveling of political authority that the song narrates. In measures 3-4 on page 45 of the example below, the figure begins in the flutes and the high strings, descends to the clarinet and middle-register strings, and is repeated again by the bassoons and lower strings. Each descent spans a fourth. In measures 220-221, the figure is repeated, beginning a fourth higher than previously, and descends once again from the upper registers of the orchestra to the lower. This repeated figure occurs immediately preceding and following Duda's urging of the merchants that they should "…not listen to the glum old men."[23] The orchestra pauses for two measures while Duda sings the line, as if to accentuate the starkness of his claim. The figure adds a sense of heightened tension to Duda's undermining of the religious authority of the pilgrims and their paraphrases from the *Dove Book*. Much as the *skomorokhi* function, as Asaf'ev notes, as a "curved mirror" for the state of social and political relations, the figure is mirrored throughout different sections of the orchestra. Duda's amusing critique of the religious and political powers that be brings them down to a baseline level in a similar way to which the figure descends from the upper to the lower registers. The figure seems to encapsulate his avowal of hops as the supreme authority; the top-down hierarchy of Novgorod's power structure plummets within the span of two measures.

Given the *skomorokhi*'s satirical eye toward social, political and religious matters, they function as both a source of amusement and social critique. Their narrative voice operates from the standpoint of ridiculing any pretensions to supremacy. Rather than engage with the social and political order, or attempt to affect the narrative events, they comment bemusedly on them from the periphery. Dichotomies of the false and the true, the weak and the powerful, are

[23] Ibid., p. 104.


Ploo.
Fl.
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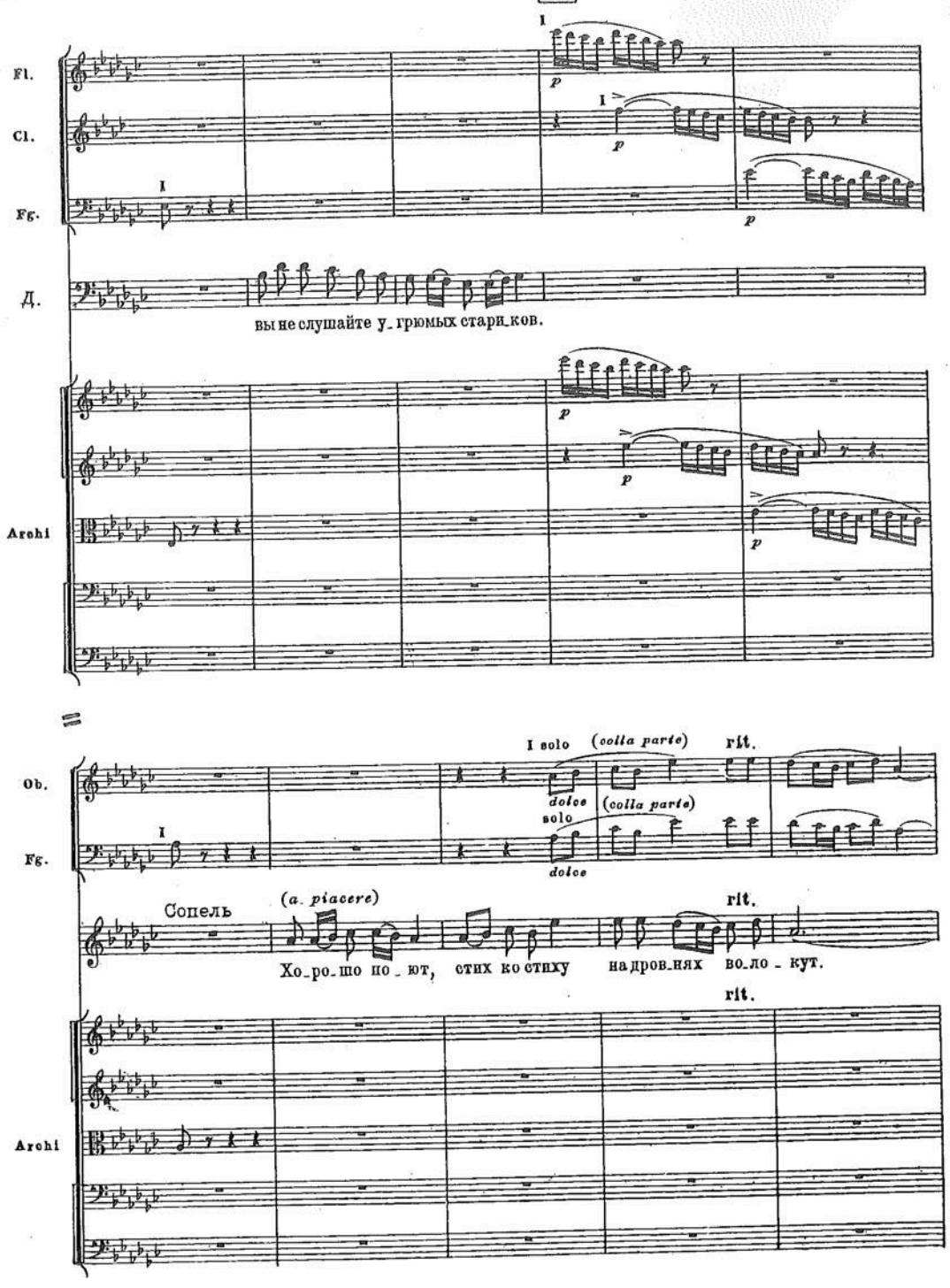
Fl.
Cl.
Fg.
Д.
вы не слушайте у_грюмых стари_ков.
Archi
Ob.
Fg.
I solo (colla parte) rit.
dolce
solo
(colla parte)
dolce
Сопель
(a. piacere)
rit.
Хо_ро_шо по_ют, стих ко стиху на дров_нях во_ло_кут.
rit.
Archi

insignificant compared to the sway of drunkenness and merriment over the entire social structure. Duda and Sopel' present a disengaged perspective on the narrative events that places laughter and amusement above their reliability as narrators. In their avowal of ridicule as a form of social critique, they constitute a sphere of narrative influence that stands independent of the other principle narrators, while also selectively affiliating themselves with them (as in the case of their restoration of the status quo to the townspeople in tableau 1). They are, as Asaf'ev states, "a kind of public opinion"—a reflexive barometer of the narrative events that always sees them in a humorous and playful light.

Conclusion

The preceding chapters were almost exclusively dedicated to the application of narratological analysis to *Sadko*. In bringing the discussion to a close, it must be acknowledged that the opera presents a plentitude of avenues for continued research that fall outside of, but are not unrelated to, the specific narratological questions that have been posed. The first of these avenues is the opera's creation of a world unto itself, with idiosyncratic parameters of the numinous and the real, the heroic and the mundane, and the perceived and the actual.[1] The ontological world of the piece is in a sense self-contained—a stylized snapshot of Russian historical reality. Within its bounds, however, are fantastical entities that selectively intervene upon the quotidian realm and assert their dominion over the progression of the narrative. The presence of multiple narrators creates heteroglossic views on a *sui generis*, folklorically stylized synoptic reality. In effect, the piece creates a sense of objectivity through the inclusion of an array of subjectivities. There is a singular folkloric world in *Sadko* that multiple narrators merely cast different lights upon. The sense of actuality in the narrative extends beyond perception, alluding to an unambiguous reality that the various narrators refract in distinctive ways. The analysis of musical domains such as harmony, metrical/rhythmic organization, and orchestration are central to the future exploration of this process of word-building.

The introduction suggested that Rimsky-Korsakov's treatment of folk musical and textual material was, on the one hand, citational, in that the piece is a veritable archive of folk realia

[1] Rimsky-Korsakov's construction of a world unto itself figures within the Wagnerian elements of the opera's design. For a discussion of Wagner's "Gesamtkunstwelt," see Raymond Knapp, "'Selbst dann bin ich die Welt': On the Subjective-Musical Basis of Wagner's Gesamtkunstwelt," *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Fall 2005), pp. 142-160.

culled from diverse sources. The composer's creation of a folk aesthetic is, on the other hand, a product of the approach to folkloric recreation in the second half of the nineteenth century, which, as Gozenpud points out, strove not only to cite folk material, but also to recreate the atmosphere in which the folk material was initially devised.[2] The citationality of *Sadko* reflects a wide array of cultural urgencies in the nineteenth century, including the reimagination of the medieval period, the preoccupation with romantic fragments, and the development of professional philology. Rimsky-Korsakov's construction of a folkloric world in this sense demonstrates a striking resemblance to the Wagnerian project. The worlding effect of *Sadko* is, in an important sense, the product of Rimsky-Korsakov's assuming of a bardic viewpoint. His emulation of bardic narrative style and form likewise involves his approximation of the worldview from which the medieval Russian bards narrated their historical reality. The world that the opera creates is both constituted by and perceived through the lens of bardic narration. As a result, the piece's worlding effect extends to the stylized bylinic language of the characters as well as their discursive practices, which rely on diegetic music as the most consequential form of utterance. What constitutes narrative actuality in the world of *Sadko* is a product of the bardic mentality and its construal of social and historical reality.

Much interpretive significance has been ascribed in the preceding pages to Asaf'ev's perception of a bardic presence within the narrative fabric of the opera that remains unseen. Chapter 1 proposed the notion that this impression of a bard behind the scenes is attributable to Rimsky-Korsakov's synthesizing of different bylinic narratives with folkloric elements from other sources in order to create more synoptic and totalized folkloric world. In another sense,

[2] A. Gozenpud, *N. Rimsky-Korsakov: Temy i idei ego opernogo tvorchestva* [Rimsky-Korsakov: Themes and Ideas of his Operatic Works] (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe muzykal'noe izdatel'stvo, 1957), p. 40.

however, the dual-world ontology of the opera, which is delimited by sea and land, noumenal and phenomenal, and fantasy and reality, offers another explanation. Chapter 3 postulated that the noumenal world in the opera is attuned to Sadko's narrative, and intervenes at opportune moments, as if characters from the numinous realm are following the story from an undisclosed location. To an extent, the numinous realm can then be construed an extension of Sadko's solipsistic heroism; however, in another sense, these noumenal entities such as the Sea King, Volkhova, and the saintly apparition constitute these unseen narrative presences that Asaf'ev speaks of. The foremost of these otherworldly narrators generating the tale from the *au-delà* is the saintly apparition. It is he, after all, who in effect synthesizes (or, perhaps permanently separates) the dual worlds of the opera's ontological framework at its conclusion, declaring an end to the reign of the Sea King and commanding Sadko to devote his songs to the benefit of Novgorod. The saintly apparition asserts both discursive control over the course of narrative events like Sadko, and providential dominion over the world of the opera. The overarching narrator is, in other words, an otherworldly narrator who not only shapes the narrative events, but also brings the drama to a close with a *deus ex machina*.

The coexistence of Christianity and paganism in the piece plays into one of the recurring themes of Rimsky-Korsakov's operas: their pantheistic religiosity. Asaf'ev views Sadko as a transitional point between the foregrounded pantheism of *Mlada* and the unequivocal Christianity of *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh*:

> *Sadko* serves as a link between the pagan and Christian operas of Rimsky-Korsakov. The Christian element is still insufficiently evidenced in the *bylina*, but by its own token provides extremely important effects of contrast, which take on a more developed form in *Kitezh*.[3]

[3] B. V. Asaf'ev, *Rimskii-Korsakov: Opyt kharakteristiki* [Rimsky-Korsakov: An Attempt at Characterization] (St. Petersburg; Berlin: Svietozar', 1923), p. 24.

Christianity's eventual triumph in *Sadko* is *de rigueur* for imperial Russia in the period of the piece's composition; however, Rimsky-Korsakov continually foregrounds this amalgamation of pagan and Christian worldviews as if to accentuate its quintessential Russianness. As discussed in the introduction, the composer viewed *dvoeverie*, or "dual belief," as a constitutive aspect of the Russian national character. His negotiation of animistic and Christian worldviews highlights a duality within a singular and particularly Russian worldview. In filing religious viewpoints under a broader category of national characteristics, Rimsky-Korsakov suggests that the pagan and the Christian appertain to a larger superstructure, that of national self-identification. Christian pantheism, in other words, is built into the worldview of the bards. The recreation of bardic narrative perspectives in turn fuses pagan and Christian elements as extensions of the quotidian reality of the world of the opera. One theme to account for in a continuation of the narratological reading of *Sadko* is thus the *dvoeverie* of the bardic narrators, and how it figures in the construction of the opera's folkloric world. Rimsky-Korsakov's level of attentiveness to frameworks for religious thought can be productively counterposed with Richard Taruskin's characterization of the composer as a Victorian rationalist. The exploration of the religious mentality that Rimsky-Korsakov encapsulates in *Sadko* has the potential to present the composer's engagement with currents in late nineteenth-century intellectual history in an entirely new light.

Both the pantheistic element of *Sadko* and its use of *skaz* as a technique of characterization is reminiscent of Gogol's take on the East Slavic folk mentality. Rimsky-Korsakov clearly drew inspiration from *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka* (*Vechera na khutore bliz Dikanki*) for his recreation of *skaz* narration and a syncretistic religious stance. The introduction pointed to Gogol as an important predecessor to Rimsky-Korsakov's construal of a

folkloric worldview in his operas. As his numerous settings of Gogol's work attest, Rimsky-Korsakov often looked to the prosaist as a source of inspiration for folk atmospherics. In addition to his early Gogolian adaptations, the late operas such as *Sadko* and *Kashchei the Deathless* likewise evidence Gogolian perspectives on folk culture. The Gogolian strain in the narrative framework, humoristic disposition, and fantastical elements of *Sadko* remains a topic for further investigation.

Much as Gogol occupies an intermediary space between Realism and fantasy, the grotesque, and the comic, *Sadko* resides in a similarly indeterminate domain between Realism and Modernism. The folkloric and fantastical thematics of the opera clearly represent a measure of distance between Rimsky-Korsakov's work and that of his mentor Musorgsky. In contrast to Musorgsky's Realist construal of Russian historical reality, Rimsky-Korsakov's representation of Russian history creates *in situ* perspectives of the depicted historical moment. Rimsky-Korsakov attempts to eliminate retrospectivity and historical reevaluation, opting instead for antiquarian recreations of both the period in question, and the epistemological framework within which the narrative events might initially have been perceived.

As a result, the representations of Russian national identity in Musorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov are markedly delineated. While both composers' thematics attempt to recreate a pre-Westernized form of Russian national consciousness, Musorgsky introduces an element of didacticism that is less pronounced in Rimsky-Korsakov. The latter urges his audience to arrive at a vision of Russian nationality through inductive reasoning in *Sadko*. The opera's episodic structural layout perhaps serves as the clearest example—rather than a distinct and unambiguous vision communicated by an overarching narrator, *Sadko* highlights the seams of its construction, and leaves the resolution of its plot to a presence outside of the narrative frame (the saintly

apparition). Instead of imposing an unambiguous significance to the work, Rimsky-Korsakov relies on his audience's ability both to self-identify with the characters and to recognize the national particularity of the folkloric setting. Clearly the figure of Sadko is meant to serve as the main source of national self-identification for its Russian audiences; however, Nezhata, the *skomorokhi*, and the townspeople serve a similar purpose. The audience is left to devote its attention to what it pleases, rather than being guided by an overarching narrative presence. The bard behind the scenes in the opera is less a Realist omniscient narrator in the manner of Tolstoy than an antiquarian archivist, a creator of folk tableaux.

Gogol can be fashioned into the bridge that carries both literary and musical culture from Realism to Modernism. Much in the way that Gogol conditioned Rimsky-Korsakov's treatment of folk material, turning it toward the fantastical and the comic, his work also influenced the development of Russian Symbolist prose in works such as Andrei Bely's *Silver Dove*. Rimsky-Korsakov's structural reliance on tableaux points forward to a Modernist preoccupation with ornament and de-centralized narratives. His idiom for depicting the fantastical and otherworldly realms likewise antedates the octatonic language that would become a defining characteristic of Russian Modernist music. In comparison with later developments such as Symbolism, however, Rimsky-Korsakov's level of tolerance for metaphysical topoi seems purposely bound, if not decidedly restrained. He understands metaphysicality and pantheism empirically as elements of folk culture, which constitute something essential about the national character.

Olga Haldey places the aesthetics of Savva Mamontov's Private Opera Company, which premiered *Sadko* in 1897, in a similar space between Realism and Modernism.[4] The major

[4] Olga Haldey, *Mamontov's Private Opera: The Search for Modernism in Russian Theater* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010, pp. 15-35.

figures of the "Wanderers" (*peredvizhniki*), as well as those of early Modernist visual art and theater in Russia, were on staff at the Private Opera Company, and often collaborated on the same projects. At various times, painters such as Vrubel', Levitan, Repin, the Vasnetsov brothers, and Apollinarii worked on Private Opera productions. The Private Opera's connection with the colony at Abramtsevo offers insight into its première of *Sadko*. The artists at Abramtsevo were preoccupied with a similar sort of folkloric recreation as Rimsky-Korsakov. Given Rimsky-Korsakov's growing dissatisfaction with the productions of his operas by the Imperial Theaters, which as a rule featured classicized stage and costume design, the Private Opera offered a welcome recourse.[5] Every aspect of the original production of *Sadko*, from the backdrops and scenery to the costumes, was created at Abramtsevo in imitation of folk style. The Abramtsevo artists K. A. Korovin and S. V. Maliutin created the folk-inspired visual components. The Abramtsevo artists' folklorically themed stylizations act as predecessors to later currents in Russian Modernism such as Neo-Primitivism, which likewise centers on the reimagination of folk visual culture.

Preceding his affiliation with the colony at Abramtsevo, in 1876, Il'ia Repin painted *Sadko*, an image depicting Sadko's temptation by Volkhova on the sea bed. The painting offers an array of interpretive parallelisms and contrasts with Rimsky-Korsakov's opera. The painting depicts Sadko intently gazing upward at his wife while his temptress, Volkhova, passes before him escorted by a retinue of female figures. Sadko's focus is on his wife, who is presumably located in the upper world visible from beneath the sea. The juxtaposition of a quotidian reality

[5] Tsar Nikolai II personally rejected *Sadko* from being premiered by the Imperial Theater, calling for something "more cheerful" (*chut' poveselee*) instead. Brian Reeve, "Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's Use of the Byliny (Russian Oral Epic Narratives) in his Opera *Sadko*" (PhD dissertation, University of Nottingham, 2005), p. 133.

with a fantastical underwater realm has a clear analog in Rimsky-Korsakov's opera. Sadko's wife[6] occupies the darkest portion of the painting, perhaps suggesting that she is in fact a projection of the remote recesses of his consciousness. She is simultaneously the furthest figure from Sadko in the painting, and, as potentially an embodiment of his thoughts, the closest as well. The painting's sense of depth places her at a remove, but she can be construed as being the most immediate presence in that she is Sadko's focal point.

Despite the painting's depiction of a procession of undersea characters, there is curiously little movement to behold in the painting. Its stasis itself is arresting; nothing is moving and it looks as if nothing is going to move. The construction of the painting is slightly asymmetrical, with the majority of focal points located on the left half. Though asymmetricality would normally suggest movement or at least the potential for movement, the undersea scene gives off a sense of torpidity, as if motion of any sort would require laborious effort. The asymmetricality causes the eye to move, but there is no progression within the scene. It is a tableau; movement is possible, though progress is not.

It is as if the movement of Volkhova's procession has been halted by the presence of a foreign visitor to the undersea status quo. The two figures in the foreground who appear to be pulling Volkhova's carriage do not appear to be exerting themselves, and are instead peering quizzically at Sadko. Volkhova does not turn her head to look at Sadko; she instead faces straight ahead while she looks at Sadko askance. The faces discernible in the background view Sadko with expressions ranging from menacing disdain (the two to the right of Volkhova) to apprehensive surprise (the one on the left). This female figure to the left of Volkhova conveys a

[6] It will be recalled that her name in the opera, Liubava, is not evidenced in the bylinic sources. Repin would not have known her by this name; thus she will remain unnamed for the purposes of this discussion.

Il'ia Repin, *Sadko*, 1876, The Russian Museum, St. Petersburg.

sense that Sadko is an intruding presence in the underwater realm. In the world of mermaids, seaweed carriages, and underwater princesses, a figure from the upper world is a cause for alarm. Sadko appears unperturbed by his surroundings; his hands, which are at rest on his cloak, suggest a sense of contemplative calm. Perhaps only the fish and the bubbles in the foreground allude to the potential for movement in the still image. The human figures convey a supreme quiescence comparable to one's restricted auditory capabilities while underwater.

The painting, in a peculiar sense, seems mute in addition to static. None of the figures are in conversation, nor do they give the impression that conversing is necessary or even within the realm of possibility. In contrast to the opera, there is no interaction between the protagonists, nor perhaps even the potential for interaction, in Repin's depiction. The music of the scene is a looming undertone, an omnipresent absence of sonorousness. Whereas the undersea realm hosted Sadko's diegetic music followed by a prolonged balletic suite in Rimsky-Korsakov's opera, Repin's painting accentuates the impossibility of sound and movement.

The scene, which is replete with all manner of undersea realia and ornamental minutiae, is extraordinarily detailed. Like Rimsky-Korsakov, the painting is heading toward Modernism, but in exploratory gesture rather than prescient intent. In an important sense, both the painting and the opera foreground particularity and deemphasize universality. They prelude Modernist ornamentalism in their blurring of the realms of surface and depth. The painting has a shimmering surface that overwhelms the depth of perspective; in a similar manner, the opera exhibits a series of tableaux and multiple narrative voices rather than inner structural unity and an omniscient narrator. Gerald Abraham's description of the opera as "an affair of superimposed planes" is equally applicable to the painting:

> *Sadko* is, in a sense, an affair of superimposed planes, one background behind another. But the backgrounds are so brilliantly painted that perspective is destroyed and the

> significance of individual figures in the foreground diminishes to a vanishing point. And yet this very defect, as it apparently is, deepens the work's charm, underlining its resemblance to some archaic tapestry come to life.[7]

The center of the painting, where it is most intensely lit, is likewise where it exhibits what might be called the particulate sublime—the blurring of the image through an excess of imagerial elements. As in Abraham's description, the painting superimposes the real onto the fantastical, or the fantastical onto the real, such that both are rendered indistinguishable. The upper world and the undersea realm are integrated within one another so as to diminish the perception of surface and depth. They are merely "one background behind another."

In an odd way, Sadko does not appear to be a full participant in the scene that bears his name. He is standing just out of the light, suggesting an extrinsic quality to his presence in the underwater realm. He is positioned just out of the main frame, appearing as if he is imposed upon the background. Although all eyes in the picture are on him, his eyes are fixed upward at a figure that is out of the underwater space entirely. Sadko has an observational mien, not engaging directly with his immediate surroundings. In this sense, his presence in the painting is reminiscent of a narrator, a bard within the narrated scene. He is both central to the narrative events of the scene and observing them from afar. In this respect, Repin's painting is comparable to Sadko's narrative role in the opera. His narrative voice must encapsulate both subjectivity and objectivity in a singular viewpoint; he is, after all, both the hero and the teller of the tale. He both constitutes and figures within the narrative world that he creates, and that shapes him.

[7] Gerald Abraham, *Studies in Russian Music* (London: W. Reeves, 1935), p. 232.

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