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"Be Bored":
Reading a Mussorgsky Song

MICHAEL RUSS

"Be Bored" is the fourth number in Modest Mussorgsky's song cycle *Sunless* (*Bez Solntsa*, 1874). This cycle sets poems by the composer's newly found but already intimate younger friend Arseny Golenishchev-Kutuzov (1848–1913), with whom Mussorgsky shared rooms briefly in the winter of 1874–75 after the completion of *Sunless*.[1] The poems dwell on rejection in love and the loneliness that results; they are the work of an introverted poet who, unlike the composer, was too young to have been affected by the populist-realist aesthetic of the 1860s.

Mussorgsky chose six unpublished poems from his friend's notebooks and arranged them to form a loose narrative. In the first three songs, the rejected hero of the cycle is found in his room. After taking comfort in his familiar surroundings in the first song, he sings, in the second, of not being recognized in a crowd. Mussorgsky's settings in the first two songs are so brief that they are almost acts of compositional withdrawal. The texts are set syllabically to repeated rhythmic patterns; expression is created almost entirely through the twists and turns of the inventive harmonic language. In the third song, the hero lies awake at night, an image of his love appearing to him in the form of a shadow. This song is more extended, has a greater degree of internal contrast, and

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[1]The exact time when the two men shared rooms is a matter of some debate. See Alexandra Orlova, *Musorgsky Remembered*, trans. Véronique Zaytzeff and Frederick Morrison (Bloomington, Ind., 1991), p. 172, n. 6.

allows the piano a greater role. In the fourth song, the subject of the present essay, the morose character emerges from the Dostoyevskian darkness of his little room. He no longer muses introspectively, but addresses a woman whom we take to be his lost love. Whether she hears him we do not know. She appears to be playing an album leaf on the piano; the entire song takes on the character of an ironic intermezzo that interrupts the progress of the cycle. This song is followed by a powerful Elegy in which the hero again moves outside his apartment and finds comfort in images of nature; these images are contrasted with the sounds of life (a distant crowd) and death (a funeral bell), which provide Mussorgsky with an opportunity for some powerful musical imagery. This, the most extended song, is followed by the most lyrical, which finds the hero contemplating a suicidal plunge into the river.

This brief reading of *Sunless* implicitly relates the cycle to Romantic song cycles in which rejection in love creates feelings of desolation and loneliness and leads to the contemplation of death.[2] This reading runs counter to a number of Russian accounts that tend to treat the cycle autobiographically as an indication of Mussorgsky's own loneliness and dejection. Such accounts interpret these topics, together with Mussorgsky's move away from the realistic portraiture he favored in the 1860s, as an indication of a weakening in the composer's powers. Yuri Keldysh (1933) regarded *Sunless* as indicative of an "ideological and artistic decline." Vera Andreevna Vasina-Grossman (1956) thought that in *Sunless* Mussorgsky expressed his own feelings more fully than he had in his previous works, and that this cycle came as a result of his own great loneliness.[3]

While it is true that Mussorgsky was a lonely man who could easily identify with the poems of his young poet friend, his intention was not so much to express his own loneliness as faithfully to reflect the feelings expressed in the poems. When Mussorgsky described the work of Golenishchev-Kutuzov to Stasov, he noted that what attracted him to the poetry was that the poet "hammered into verse those thoughts which occupied *him*, and those longings, which belonged to *his* artistic nature."[4] This remark and the fact that Mussorgsky set his friend's poetry with no alterations (in strong contrast with his treatment of the poetry Golenishchev-Kutuzov provided for the *Songs and Dances of Death* of 1875–77) suggest that the reflection of the emotions expressed in the poetry was more important to him than the expression of his own feelings. Sensitive treatment of a subject does not necessarily mean that the artist is himself experiencing cognate emotions at the time the work is being produced. Furthermore, Mussorgsky's own loneliness may have been tempered in this period by his close friendship with Golenishchev-Kutuzov. When Richard Taruskin remarks that the "voice that speaks from the *Sunless* cycle is that of a neurotically self-absorbed, broken-down aristocrat. That was Musorgsky by 1874,"[5] he may be making a true assessment of Mussorgsky's character. But the voice that speaks through the song cycle belongs as much to the younger poet as to the composer in decline. Furthermore, even when looking at the beginnings of Mussorgsky's decline, one should remember that *Sunless* was written in one of his most productive periods. *Pictures at an Exhibition*, a much more positive and optimistic work, was composed in a great burst of enthusiasm in the twenty days immediately following "Be Bored."

[2]Schubert's *Die Schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise* are the most obvious parallels, although I would not wish to argue for any direct connection. In a letter to Rimsky-Korsakov (September 1867), Mussorgsky identified his seven favorite songs. Five were by members of his circle, but the other two were Schubert's "Doppelgänger" (*Schwanengesang*) and Schumann's "Ich Grolle Nicht" (*Dichterliebe*), songs whose topics are similar to that of the present work. See Jay Leyda and Sergei Bertensson, *The Musorgsky Reader: A Life of Modeste Petrovich Musorgsky in Letters and Documents* (New York, 1947, rpt. 1970), pp. 100–01.

[3]See in particular the comments of Yuri Keldysh and V. A. Vassina-Grossman as translated in James Walker, "Musorgsky's *Sunless* Cycle in Russian Criticism: Focus of Controversy," *Musical Quarterly* 67 (1981), [382–91], 388, 389.

[4]Letter from Mussorgsky to Stasov, dated 19 June 1873, *The Musorgsky Reader*, p. 217 (the emphasis is Mussorgsky's).

[5]Richard Taruskin, *Musorgsky: Eight Essays and an Epilogue* (Princeton, 1993), pp. 384–85.

The words *subjective* and *pessimistic* are frequently associated with this cycle.[6] While appropriate to the cycle as a whole, these terms do not recognize that the fourth song contains elements of ironic humor and satire connected with earlier songs and projects.[7] This article will increasingly be concerned with such qualities as it progresses. Since, however, it is as much an exercise in analyzing song as a study of Mussorgsky, I start with an analysis of "Be Bored."

The analytic methodology adopted here follows that suggested in a recent article by Kofi Agawu. My article will proceed from an informal ad hoc approach to music and text, through more formal and systematic analysis, to interpretation, poiesis, and reception.[8] Adopting such an agenda and subjecting a single song to intense analysis of all its aspects break with almost all previous writing on Mussorgsky. In essays on this composer, limited close analysis has been used primarily to support viewpoints on Mussorgsky's historical position and aesthetics.[9] Analysis is also occasionally employed to identify Mussorgsky as one of the first composers on the path to modernism in music.[10] Close analytical examination of complete works, or even substantial fragments, remains rare.[11] The music of the mid-1870s is possibly the most fruitful place for this kind of analytical speculation on Mussorgsky to begin. In 1874 he completed his revision of *Boris Godunov,* an extensive effort prompted not only by the demands of the repertoire committee of the Maryinsky Theatre for a prima donna role, but also by his own desire to be taken more seriously as a composer. The incorporation of greater lyricism in both the revised *Boris* and *Khovanshchina,* the development of the "rationally justified melody,"[12] and the production of his only extended instrumental composition are indicators of his desire to be regarded as more than a musical comedian and caricaturist.[13] Golenishchev-Kutuzov, in his memoir of the composer, recorded that, just after completing *Sunless,* Mussorgsky reported that "many say . . . that my only qualities are fluid form and humour. Well, we shall see what they say when I show them your poems. The only element I have here is feeling, and the result isn't half bad."[14]

In proceeding with close musical analysis one recognizes that whenever music and text combine, music gains the upper hand. The poetry of Golenishchev-Kutuzov provides the stimulus for this song but does not enslave its music. The analysis of song is traditionally viewed as successful if it relates music and texts, if the structures of one are seen as appropriate to or confirming the other. The objective of this article is to show, on the one hand, how

[6]Gerald Abraham remarked that "in the *Sunless* cycle a new element of subjective pessimism makes its appearance" (Abraham, "Musorgsky," *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians,* ed. Stanley Sadie [London, 1980], vol. 12, p. 872). Walker remarks that *Sunless* has a "subjective, pessimistic mood" ("Musorgsky's *Sunless* Cycle," p. 382).

[7]Nancy Basmajian notes that even in his most realistic songs Mussorgsky's tone is "ironic or even satiric[al]" ("The Romances," in *Musorgsky: In Memoriam 1881–1981,* ed. Malcolm H. Brown [Ann Arbor, Mich., 1982], p. 31).

[8]Kofi Agawu, "Theory and Practice in the Analysis of the Nineteenth-Century *Lied,*" *Music Analysis* 11 (1992), 10–12.

[9]Taruskin's astute analytical observations on Mussorgsky usually fall into this category. See his *Musorgsky: Eight Essays.*

[10]See, for example, the comments on Mussorgsky in Elliot Antokoletz, *The Music of Béla Bartók* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984), pp. 4–6.

[11]A symposium of analytical articles did appear in *Music Analysis* 9 (1990): Allen Forte, "Musorgsky as Modernist: The Phantasmic Episode in *Boris Godunov,*" pp. 3–45; Derrick Puffett, "A Graphic Analysis of Musorgsky's 'Catacombs'," pp. 67–77; and my "The Mysterious Thread in Musorgsky's *Nursery,*" pp. 47–66. See also Robert William Oldani, "The Music" in *Modest Musorgsky and* Boris Godunov: *Myths, Realities, Reconsiderations,* ed. Caryl Emerson and Robert William Oldani (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 225–76; and my *Musorgsky:* Pictures at an Exhibition (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 50–75.

[12]The concept of rationally justified melody, described by Mussorgsky in a letter to Stasov (25 December 1876), is hard to define precisely. Taruskin speculates extensively on its meaning in *Musorgsky: Eight Essays,* pp. 357–65. What may be concluded is that it involved a moving away from recitative toward a more orderly, more melodic vocal style.

[13]Among the reasons for the extensive revision of *Boris Godunov* was Mussorgsky's dissatisfaction with the way that *opéra dialogué* (as found in the *Marriage* and in the first *Boris*) and the realistic declamation of many of Mussorgsky's songs of the 1860s were regarded by some as comic even when intended to be serious. Mussorgsky felt it was time to develop a new seriousness in tone. See Emerson and Oldani, *Modest Musorgsky and Boris Godunov,* pp. 75–76.

[14]Orlova, *Musorgsky Remembered,* p. 96.

the music complements the text and, on the other, how it establishes its own voice independent of the text. The outcome of the combination of music and text is more than the simple confluence of the two constituents. Song can be regarded in general as "including three areas, an area of words, an area of music and a third, autonomous area, the area of song."[15] In this essay structural analysis forms a background against which to situate other elements including the poem and the cultural context, but is in itself inadequate, requiring one ultimately to address such other matters.

The strophic "Be Bored" has the tightest formal and phrase structure in *Sunless* and its harmony is the most conventional. Its key, B minor, can be regarded as central to the cycle. In relation to "Be Bored," the first two songs are in the relative major (D), the third is in the Neapolitan key of C; the final two songs seem to move away from "Be Bored" along a cycle of fifths. Song 5 is centered on B minor, but ends in the dominant, F♯. The final song ends on C♯, but with a seventh that seems to direct it back toward F♯. These two tonal centers are anticipated for the first time in the first strophe of "Be Bored." The first three songs are colored by modal mixture and by chords from the flat side of the tonal spectrum; the last three move to the sharp side. In the tonality of the cycle, therefore, "Be Bored" enters with the central key, possibly because here the otherwise elusive woman has a moment of real presence. In "Be Bored" the vocal line returns to the syllabic setting of the first two songs, and the voice is given no chance to "overvocalize," as Kramer puts it. Mussorgsky's musical structures operate subtly, without causing "the disintegration of language by melisma, tessitura, or sustained tones"; there is no "purposeful effacement of text by voice."[16] "Be Bored" is the only song in the cycle to have anything approaching an introduction, albeit only one-and-a-half measures: the other songs in the cycle begin with single chords. Each strophe begins with the same piano introduction, which the voice interrupts with the words "Be bored." But each strophe is thereafter quite different; with a couple of tiny exceptions in the second strophe, nothing is heard twice. Although there is a pervasive rhythm, described below, every phrase differs and there is a great variety of phrase endings (although we note the Mussorgskian tendency for falling ones, particularly strong-weak through a third or larger interval). Each strophe has an asymmetrical structure in which high points of increasing intensity occur in the last four measures, followed by perfect cadences. The strong sense of forward movement throws the weight of the song onto the high point of the final strophe (mm. 26–27), the poetic and musical dénouement. Strophes one and two conclude with cadences in the dominant and subdominant major respectively, in equilibrium on each side of the tonic. Each cadence contains parallel fifths that make them rhyme with each other. The final strophe ends with a perfect cadence in the tonic, but follows it with a short prolongation of the French sixth that plays an important role in the song.

Skuchai. Ti sozdana dlia skuki!
Be bored! You are born for boredom!
Bez zhguchikh chuvstv otrady nyet,
Without burning passions there is no comfort,
Kak nyet vozvrata bez razluki,
as there is no reunion without separation,
Kak bez borenya nyet pobed.
Without struggle no victory.

[Extra verse in Golenishchev-Kutuzov's original poem:
Skuchai, v tishi uyedinenya,
Be bored in quiet seclusion,
Vlacha dosug nenuzhnykh dnei;
drawing out your senseless days;
Na prazdnestvakh, pri zvukakh penya,
and in this songful festive atmosphere,
Pri bleske kamney i ogney.
with sparkling jewels and lights.]

Skuchai. Skuchai, slovam liubvi vnimaya,
Be bored! Be Bored, hearing words of love
V tishi serdechnoi pustoty,
in the silence of your empty heart,
Privetom lzhivym otvechaya,
responding with deceitful greeting
Na pravdu devstvennoi mechty.
to the truth of an innocent dream.

[15]Agawu, "Theory and Practice," p. 7.
[16]Lawrence Kramer, *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984), p. 132.

Skuchai. S rozhdenya do mogily
Be bored! From birth to grave
Zarane put nachertan tvoi:
your path is foreordained.
Po kaple ti istratish sily,
You will waste your strength drop by drop,
Potom umriosh, i Bog s toboi,
[*Mussorgsky: i Bog s toboi*]
then you will die—and good luck to you.

As already mentioned, Mussorgsky employs the exact words of his friend's poem (see the translation). He does, however, omit one verse, the reasons for which will appear later.[17] The listener seems to intrude on a little scene in which our hero is, in a rather superior sounding manner, roundly condemning the shallowness of someone; one assumes it is the woman who has rejected him. Only the hero speaks; the woman never defends herself. The first verse, in which the man preaches about the necessity to suffer and struggle, contains a series of conventional oppositions between burning passion and comfort, reunion and separation, struggle and victory. Golenishchev-Kutuzov's double employment of a weak chiasmus effect here (lines 2–3 and 3–4) is reflected by Mussorgsky in alternation of A♯ and A♮ at the phrase ends in mm. 6, 7, and 9. Rhetorical opposition is the main poetic device, and the whole poem may be interpreted as juxtaposing the ideal and reality. The second verse focuses on love: the woman's empty heart and "deceitful greeting" oppose the truth of the "innocent dream." The final verse looks to the future: the wasteful, inevitable, boring progress to death.

There is little sense of development in the poem, although the listener feels a kind of crescendo of emotion and the third verse is clearly final. The poem is simple in construction: apart from repeated words at the beginning of the second verse and at the conclusion (added by Mussorgsky), the lines alternate eight and nine syllables and have a simple ABAB rhyme scheme. The iambic opening word of the poem "Skuchai" contrasts with the predominantly trochaic meter of the rest of the line and the trochaic nature of much of the rest of the poem. Mussorgsky's setting neatly draws out the reversal between the iambic "Skuchai" (Be bored) in m. 2 and the trochaic "skuki" (boredom) in m. 4. Mussorgsky also derived a basic rhythm from the poem, which is given at the head of ex. 1. This rhythm corresponds to no phrase exactly, but underlies nearly all of them; it has the effect of creating a sense of a dance in the background (thus supporting the idea that this song is set in a salon or ballroom, as suggested below). Closest to the basic rhythm are the initial phrases of the final strophe, that is, those phrases that occur immediately before the rhythm itself is abandoned. The rhythm may also be found, without upbeat, in the piano introduction. Its pervasiveness probably represents the inescapability of boredom, but Mussorgsky constantly varies the rhythm so as to prevent the song from being sucked into the very boredom it represents. When we do finally break free from the rhythm, the song ends.

In the song, the word "Skuchai" interrupts the introduction. With its chromatic lyricism and diminished harmonies, this introduction has a sugary quality that would not be out of place at the beginning of an album leaf or some such lightweight piano piece for the salon. The sentimental beginning seems to provoke the hero's outcry (Mussorgsky, as will be noted, may have regarded this opening phrase as the very epitome of musical boredom). The clear intention is to set up a recurring opposition between the sentimental "album-leaf" introduction, which can be taken to represent the woman who, seated at the piano, is the object of the hero's wrath, and the pompous recitative-like entries of the singer during which the piano takes on the role of a continuo. The exploration of the two modes of pianism is an essential part of this song. The feeling of interruption is emphasized by the harmony: the octatonic and whole-tone French-sixth chord in m. 2 contrasts sharply with the triadic and diminished sonorities that precede it. The employment of augmented-sixth chords for purposes of interruption has plenty of precedent in Mussorgsky; one very clear example is the en-

[17]Golenishchev-Kutuzov's original poem, which dates from the early 1870s, is preserved in his notebook from this time in an archive in Moscow. As I discuss below, it differs from his later published versions of this poem. The earlier notebook version, however, corresponds exactly to Mussorgsky's song text.

Example 1: Mussorgsky, "Be Bored": basic rhythm and variants in strophe 1.

try of the nurse in the second song, "In the Corner," from the song cycle *Nursery*. With the arrival of the hero in "Be Bored" comes harmony of great interest and potential. Mussorgsky is able to resolve the augmented chord in a different direction in each strophe. In so doing, he seems, ironically, to contradict the word "Skuchai" (Be Bored) to which the chord attaches. The chord, which becomes a harmonic motive paralleling the basic rhythm, retains this position and association throughout the song except when it is recalled in the closing measures. Closure is in part effected through the disruption of a persistent pattern.

After the interruption of mm. 2–4 the piano seems to resume its "album leaf" mode. Ironically, the voice sings of burning passions to the insipid melodic line. This togetherness does not last, but is interrupted by strikingly dissonant suspensions in the middle of m. 6 where once again the piano assumes the role of continuo, this time for the remainder of the strophe, which it concludes with a perfect cadence complete with parallel fifths. These may be seen not as errors on Mussorgsky's part, but as the continuo alluding to the lady pianist's inadequate musical skills. In the second strophe, the piano resumes its "salon" mode after resolving the French-sixth chord in the most conventional way. This strophe is the only one to employ melismas, even if they are only two notes to a syllable. Their effect is both to mock the sentimental piano melody and to suggest the false sweetness of the girl. The relative poverty of invention in the repeated E^7–B^7 root-position chords reflects the emptiness of her heart. The music seems to break out in m. 16 with its dissonant ninth on the "deceitful greeting." Subsequently, the repetitions become more compressed, and the piano seems to struggle to regain its continuo role.

The final strophe, closely modeled on the first, concerns the progress from birth to death, the inexorable wasting away of a boring life in futility as fate has determined. In consequence, the harmony is the most directed in the song. The piano introduction is simplified and shortened, and the vocal interruption comes sooner, as though the hero had become impatient. The piano is even more closely associated with the role of continuo or arioso-accompanist in this strophe; its intertextual reference to music of an earlier era is strengthened by the Phrygian cadence in mm. 23–24. The first three lines

stick more closely than any others in the song to the basic rhythm, but the song closes by destroying it. The dance ends and we are left only with speech. In the end, the poet becomes dismissive, perhaps even vindictive, and the poetry breaks down. The girl is sent away with a colloquial Russian phrase "i Bog stoboi," which literally translates as "God be with you" but is closer in sense to "good luck and good riddance." The piano's final cadence recalls two earlier resolutions of the French-sixth chord, as if, at last independent of the girl and the poet, it is muttering "Be bored."

The way Mussorgsky is able to counterpoint the poetry, creating patterns and drawing out details that cut across the poem's simple rhyme-scheme and meter, is one of the most interesting features of his setting. To take the first verse as an example, the poetry has a clear ABAB structure, which Mussorgsky reinforces with the use of final notes alternating between F♯ and A♯. But as shown in ex. 1, he counterpoints this alternation with phrase beginnings that suggest an AAAB pattern and final chords that alternate between the dominant major and minor in the pattern MMmM (if D♯ in m. 6 is regarded as an added sixth). The semitonal opposition between A♯ and A inherent in this last pattern is one of several such semitonal oppositions in the song. In addition, the word "nyet" appears in three of the four lines of the first verse. In the final two lines it is deployed symmetrically as the second word of the third line and the second to last of the fourth. Mussorgsky draws out this effect (which results from the poet's use of chiasmus) through the employment of dotted quarter notes (used only once previously on the similar syllable "na" in line one). Each setting of "nyet" is metrically strong, and the last two are approached by successively larger leaps. The strongest "nyet" is probably in the third line where the vocal D (m. 6) coincides with C♯ in the same register in the piano. As a complement to the negativity introduced by the repeated "nyet," the word "Bez" (without) from the cycle's title also appears on three occasions, but Mussorgsky chooses not to draw it out in the same way.

I proceed now to a more systematic analysis of the music, in which the harmony's mixture of banality and sophistication is striking. Belonging to the banal, almost humorous aspect are the frequent perfect cadences complete with parallel fifths, the Phrygian cadence in mm. 23–24, the tendency toward root progression by fifth in the early part of the song, and the tonic pedal and B–E ostinato in the second strophe. A cycle of fifths underpins this activity: the first strophe proceeds from B to F♯, the latter prepared by its own dominant, C♯, the next step round the circle; the second strophe reverses direction as B major becomes the dominant of the subdominant, E. Both chords appear in their major rather than diatonic minor forms, and the addition of sevenths sets up an implication of further forward movement that initially fails to come: the harmony keeps turning back in a circle. In the final strophe, however, the music moves swiftly from B minor to a Phrygian cadence in E minor and onward to its subdominant A-minor chord in m. 26. These important keys and chords form a short cycle of fifths spanning C♯ to A, symmetrically balanced around B. This has the effect of giving the song a sense of purpose and direction, which might be connected with the poem's progress from life's struggle through love to death. The three elements in the middle, F♯, B, and E, have important roles in both major and minor forms, notably in their major forms at cadences at crucial points. The two flanking elements have more restricted functions: C♯ major acts only as V/V, A major is momentarily tonicized in the resourceful harmonization of the introduction, and A minor appears only once but (as will appear later) with a significant voice-leading role.

Modal mixture is clearly a prominent harmonic feature. So too is the way Mussorgsky resolves the French-sixth chord at the beginning of each strophe in a different way. These two aspects are essential to the more progressive aspect of the harmony. Just as the surface parallel fifths and the perfect cadences have a deeper manifestation in the circle of fifths, so modal mixture and the transformations of the French-sixth chord generate a series of octatonic relationships. The chord on the fifth degree in this song may be either major or minor (an equivocation particularly important in the first verse) and its fifth may be either perfect or

Example 2: Mussorgsky, "Be Bored": octatonic chords.

a. fundamental structure.

b. middleground.

Example 3: Mussorgsky, "Be Bored."

diminished; our French-sixth chord is synonymous with a dominant seventh with a lowered fifth. This expansion of the dominant creates an octatonic hexachord (ex. 2). With the inclusion of G, the same collection extends to embrace both chords in the second halves of mm. 13 and 15, which may be derived from the dominant ninth in B minor with the seventh in the bass (B is taken as a neighbor note), and an entire passage at the beginning of the final strophe from m. 20, beat 4, to m. 23, beat 3. The A-minor triad that prefaces the dominant at the work's climax is from the very same octatonic, extended dominant family and provides a point of contact with the cycle of fifths at a crucial point. The song thus demonstrates a combination of the old and the new in harmony, reflecting, but not temporally coordinated with, the two modes of pianism.

The graphs presented in ex. 3 provide a Schenkerian reading of the song. The three strophes become, at the deepest level, prolongations of a two-part divided fundamental structure in classic Schenkerian terms but with a flattened Phrygian 2 in the final descent (ex. 3a). The dialogue between C and C♯ is, as noted in the context of the harmonic analysis, an important aspect of this piece. The end of the first strophe coincides with the point of interruption. In the deep middleground graph of ex. 3b are two linear progressions descending from the primary tone. These occupy the second strophe and the first part of the third. Both are labeled $\hat{7}$–$\hat{6}$–$\hat{5}$ since their goal harmonies are E

c. foreground.

Example 3 (*continued*)

major and E minor respectively. The second strophe begins with the reestablishment of the primary tone and tonic harmony, but as it progresses, and E major becomes the harmonic goal, the primary tone becomes a seventh (emphasized in the foreground by the frequent appearance of E7). In addition to strengthening the primary tone's contrapuntal desire for downward resolution, the prolongation of this harmony creates a functional pull that is finally, if somewhat distantly, resolved by the arrival on A minor in m. 26 when the fundamental line falls to ♮$\hat{2}$. Yet again attention is drawn to this chord, which, as explained above, provides a point of contact between the lengthy cycle of fifths (ex. 3b) and the series of octatonic substitutions. In ex. 3b, the arrival on B minor in m. 20 is shown not as a return to support of the

primary tone by tonic harmony, but as a momentary reference to the tonic chord as part of the longer prolongation of E^7 that binds the second and third strophes together into the second part of the two-part structure.

In the foreground graph (ex. 3c), although the primary tone, D, appears immediately, subsequent presentation of the structural line tends to be fragmentary. Activity in the obligatory register is suspended until m. 5, and in between the music focuses on the inner-voice F♯, which is similarly prominent in subsequent strophes, each of which follows this tendency to present and then suppress the structural line. At the first occurrence of the French sixth in m. 2, the Schenkerian reading typically undervalues it: it becomes the result of a passing note (B♯) in the bass connecting I and $V^6_{4 \atop 3}$, the latter prolonged by motion to the subdominant and back. The structural bass motion, B to B♯, at the opening is a reversal and respelling of the motion C–B in the fundamental structure.

The voice leading in the first strophe is characterized by the importance given to the inner register centered on F♯ and by the tendency of the upper voice to gravitate toward it. In the prolongation of F♯, the upper neighbor G is important in both its natural and sharpened forms.[18] The motion between F♯ and G or G♯ is marked as motive "x" in the voice-leading graph. We notice too the strongly dissonant 9–8 suspension in m. 6 in which both the bass C♯ and the dissonant vocal D are doubled in the piano's right hand.

In the second strophe, the bass of the French-sixth chord is respelled as C and acts as an upper neighbor to B in a completely conventional resolution to B major. The main feature of the voice-leading structure is again the submergence of the structural line in an inner voice and its abrupt restoration to the obligatory register in m. 16. G♯ again plays a prominent role as an upper neighbor to F♯. Once the upper voice is restored in mm. 16 and 17, the harmonic progression comprising B^9 followed by a German sixth strongly suggests resolution to E, which duly arrives in m. 18 as the middleground descent to B is completed. The cadence in E major is repeated in m. 19, complete with parallel fifths and with the inclusion of the major ninth C♯ in the E: V^7 chords on the downbeats of mm. 18 and 19.

At the beginning of the third strophe, Mussorgsky removes both some decoration and the brief tonicization of A major that had previously occupied the end of the first measure of the piano introduction. These foreground changes reflect the transformation of the primary tone into a seventh at this point. The first chord appears to reassert the home key and primary tone, but is overridden by the arpeggiation of E^7. The French sixth is now followed by a clear assertion of E minor confirmed by the Phrygian cadence (with C–B motive in the bass) and the arpeggiation of E minor that follows in mm. 24–25. Even during this arpeggiation, however, the juxtaposition of A♯ and G begins to suggest a return to B, but this occurs only in m. 26 via A minor, which forms the resolution of the seventh and acts as a dominant substitute at a more remote level of structure. A minor is followed by a V^6_5–I cadence in B major. Mussorgsky then adds a codetta in which, on the basis of duration and accent, the dominant is given a prolongational role in relation to the French sixth. While the motion C–B is heard in the bass for the last time, the vocal line skips from F♯ to B, creating a miniature upside-down replica of the concluding part of the song's fundamental structure.

In beginning to evaluate the analysis so far, one can conclude that both the poem and the music are end-weighted gestures. The poem releases its energy in its final line in two stages, both matched by the music. First, at the end of the phrase "then you will die" (*Potom umriosh*) in m. 26 the conclusion of the cycle of fifths and the descent to $\natural\hat{2}$ in the *Ursatz* are reached. Second, the poet's dismissal of the woman and his reversion to speech rhythm coincide with the music's final descent to $\hat{1}$ and with the concluding cadences, not least the voice's falling fifth. This kind of large-scale relationship between music and text complements others, varying in scale and kind from the song's adoption of the poetic rhythm to the reflection of poetic oppositions in the juxtaposition of major and minor. But there are still deeper and

[18]The song has three semitonal oppositions: G/G♯, A/A♯ and C/C♯.

more complex relationships between music and text to be explored.

Schenkerian fundamental structures are abstractions not generally possessed of expressive powers except when they contain some kind of deviation or distortion as happens here. The descent to $\hat{1}$ is more powerful and expressive because it comes from the "nonstandard" C♮ rather than from C♯. Nevertheless, in spite of this distortion, note that this song is amenable to "conventional" Schenkerian analysis and contains many features that Schenkerians regard as commendable, such as the clearly articulated divided structure and the motivic links connecting all structural levels. This method of analysis proves itself a useful and efficient means of assessing the way in which the music prepares and projects itself toward its dénouement. It also reveals the framework of purely musical organization that allows the song to function coherently at all moments, not just those that directly signify something in the poetry.[19] The necessity for such a framework arises because of the more extended and precisely defined time span of the musical setting, the overall coherence of which takes precedence over the poem. This order of value is reflected in our priorities as listeners. When listening to the poem in a song, we usually form a generalized conception of what it is "about" and recognize certain key moments of word painting, but the poem's verbal structure and semantic twists and turns concern us less than the structure and quality of the musical argument. A good deal of the poem is, in Kramer's term, "erased," or, perhaps more accurately, covered up: the poem is still there, and it can still be found, but is now obscured by a layer of music.

In this song the poetic meter subjugates the rhythm of the melodic line, and the singer is barely allowed to move beyond declamation; the listener is not allowed to experience the voice in all its glory. In this light, the singing voice retreats before literary elements, as it does in many places in Mussorgsky's work.[20] Apart from a few crucial, almost spoken, moments at the beginning of each strophe and at the end of the song, most of the musical interest is actually located in the piano. Apart from these moments, the role of the text seems to be the provision of a scenario and an end-weighted strophic framework and the suggestion of mood. Kramer well describes how

> some poems, notably the feeble ones that still make for good songs, exhaust themselves in the process of identifying the music with an imaginary circumstance. Their purely reifying function, in fact, is the reason why they do not need to be much good. A banal bit of versifying can supply the basic rubrics and images of a fiction as well as a work of genius; the poem does not have to operate as poetry, but only as language. Most often, a song based on such a marginal text will treat it directly as a verbal failure. The fictional framework will be shown up as flimsy; the song will brush it aside, belie it, with an obviously more resonant fiction of its own.[21]

While one might not go quite so far as to describe this poem as feeble, during the course of the song its role is often reduced to little more than a provider of words for the singer to use between major signifying points, which may not always concur with those of the poem. Certain events in the song may have little or no poetic justification. This is not necessarily a matter of contradiction. Instead, the song pursues its own agenda independently of the poem and exercises control over the progress of the music.

[19] This point has been well made by David Lidov, as cited by Agawu, "Theory and Practice," p. 25.

[20] The idea of the singing voice retreating before the literary elements is taken from Carolyn Abbate's description of Poizat's modes (Michel Poizat, *L'Opéra ou le cri de l'ange: Essai sur la jouissance de l'amateur d'Opéra* [Paris, 1986], *The Angel's Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera*, trans. Arthur Denner [Ithaca, N.Y., 1992]). She describes Poizat's work thus: "In making his distinctions between vocal levels in opera, Poizat attempts to define different modes appropriate to each. The first level is a rational, text-orientated one, in which singing retreats before literary elements (words, poetry, character, plot). Recitative is, of course, the best representative of this mode. The second is the level of the voice-object; the third consists of moments at which either of the first two are breached by consciousness of the real performer, of witnessing a performance" (*Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* [Princeton, 1991], p. 11).

[21] Kramer, *Music and Poetry*, p. 143.

To take an example, several structurally significant musical events occur in m. 16, coinciding with the words, in Russian order, "greeting deceitful" (*Privetom lzhivym*). At this point the obligatory register emerges forcefully after its suppression from the end of the first strophe, with C♯ distorted to C for the first time. The harmony, a dominant ninth in E minor (in a rather strange, unbalanced registration), highlights this emergence. Other factors contribute to the feeling that this is a turning point. The one-measure phrases in mm. 16 and 17 end on German sixths, pulling the music toward E, rather than on the dominants that had characterized phrase endings until this point. We are also at our furthest remove from the poetically derived basic rhythm; the use of three melismas within a single phrase seems to indicate that music is gaining the upper hand here. There is no poetic justification for this point of musical emphasis. One might speculate that it shows the depth of the relationship between the two protagonists, but such explanations are strained. The song is really pursuing its own agenda: it is the right moment structurally for a turning point, whatever the text may say. (As it happens, we are approaching the Golden Section.[22]) This moment of emphasis is achieved structurally and expressively through the sudden and distorted reassertion of the *Urlinie;* as such it is part of a musical discourse based on suppression and distorted reemergence. At the point when the *Urlinie* reemerges, the harmony and rhythm challenge the repetitive patterns that have tried to hold them captive.

The origins of this discourse in the *Urlinie* lie in a move between registers used to make the initial distinction between the woman (the piano's entry on a sustained d^2) and the poet (the vocal entry focused on f♯^{1} or an octave lower if sung by a man). As the song proceeds, however, it seems to take over this registral device as part of its own voice, one independent of the text and of the distinction between personas. At first, this occurs for only a short time (mm. 2–5), then for a more extensive period at the beginning of the second strophe. Once it bursts out in m. 16, the song is no longer able to bury its upper voice for any length of time; it can do so only for mm. 21–22, where it again hovers around f♯^{1}. But even though the structural line breaks free and takes control and the harmonic process becomes more directed, one cannot initially free oneself from the basic rhythm. That freedom comes only in the final moments when poetic and musical structures reach a point of concurrence. In these terms, the progress of the song in its own right can be discussed, as a musical narrative counterpointing, and not enslaved by, the poem.

The power and interest of the song's narrative is enhanced by devices such as the interruption of the piano by the voice and the distortion of the *Ursatz*. The narrative also draws on musical intertextuality in the juxtaposition of the two piano styles and of old and new harmony, the shifts between them having no direct parallels in the poem. The song depends further on a number of oppositions. Some, notably suppression and reemergence, are independent of the poem; others originate in the poem but are brought under the control of the song and of the structural framework identified in the Schenkerian analysis. The most important of these oppositions, broadly speaking, is that between old, fixed, inescapable, and conventionally "boring" elements (the cycle of fifths, basic rhythm, constant cadences) and those that are new, interesting, sophisticated, and enriching (the process of variation, octatonic substitution). Using such devices within the controlling framework allows the song to pace its emotional and narrative progress while beginning to prepare its conclusion from the very beginning in a way that the poem is unable to do. The voice of a song is not simply the sum of the poetic and musical structures; nor does it always erase, although it may obscure, the poetry. It is a third element, in part overlapping, in part separate. Elements in the music may be seen as contributing in varying strengths to the three voices: poem, music, and song. For example, in its interest and potential the French sixth is directly associated with contradicting the word "boredom" in the poem. Yet, in its nondiatonic bass motion C–B, it reflects the distortion of the *Ursatz* that is part of the indi-

[22]The song has a duration of 114 quarter notes. 114*0.618 = 70.452. This locates the Golden Section in the middle of m. 18, at which point the prolongation of e: V begun in m. 16 concludes.

vidual voice of the song while also contributing to the organic connectedness on which good tonal structures depend.

When heard in the context of the complete cycle, this song gains much of its effect from interruption. The intrusion of a tuneful introduction and the abrupt shift from C major to B minor (even if the latter is explainable as a Neapolitan) are the most obvious manifestations of this. But the singularity of this disruptive moment becomes much greater if the audience is aware of the way in which Mussorgsky brings his two characters into the open by making one of them a performer. As noted above, the singing voice heard is constrained in its "real" performance to a role that is, in crucial places, speechlike. This throws into the spotlight the performance of the "fictional" album leaf. The woman in 1870s St. Petersburg plays the piano and becomes an object of musical production in one of those "isolated and rare gestures" when music itself begins to narrate.[23] The audience hears both the piano in the story and the "real" pianist supporting the singer. The woman's performance makes it known that the hero is unaware of all music but the album romance that she plays; in the scene he either does not sing at all, or only joins in intermittently at those points where the vocal line doubles the piano melody. The word "Skuchai" is surely a spoken interjection; the hero does not hear the continuo accompaniment, which is music that emanates from somewhere else. The hero's interruptions affect only the audience's hearing of the album romance; in the salon the woman continues to play. If her piano piece is interrupted only in the audience performance, it is conceivable that she is actually unaware of the hero. It is not inconceivable that he sits at some distance castigating her under his breath. Neither he nor she hears the song that the audience hears.

So far I have pursued an interpretation of this song in which a woman at the piano plays insipid music while being attacked (with or without her hearing) by the hero. The song is a scene rather than a Lied or romance, even if it arises from the fusion of two genres: the instrumental album leaf and the vocal romance of the nineteenth-century, French-mannered St. Petersburg drawing room.[24] This interpretation, which arises logically from the music and the poem, is substantiated by the subtitle on Mussorgsky's autograph: "For the album of a fashionable young lady." The subtitle has unfortunately disappeared from all the printed scores, even from the one in Lamm's complete edition.[25] Lamm does refer to the subtitle in his critical notes, but regards it as an earlier, abandoned title. While it is true that two other songs in the set have earlier titles, these are clearly deleted in the manuscripts; the subtitle to "Be Bored" is not. Mussorgsky's subtitle is a slightly altered form of the title of Golenish-

[23]Abbate, *Unsung Voices,* p. ix. I acknowledge a more general debt here to the ideas of Abbate. Her study *Unsung Voices* is concerned with the moments when opera, and in some cases instrumental music, narrates. In her view, these moments of narration are rare and are often associated with disjunctions in the score; when they do occur in opera they often involve characters on stage becoming performers of narrative ballads and so on. Performances within performances, Abbate argues, are part of the process by which unsung voices, which exist in addition to those of the phenomenal performers, are transmitted. Abbate is also concerned with "deafness": "In opera, the characters pacing the stage often suffer from deafness; they do not *hear* the music that is the ambient fluid of their music-drowned world. This is one of the genre's most fundamental illusions: we see before us something whose fantastic aspect is obvious, since the scenes we witness pass to music. . . . We must generally assume, in short, that this music is not produced by or within the stage-world, but emanates from other loci as secret commentaries for our ears alone, and that the characters are generally unaware that they are singing" (p. 119).

[24]The preference of the Russian aristocracy in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries for speaking in French and for French mannerisms is well known. In song writing, this extended itself to the use of the French term *romance* for art song. The exact qualities of a "romance" are hard to define. Basmajian distinguishes the *pesnia,* the Russian folk or popular song, from "romances (often highly sentimental in character) [which] represented the more refined tastes of the court, salon, or drawing-room; in this basic distinction the two terms have continued in use to the present" ("The Romances," p. 30). There was, however, a good deal of interaction between *pesnia* and romance. Mussorgsky described a number of his songs in the period 1858–65 as romances, but later abandoned this term, although some of his songs from the late 1870s might fit the category. Large numbers of romances were written by other nineteenth-century Russian composers, notably Tchaikovsky.

[25]The autograph is in the Manuscript Department of the M. E. Saltykov Shchedrin Public Library in St. Petersburg. Lamm's edition is correct in all other respects.

chev-Kutuzov's original unpublished poem: "For the Album of a Girl."

Mussorgsky has set his musical scene in a salon. This idea probably originated in the verse that he deleted from the poem, which refers to a "joyful songful atmosphere with sparkling jewels and lights." Mussorgsky chose to represent this verse through the structure of the song rather than as text. By 1877 Golenishchev-Kutuzov had taken the poem and incorporated it into a larger one entitled "Skuka" (Otrivok iz dnyevnika) (Boredom [Fragment from a Diary]), published in the 1878 collection of his poems.[26] While this longer poem postdates our song, the principal materials from which it is constructed are earlier poems from the notebooks that contained the *Sunless* poems. Mussorgsky would undoubtedly have known the poems that eventually became "Skuka," and the ideas behind them undoubtedly influenced his song.[27] "Skuka" is a long, self-indulgent piece of Russian fatalism and disillusionment tinged with a degree of tongue-in-cheek humor. It relates how boredom affects everyone, particularly the poet's own generation that lacks faith, strength, knowledge, and love and does not value its own beliefs and convictions. At the heart of the poem is a description of an evening at a fashionable salon where "all-defeating" boredom reigns. Romances are sung, the General discusses the Eastern Question, the poet reads poems, but, although outwardly everyone behaves impeccably, everyone is bored; they all want to go home and sleep. The poet sits in the corner and dreams of the countryside. His dream is interrupted by the young, beautiful, and proud mistress of the house, who whispers in his ear how bored she is. "Entertain me" she requests; "Here is my album: be so kind as to write something in it. Write what you want in an impromptu manner, something polite, something cheeky—it doesn't matter so long as it is funny." The poet, inspired by secret anger, takes the album and writes a modified version of our little poem.

It was not just the boringness of the fashionable young lady that was under attack here but that of the whole society she represents. Boredom was not a quirky concern of Golenishchev-Kutuzov, but a subject common to many nineteenth-century Russian writers. Pushkin's *Onegin* and Goncharov's *Oblomov* illustrate this, as does the following passage from a literary work of infinitely greater quality than Golenishchev-Kutuzov's, one that, like our song, was begun in 1874:

> [Liza Merkalov] "Tell me, how do you manage not to feel bored? It's a delightful to look at you. You're alive while I am bored."
> "You bored? Why, yours is the gayest set in Petersburg" said Anna [Karenina].
> "Maybe those who are not in our set are even more bored; but we—I at any rate—do not feel gay but awfully, awfully bored." . . . "How can you say that?" exclaimed Betsy. "Sappho said they had a very jolly time at your house yesterday."
> "Oh dear, it was so dreary!" said Liza Merkalov. "We all went back to my place after the races. The same everlasting crowd doing the same everlasting things! Nothing's ever any different."[28]

Knowing the subtitle of the song on the autograph provides the analyst with a ready-made interpretation that the poetic evidence corroborates. At the same time we are constrained. Several decades of positivistic musicology have granted an authority to autographs that we find hard to resist. We feel that this reading must have priority, all others must be suppressed, suffocated. This raises a question about who should know the extra words at the head of the autograph. Are they part of the song for the audience (and therefore a constraint on reception), are they instructions to the performers only, or simply a message from Mussorgsky to Golenishchev-Kutuzov? If this is a message to the performers, like the ridiculously outsized direction at the head of the song, *Andante*

[26]The new larger poem appears in Count Arseny Golenishchev-Kutuzov, *Calm and Storm 1868–78* (St. Petersburg, 1878), p. 43. The poem is too long to translate here. Golenishchev-Kutuzov made some minor changes to "From the Album of a Girl" when incorporating it into the larger poem.

[27]Most significant, in addition to "Skuchai" (Be Bored), is another poem entitled "Pir" (Feast). These two poems appear next to each other in one of Golenishchev-Kutuzov's notebooks.

[28]Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenin*, trans. Rosemary Edmonds (Harmondsworth, 1954), p. 323.

commodo assai e poco lamentoso, then it obliges them to present the song in a way that makes the scene clear. Such a performance might be regarded as ideal; both the performers and audience would possess a full knowledge of the musical structure, its expressive message and the cultural conditions under which it was composed.[29] Even if this were possible, however, the way in which it blocks other readings might make it less than desirable. There are indeed further readings of this song to pursue. For example, the girl might be regarded as a personification of boredom, a counterpart to the personification of death in the vocal line of *Songs and Dances of Death.*[30] But the final part of this essay is concerned with the irony and satire mentioned at the beginning.

In his seminal essays of the early 1880s, Stasov associated *Sunless* and the songs of Mussorgsky's final years with the composer's moving away from the realistic description of Russian scenes and with the beginning of a final decline in his compositional powers.[31] Both Rimsky-Korsakov and Stasov mark 1874 as a turning point for Mussorgsky, and their view has persisted. The following remark therefore comes as a surprise: "Musoryanin [Mussorgsky] has written a song on Kutuzov's poem 'Be Bored,' and although this is not a first-rate song, it is all the same one of his *good* songs."[32]

Stasov made this remark to Rimsky-Korsakov in a letter dated 1 July 1874, just one day short of a month after Mussorgsky completed his song. Stasov would not readily have praised a song by Mussorgsky if he regarded it as subjective or pessimistic, nor would he have praised it only for the quality of its musical invention. Perhaps when he later condemned *Sunless* he simply forgot the presence of the ironic little intermezzo, or else tarred the whole cycle with the same brush; in any case his intent was not simply to give an account of Mussorgsky's music, but also to begin the construction of a picture of Mussorgsky as the populist-realist man of the sixties who was deflected from his true path in the mid-1870s, a distorted vision readily received by Soviet musicologists.[33] Nevertheless, the question remains as to what Stasov could have meant when he underlined "good" in 1874. The answer may be that this song is not just an attack on the woman who has deserted the hero of the cycle, but that it also has a wider satirical import.

Mussorgsky was constantly under attack from the critics, many of whom were professors at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, for what they regarded as his poor technique and frequent musical solecisms. As Ridenour has well described, the westernizing men of the Conservatory and the more strongly nationalistic and modernistic members of the "Kuchka" competed for the leadership of Russian musical life in the 1860s and early 1870s, a competition fueled by strong personal rivalries.[34] In 1870, in a withering attack on some recently published songs by Mussorgsky, Alexander Famintsyn, a critic, music historian, and professor at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, included the following remarks:

> First and foremost, we see an excessive desire to be original or at least to appear to be so, in defiance of aesthetic feeling and to the detriment of musical beauty: the crudest realism, approaching cynicism; the piling up of both appropriate and inappropriate dissonances, fifth progressions, harmonic and rhythmic oddities of every kind, all of which are shocking but not in the least original and often entirely unsuitable to the text, merely piling up without reason

[29]Eugene Narmour has recently remarked that "the notion of an 'ideal' listener with an 'ideal' structural knowledge of any given style is hopelessly rationalistic" (*The Analysis and Cognition of Melodic Complexity: The Implication-Realization Model* [Chicago, 1992], p. 8). Adding a requirement for "ideal" cultural knowledge makes the notion yet more unrealistic, but I believe it worth retaining as the ultimate goal of our quest.

[30]See Caryl Emerson, "Real Endings and Russian Death: Musorgskij's *Pesni i pljaski smerti,*" *Russian Language Journal* 38 (1984), 199–216.

[31]Principally see Vladimir Vasilievich Stasov, "Modest Petrovich Musorgsky: Biographical Essay," *Vestnik Evropy* 89 (1881), and "Perov and Musorgsky" *Russkaya starina* (1883).

[32]Leyda and Bertensson, *Musorgsky Reader,* p. 275. I have substituted the more accurate "Be Bored" for the title "Longing," given in their translation.

[33]See Taruskin, *Musorgsky: Eight Essays,* esp. pp. 3–37, where the picture of Mussorgsky manufactured by Stasov and the Soviet vision of Mussorgsky as man of the people and forebear of Soviet realism are constantly challenged.

[34]Robert C. Ridenour, *Nationalism, Modernism and Personal Rivalry in Nineteenth-Century Music* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1981).

numerous major and minor [intervals and chords] (the surest sign of dilettantism).[35]

Mussorgsky responded to such criticism with satirical songs. Famintsyn's criticism of Rimsky-Korsakov's innovations in *Sadko* provoked Mussorgsky to the song *Klassik*, in which the outer parts of a ternary structure, representing Famintsyn as the "simple," "serene," "polite" classicist, are cast in an eighteenth-century style incongruous with the modern innovations at the song's center. Famintsyn also figured in the satirical song *The Peepshow* (1870). Interestingly, in the same month as he completed "Be Bored," Mussorgsky was making plans for yet another piece of musical lampoonery to be entitled *The Hill of Nettles*, in which Herman Laroche, in the guise of a crab, addresses members of the musical establishment—including Famintsyn, who was to appear as a sheep—on the bad state of musical affairs. The animals complain of the activities of "the rooster" (Mussorgsky) who scratches around in dung heaps.[36] Stasov describes this project in the same letter to Rimsky-Korsakov that contains the reference to "Be Bored."[37]

The idea for a new "Peepshow" had been in Mussorgsky's mind for over two years. In a letter to Stasov (31 March 1872),[38] he mentions that Rimsky-Korsakov had encouraged him to produce a new work on these lines. Certainly the project was still in his mind as he finished "Be Bored" on 2 June 1874, because in a note written before 20 June he thanked Stasov for encouraging him to proceed.[39] The brevity of Stasov's reference to this song might be taken to indicate that it was, for him, a less important work than the proposed *Hill of Nettles*. To return to the word "good": when Stasov praised Mussorgsky, it was not usually for beauty of construction or formal perfection, but for truth and realism at the expense of those qualities and for the effects of musical comedy and satire.[40] Stasov may have recognized that "Be Bored" can be read as an attack on musical boredom.[41] Such boredom for Mussorgsky would arise precisely from the hollow pursuit of formal and technical perfection and musical beauty. The role of the artist was to push ahead:

The artistic depiction of beauty alone, that is, in the material sense, is sheer childishness—art in its infancy. *The finest traits in man's nature* and in *the mass of humanity*, tirelessly digging through these little-known regions and conquering them—that is the true mission of the artist. "Towards new shores"—fearlessly through storms, and shallows and treacherous rocks.[42]

A couple of months later, after several meetings with Tchaikovsky (and probably with Rimsky-Korsakov, who had accepted a teaching post at the Conservatory in 1871), Mussorgsky wrote:

I've had to spend all these days in the company of the worshippers of absolute musical beauty and have experienced a strange *feeling of emptiness* in conversation with them; this strange feeling of emptiness was replaced by an even stranger one, but an inescapable feeling—I cannot name it: it is such a feeling as hurts one in losing a very near and dear person, with whom, as they say "the days were spent and the nights [whiled away]."[43]

Musical beauty, emptiness, and the loss of a dear person are all connected here. The loss referred to is probably that of Rimsky-Korsakov, with whom Mussorgsky shared rooms until June 1872, when Rimsky-Korsakov married. It was a loss that Mussorgsky felt keenly.

I return to "Be Bored" (ex. 4), with its obvious use of ternary form, the use of the cycle of

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[35]Orlova, *Musorgsky's Days and Works: A Biography in Documents*, trans. and ed. Roy J. Guenther (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1983), p. 194.
[36]Herman Laroche (1845–1904) was a professor of music history at the St. Petersburg Conservatory at this time.
[37]But Stasov's greater delight in the new project is evident from his full description, which is much longer than the few words used to describe "Be Bored."
[38]Leyda and Bertensson, *Musorgsky Reader*, pp. 181–83.
[39]See Orlova, *Musorgsky's Days and Works*, p. 417.
[40]The *Peepshow* was dedicated to Stasov. As a birthday present on 2 January 1874, Mussorgsky presented Stasov with the manuscript of *The Marriage*, his most extreme experiment in comic *opéra dialogué*.
[41]This song may have been in Stasov's mind when he recommended to Mussorgsky and Golenishchev-Kutuzov the idea of a scene for *Songs and Dances of Death*, in which a woman dies at a ball.
[42]Letter to Stasov, 18 October 1872, Leyda and Bertensson, *Musorgsky Reader*, p. 199.
[43]Ibid., p. 200.

Be Bored
(For the Album of a Fashionable Young Lady)

Andantino comodo assai e poco lamentoso

Sku - chai! 'Ti soz- da - na dlia sku - ki! Bez zhgu - chikh chuvstv ot - ra - dy
Be bored! You are born for bore - dom! Without burning pas - sions there is no

6
nyet, Kak nyet voz - vra - ta bez raz - lu - ki, kak bez bo - re - nya nyet po - bed.
comfort, as there is no re - union with - out separ - ration, With - out strug - gle no vic - to - ry.

10
Meno mosso
Sku - chai! Sku - chai, slo - vam liub - vi vni - ma - ya, v ti -
Be bored be bored hear - ing words of love in

14
shi ser - dech - noi pu - sto - ty, pri - ve - tom lzhi - vim ot - ve - cha - ya na
the si - lence of your em - pty heart, re - spond - ing with de - ceit - ful greet - ing to

Example 4: Mussorgsky, "Be Bored."

18
poco rall.
a tempo
senza espressione
prav - du dev - stven - noi mech - ty. Sku - chai! Srozh - de - nya do mo -
the truth of an in - no - cent dream. Be bored! From birth to
pp
p
22
gi - ly za - ra - ne put na - cher - tan tvoi: po kap - le ti is - tra - tish si - ly,
grave your path is fore - or - - - dained. You will waste your strength drop by drop,
26
poco rall.
po - tom um - riosh i Bog s to - boi. i Bog s to - boi!
then you will die, and good luck to you. and good luck to you.

Example 4 (*continued*)

fifths, the exaggerated suspensions, the ostentatious Phrygian cadence: these and the other factors that make this song so amenable to Schenkerian analysis are exactly the kind of musical commonplaces that Mussorgsky might consider to endanger progress in music. Furthermore, the introductory idea could almost serve as an introduction to a *Feuille d'album* or instrumental "Chanson Triste," perhaps even one by Tchaikovsky. As pointed out earlier, this is the only song in the cycle served by an introduction that is longer than a single chord. The song may thus constitute an attack, on not only the "young lady," but also the shallow music she is likely to have played, music of the lightweight kind that filled the catalogs of music publishers. Such pieces were produced in large numbers by Rubinstein, Tchaikovsky, and others.[44] Golenishchev-Kutuzov's attack on the boredom of Russian society is paralleled in Mussorgsky's song by an attack on the empty musical procedures of the Conservatory composers. The attack is an ironic one, in which Mussorgsky borrows the devices of a professionally trained composer and then corrupts them. It is a risky strategy for one already under sustained critical attack for his poor musi-

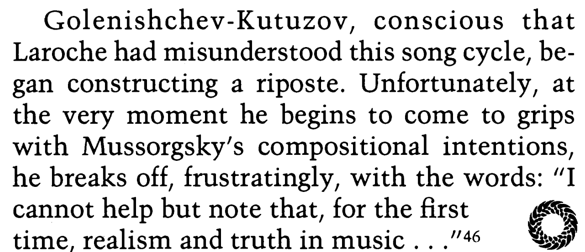
[44]Mussorgsky contributed a few slender piano works of his own to this tradition, but they date either from the early part of his career or from his very last years when his powers were severely weakened.

cal grammar. The frequent parallel fifths and poor voice leading in the fifth progressions that characterize the second half of the first verse are surely not oversights; nor are the parallel octaves in the Phrygian cadence. The suspended D in mm. 6–7 breaks the rules twice over: by being doubled in octaves and by having the note of resolution (C♯) present in the piano's right hand. These corruptions indicate that Mussorgsky was not entirely serious about these devices, just as his slightly wayward harmony indicates that one should not take his sentimental introduction too seriously either. At the very deepest level the corruption of the Schenkerian background structure through the use of C♮ rather than C♯, while certainly not planned by the composer, who knew nothing of such things, is nevertheless indicative of the (deeper) underlying process.

A composer who adopts such a strategy clearly puts himself at risk of being misunderstood, of making himself an even greater object of ridicule. That Mussorgsky was not understood is evidenced by Herman Laroche, critic and man of the Conservatory, in his review of *Sunless:* "The first place among the modern cacophonists by rights belongs to Mr Mussorgsky, who surpassed himself with a small collection of romances entitled 'Sunless'. . . . [The] poems alone, without any music, are much more *musical,* than with the music of Mr Mussorgsky." Laroche forms an association between women and bad pianism, but only in the context of the third song: "From the piano keyboard a stream of musical sewage is pouring, as if a girl is reading a new piece at the boarding school without making out how many flats are in the key signature." He then turns his attention to our song:

> In other romances there are even more curious things. Thus, in the romance "Be bored, you were born for boredom" one can find two lines: "Responding with a deceitful greeting to the truth of an innocent dream," where "innocent dream" is depicted by the complete discord between right and left hands: there is, so to say, a little harmonic fight going on there. How characteristic of Mr Musorgsky . . . , that even "innocent dream" . . . turns out to be a musical miasma, a chain of unbearably wrong chords, which reeks of the Petersburg summer aroma, the aroma of Sennaya [Street] and the Ekaterinsky canal![45]

Golenishchev-Kutuzov, conscious that Laroche had misunderstood this song cycle, began constructing a riposte. Unfortunately, at the very moment he begins to come to grips with Mussorgsky's compositional intentions, he breaks off, frustratingly, with the words: "I cannot help but note that, for the first time, realism and truth in music . . ."[46]



[45]H[erman] Laroche, "Russian Musical Literature 1874–75," *Golos* 158 (1876).

[46]This draft response is to be found in Golenishchev-Kutuzov's sketchbooks. See Orlova, *Musorgsky's Days and Works,* p. 497.

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[Footnotes]

[3] **Mussorgsky's "Sunless" Cycle in Russian Criticism: Focus of Controversy**
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[8] **Theory and Practice in the Analysis of the Nineteenth-Century 'Lied'**
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