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***Diktat* and Dialogue in Stalinist Culture: Staging Patriotic Historical Opera in Soviet Ukraine, 1936–1954**

Serhy Yekelchuk

Decades ago, a highly readable émigré memoir aptly labeled Stalinist cultural policy the “taming of the arts.”¹ Reinforcing the dominant totalitarian paradigm according to which Soviet society was the passive object of an all-powerful state, this catchy image became popular in the Cold War west. During the 1970s, the “revisionist” generation of western scholars began questioning the orthodox view of Stalinist culture. For example, Vera Dunham suggested that the middle-class values apparent in the literature of mature Stalinism might reflect a “Big Deal” between the bureaucracy and the cultural tastes of the new Soviet “middle class,” while Sheila Fitzpatrick maintained that even in the heyday of Stalinism, some prominent intellectuals held positions of “cultural authority,” enabling them to influence the course of cultural life.² These suggestions, however, illuminated the social background of the cultural processes rather than their inner dynamics. During the last three decades, western scholars have made use of published sources to refine the revisionist model of Stalinist culture.³ Nonetheless, until recently, the unavailability of the party archives has delayed a comprehensive conceptual reassessment of relations between power and culture in the Stalin period. The question of how the pronouncements of party leaders, decisions of local bureaucrats, the creative work of intellectuals and artists, and the reaction of audiences in-

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1. Iu. Elagin, *Ukroshchenie iskusstva* (New York, 1952).

2. See Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin's Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction*, with an introduction by Jerry F. Hough (Cambridge, Eng., 1976); Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Culture and Politics under Stalin: A Reappraisal,” *Slavic Review* 35, no. 2 (June 1976): 211–31, reprinted in substantially revised form as “Cultural Orthodoxies under Stalin” in her *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia* (Ithaca, 1992), 238–56.

3. See, for example, Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago, 1981); Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. Charles Rougle (Princeton, 1992); Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society, 1917–1953* (Cambridge, Eng., 1992); Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*, trans. Catherine Porter (Stanford, 1992); Richard Stites, *Russian Popular Culture: Entertainment and Society since 1900* (Cambridge, Eng., 1992); and Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from the Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, 2000).

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teracted to shape everyday “cultural production” under Stalinism, especially outside Moscow and Leningrad, remains open. Moreover, although Russian historians now enjoy unprecedented access to unique archival sources, their vision of Stalinist cultural policy is still framed in terms of the state’s *diktat* and “control.”⁴

The authorities’ *diktat*, in the form of periodic campaigns against various “deviations” and close ideological supervision of major projects, seemed to be the most spectacular feature of Soviet cultural life. Nevertheless, interpreting cultural production under Stalinism exclusively in terms of the party’s ideological dominion over the terrorized intelligentsia is simplistic. The researcher’s true challenge is to recover the exact role played by the Moscow hierarchy, local functionaries, and artistic elites in shaping Stalinist culture. This paper proposes to analyze Stalinist cultural production as a complex amalgam of the state’s *diktat* and the “dialogue” between the bureaucracy and the intelligentsia. Mikhail Bakhtin has argued that all texts are organized as a “dialogue” that takes account of their perception in a given society. At the same time, audiences can “read” a text selectively, thus negotiating its meaning and entering into dialogue with the cultural producers.⁵ Taking Bakhtin’s theory a step further, Fredric Jameson has shown, in his analysis of seventeenth-century Anglicanism, that the constant repetition of hegemonic discourse indicates the impossibility of achieving complete cultural hegemony in any society. Although we often “hear” only one hegemonic voice, the hegemonic discourse always remains locked in dialogue with suppressed counterdiscourses. This is made possible by what Jameson calls the unity of a shared code—a shared language and a common set of assumptions.⁶ This concept opens up a new way to study the strategies of resistance *within* the official discourse that enable various social or ethnic groups to negotiate the meaning of the official language in order to defend their own interests.⁷

The state’s *diktat* in Stalinist culture was limited by the irregular character of the central authorities’ administrative interference. Although the periodic Moscow-initiated ideological campaigns undeniably defined the

4. See, for example, Leonid Maksimenkov, *Sumbur vmesto muzyki: Stalinskaiia kul'turnaia revoliutsiia 1936–1938* (Moscow, 1997), where the valuable archival findings often contradict the author’s traditionalist conclusions.

5. It is significant that Bakhtin developed the notion of dialogism in the Stalinist Soviet Union. Much of his work celebrated unofficial resistance to the authoritative discourses that attempt to limit the polysemous impulses of language. Since meanings cannot be fixed and made absolute, the hegemonic quest for order and stability is frustrated by the persistent residual otherness of subversion, irresolution, and ambiguity. See M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin, 1981); V. N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik (New York, 1973); Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (New York, 1990).

6. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, 1981).

7. Significantly, the study of the social history of Stalinism is developing in the same conceptual direction. Stephen Kotkin has recently argued that workers came to share Stalinism as a “civilization” through “positive integration” into official society by learning to “speak Bolshevik” and entering a subtle, if unequal, negotiation with the system. See Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, 1995).

general direction of literature and the arts, the party leadership did not exercise total control over cultural production even after the late 1930s. High-level policy decisions interfered sporadically and often confusingly with cultural life far away from Moscow, whereas local functionaries had considerable autonomy in determining the limits of what was ideologically acceptable and unacceptable. In fact, the everyday “party line” in Soviet Ukrainian culture was formulated, negotiated, and maintained by republican bureaucrats and members of the intelligentsia themselves. They could either undermine or reinforce the Moscow policy, and more often than not, the intellectuals’ dialogic responses were already infused with deference and servility. Following the authorities’ lead or acting on their own, critics, poets, and composers evaluated their peers’ work according to their own understanding of standards of Stalinist ideology and aesthetics. With or without Moscow’s approval, local ideologues and intellectuals alike did not hesitate to denounce various “errors” and to develop brief and often confusing pronouncements from the center into full-blown ideological campaigns. At the same time, by expressing their opinions in the shared “Bolshevik” political language, the artistic community could successfully negotiate the meaning of Soviet Ukrainian culture with local functionaries. The Ukrainian intelligentsia skillfully used the official discourse of “ethnic flowering” to maintain the rights of the indigenous high culture, and both the republican political and artistic elites relied on the rhetoric of the “authentic cultural tradition” to defend their cultural domain against Moscow’s centralizing efforts. Although scarce, the surviving evidence indicates the active role that contemporary Ukrainian audiences may have played in their “dialogue” with the cultural producers.

The need to revise our view of Stalinist cultural life does not end here. Even the most insightful western cultural historians have usually limited their studies to developments in Moscow and, at best, Leningrad, neglecting both the cultural dynamics of Russian provinces and the fact that at least half of the Soviet people belonged to non-Russian nationalities and consumed—together with or instead of Soviet Russian culture—the works of their native culture. Far removed from Moscow, local political bodies offered an additional forum for “negotiations” between the authorities and the intelligentsia. Moreover, contrary to a famous Soviet slogan, both the form *and* the content of national cultures under Stalinism represented an alternative avenue of self-identification for the audiences.⁸ The architects of “socialist national cultures” never quite succeeded in separating their constructs from the old “bourgeois-nationalist” cultures of the same nationalities. The goal of creating a “healthy” ethnolinguistic Soviet Ukrainian culture not identified with the non-Soviet Ukrainian ultimately proved unattainable.⁹ In their frustration, the authorities launched periodic campaigns against “nationalist deviations,”

8. Here I agree with Yuri Slezkine. See his provocative “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism,” *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 414–52, here 447.

9. Ronald Grigor Suny has examined the Soviet ideal of “healthy” ethnolinguistic nationhood in *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, 1993), 111–12.

but republican bureaucrats and indigenous intellectuals shaped the extent of those campaigns at least as much as the Moscow functionaries did. This interpretation contrasts sharply with those of contemporary scholars in the non-Russian successor states, who unproblematically demonize Moscow and its viceroys. Thus, Ukrainian cultural historians routinely concentrate on the black deeds of Iosif Stalin and his envoys, who are presumed to have successfully terrorized the Ukrainian intelligentsia and made it comply with the official “party line.”¹⁰ This paper will offer a different, more complicated picture of Stalinist “cultural production” in the most populous non-Russian republic of the Soviet Union.

Conceived as a deconstruction of the traditional view of Stalinist cultural life, this article also tells a story of its own. It is the story of the making of Soviet Ukrainian historical opera from the late 1930s to the mid-1950s, of editing and staging classical Ukrainian operas under Stalinism, and of multiple social “dialogues” in the artistic portrayal of the past.¹¹ A look at the genre of historical opera is particularly rewarding for a student of Stalinist cultural paradigms. The role of historical opera in the European national revivals of the nineteenth century inextricably tied this genre to the emergence of modern national identities and mythologies. The reinstatement of traditional social hierarchies and cultural values in the Soviet Union during the mid-1930s pushed the “bourgeois” art of opera to the foreground. The state-sponsored rehabilitation of patriotism, national pride, and Russian national heroes was another aspect of the same “Great Retreat.”¹² The genre of historical opera afforded a unique opportunity to combine the Stalinist quest for monumentalism, respectability, and “classics” in the arts with the system’s new regard for the Russian national past and cultural heritage. Scholars have shown that Russian classical opera, both tuneful and patriotic, made a spectacular come-

10. See L. A. Shevchenko, “Kul’turno-ideolohichni protsesy v Ukraini u 40–50-kh rr.,” *Ukrains’kyi istorychnyi zhurnal*, 1992, no. 7/8:39–48; Shevchenko, “Kul’tura Ukrainy v umovakh stalins’koho totalitaryzmu (druha polovyna 40-kh-pochatok 50-kh rokov),” in V. M. Danylenko, ed., *Ukraina XX st.: Kul’tura, ideolohiia, polityka* (Kiev, 1993), 1:119–30; V. I. Iurchuk, *Kul’turne zhyttia v Ukraini u povoienni roky: Svitlo i tyni* (Kiev, 1995); O. V. Zamlynska, “Ideolohichni represii v haluzi hul’tury v Ukraini u 1948–1953 rr.,” in V. M. Danylenko, ed., *Ukraina XX st.: Kul’tura, ideolohiia, polityka* (Kiev, 1996), 2:144–56.

11. This paper uses the following abbreviations for the names of the Russian and Ukrainian archives: RTsKhIDNI (Rossiiskii tsentr khraneniia i izucheniiia dokumentov noveishei istorii; renamed Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii in March 1999), TsKhSD (Tsentr khraneniia sovremennoi dokumentatsii), GARF (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii), RGALI (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva), TsDAHO (Tsentral’nyi derzhavnyi arkhiv hromads’kykh ob’iednan’ Ukrainy), TsDAVOV (Tsentral’nyi derzhavnyi arkhiv vyshchykh orhaniv vlady i derzhavnoho upravlinnia Ukrainy), and TsDAML (Tsentral’nyi derzhavnyi arkhiv-muzei literatury i mystetstva Ukrainy).

12. The rehabilitation of Russian patriotism and traditional cultural values in the mid-1930s is the subject of Nicholas S. Timasheff, *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia* (New York, 1946); Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time*; Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928–1941* (New York, 1990); Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front*; and D. L. Brandenberger and A. M. Dubrovsky, “‘The People Need a Tsar’: The Emergence of National Bolshevism as Stalinist Ideology, 1931–1941,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 50, no. 5 (July 1998): 873–92.

back on the Soviet scene from 1935 to 1937. The rehabilitation of the genre reached its apogee in 1939, when the Bolshoi lavishly produced the canonical tsarist patriotic opera, Mikhail Glinka's *Ivan Susanin*, which had remained untouchable for twenty-two years after the revolution. With a heavily edited libretto, *Susanin* became the Stalinist patriotic spectacle, an unprecedentedly pompous celebration of Russian national pride.¹³ Yet the students of the “Great Retreat” in Stalinist ideology and culture have generally ignored the fact that this transformation occurred in a multinational state. The non-Russians did not simply join the Muscovites in singing paeans to “big brother.” Instead, the non-Russian composers turned to refurbishing or writing their own patriotic operas in order to glorify their own national traditions and glorious pasts. Late in the war and especially after 1945, the promotion of local ethnic patriotism in the arts became increasingly subordinated to the glorification of the “great Russian people” and the “friendship of peoples.”¹⁴ Nevertheless, the resulting cultural hybrid allowed ample room for different “readings.”

The Quest for Grand Historical Opera

In March 1936, hundreds of Ukrainian actors, musicians, artists, and writers arrived in Moscow for the *dekada* (ten-day festival) of Ukrainian art.¹⁵ During this grandiose exhibition of the cultural achievements of Soviet Ukraine, the Kiev Opera performed in the Bolshoi in the presence of the Politburo and the cream of the Soviet state and artistic elite. The Kievans brought to Moscow two classical Ukrainian works based on folk melodies, Semen Hulak-Artemov's *kyi's* comic masterpiece, *The Zaporozhian Cossack beyond the Danube* (1863), and Mykola Lysenko's lyrical operetta *Natalka from Poltava* (1889), along with a classic Russian work, Nikolai Rimskii-Korsakov's *Snow Maiden* (1882). Performances at the Bolshoi proved a success, earning the company the Order of Lenin. (This was the first time a theater company had ever received the highest Soviet award.¹⁶) Nevertheless, *Pravda* mildly criticized the Kievans for attempting to turn the humorous *Zaporozhian Cossack* into a “grand opera” by adding a new third act, “At the Sultan's Palace,” which was entirely written by the Soviet composer Volodymyr Iorysh.¹⁷

13. A. A. Gozenpud, *Russkii sovetskii opernyi teatr (1917–1941): Ocherk istorii* (Leningrad, 1963), 212–19, 252–64; Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917–1981*, enl. ed. (Bloomington, 1983), 122; Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, 554, 570–71.

14. On the rise of the “friendship of peoples” paradigm in Soviet history writing, see Lowell Tillett, *The Great Friendship: Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities* (Chapel Hill, 1969).

15. See the extensive coverage of the *dekada* in *Pravda*, 11–25 March 1936.

16. After the 1936 *dekada*, some Leningrad artists reportedly complained that Ukrainians had received awards as part of a political campaign to exalt “ethnics” rather than because they merited them. See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York, 1999), 167–68. This would not explain, however, the simultaneous promotion of the Kiev Opera's leading conductor, Arii Pazovskii, first to the artistic directorship of the Kirov Opera in Leningrad and then to the analogous post at the Bolshoi.

17. *Pravda*, 13 March 1936, 4.

The Moscow authorities favored the idea of producing a classical Ukrainian patriotic opera that would provide Soviet Ukrainians with a truly imposing representation of their heroic past—just as *Ivan Susanin* had done for the Russians—and even of staging such a work in Moscow. During the dekada Kievans reported in *Pravda* that they were revising and editing a classic Ukrainian historical opera, Mykola Lysenko's *Taras Bul'ba*. Within weeks of this announcement, the head of the All-Union Committee for the Arts, Platon Kerzhentsev, reported to Stalin that the Bolshoi Theater's Second Company was also planning to produce *Taras*.¹⁸ The "founder of Ukrainian music," Lysenko, left this sole Ukrainian classical historical opera unrevised and only partly orchestrated at his death in 1912. Based on Nikolai Gogol's famous novella about the Cossacks' struggle against the Poles, *Taras* was good subject matter for a grand patriotic opera, while the work's anti-Polish animus was entirely consonant with the tone of Soviet prewar propaganda.¹⁹ The Kharkiv and Kiev operas produced *Taras* several times during the 1920s, but the unfinished opera did not long remain in their repertoire. In any case, the previous productions of *Taras*, with their constructivist settings, eurythmic choral movements, and panoramas of first Five-Year Plan construction sites in the finale were hardly in keeping with the High Stalinist vision of traditional and magnificent classical spectacle.²⁰

In April 1937, less than a year after the dekada, the Kiev Opera stole a march on the Muscovites by premiering *Taras* as a Ukrainian grand historical opera. The republic's leading composers, Lev Revuts'kyi and Borys Liatoshyns'kyi, polished and orchestrated the score, while the premier Ukrainian poet, Maksym Ryl's'kyi, edited the libretto. In Lysenko's version, *Taras* ended with a Cossack assault on the Polish fortress of Dubno. Iosyf Lapyts'kyi, the director of the lavish 1937 production, chose to be faithful to Gogol's story, however, closing the opera with the scene in which the Cossack Colonel Bul'ba is burned alive by the Poles. (Immolation on stage was, of course, a traditional and effective operatic device.) Although this monumental five-act opera lasted five and a half hours, it was enthusiastically received in Kiev and during the company's tour in Leningrad in May.²¹ Soviet Ukrainians seemed to have recovered the missing link of their "great tradition," required by the High Stalinist idea of a "nation."²²

High policy soon interfered in a confusing fashion, however. When the Great Purge swept away the entire Ukrainian leadership in the au-

18. *Pravda*, 23 March 1936, 4 (Kievans preparing *Taras*); RTsKhIDNI, f. 17 (TsK VKP[b]), op. 163, d. 1103, ll. 144–46 (Kerzhentsev).

19. Similar observations have been made about the 1939 production of *Ivan Susanin* at the Bolshoi. See Bojan Bujic, "Anti-Polish Propaganda and Russian Opera: The Revised Version of Glinka's *Ivan Susanin*," *European History Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (April 1985): 175–86. The Kharkiv opera company staged *Taras* in 1924 and the Kiev company in 1927 and 1928.

20. See Iu. O. Stanishevs'kyi, *Ukrains'kyi radians'kyi muzychnyi teatr: Narysy istorii (1917–1967)* (Kiev, 1970), 63–67.

21. See the collection of reviews and newspaper clippings in TsDAMLN, f. 71 (N. V. Smolich), op. 1, spr. 38, and M. Stefanovych, *Kyivs'kyi derzhavnyi ordena Lenina akademichnyi teatr opery i baleta URSR im. T. H. Shevchenka: Istorychnyi narys* (Kiev, 1968), 138–41.

22. Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment," 446–47.

tumn of 1937, “enemy sabotage” was uncovered in all fields previously supervised by the chairman of Ukrainian Committee for the Arts, Andrii Khvyliia. On 24 October, the *Pravda* critic G. Khubov used the tragic finale of *Taras* to dismiss the work, which, he claimed, had “earned the praise and approval of the vile enemy of the people, Khvyliia,” as an “antipopular production [*antinarodnyi spektakl'*]” exuding the “spirit of doom.” Significantly, the official newspaper did not accuse the producers of “Ukrainian nationalism” or of unduly fostering national sentiment. Rather, they were guilty of the “cynical glorification of Polish interventionists” and of insufficient Ukrainian patriotic fervor.²³

Hurriedly transferred from the Bolshoi, the company’s new artistic director, Nikolai Smolich, soon found himself in a difficult situation when the republican leadership put pressure on him to produce a new, more patriotic version of the only Ukrainian classical historical opera. Smolich himself felt like an outsider in Ukrainian artistic circles. He disliked Lysenko’s music and had grave doubts about staging the opera in a language he did not understand well, especially in an unfamiliar cultural and political milieu:

[*Taras Bul'ba*] was considered a Ukrainian classic, although Rimskii-Korsakov assessed it with laconic causticity in his *Chronicle*. Without even having seen the previous production, before assimilating local tastes, trends, and conditions, it was quite difficult and even dangerous for me to approach this task. However, the circumstances and my situation left me no choice. I began by planning a new redaction, eliminating “antipopular” aspects, and shaping the action along more logical and generally more patriotic lines. When I submitted this sketch to the Glavlit, the council members called me a “miracle-worker.”²⁴

Lysenko’s drafts contained enough material for at least two grand operas. To make way for more scenes of popular revolt, however, the producers edited out significant episodes of the romantic subplot, as well as arias that had won public favor. Ending with a rather inconclusive musical depiction of the Cossack assault on the Polish fortress, the 1939 redaction of *Taras* proved ideologically acceptable. Audience reaction considerably influenced the company’s repertoire policy, however. Although the company’s manager, Mykola Pashchyn, claimed “great success” for *Taras* in print, at a later closed-door meeting he acknowledged that between 1937 and 1941, the Kievans had performed *Taras* only 83 times: “that is how unpopular were those redactions.”²⁵

At about the same time, Ukrainian intellectuals began rehabilitating their prerevolutionary “great ancestors.” During the late 1930s and early

23. *Pravda*, 24 October 1937, 6.

24. TsDAMLM, f. 71, op. 1, spr. 20, ark. 206. Glavlit was the Soviet censorship office. In 1895, Nikolai Rimskii-Korsakov wrote about *Taras* as follows: “In Kiev I met with my former students Ryb and the composer Lysenko. At Lysenko’s I ate dumplings and listened to excerpts from his *Taras Bulba*. Didn’t like it—*Taras Bulba*, that is, not the dumplings.” N. A. Rimskii-Korsakov, *Letopis' moei muzykal'noi zhizni* (Moscow, 1955), 197.

25. M. P. Pashchyn, “Nash tvorchyi raport,” *Festyval' opernoho i baletnoho mystetstva: 24 bereznia–7 kvitnia [1941]* (Kiev, 1941), 9; TsDAMLM, f. 573 (Natsional'na opera Ukrainy), op. 1, spr. 171, ark. 2.

1940s, Russians saw their “heroic past” and tsarist heroes such as Peter the Great, Aleksandr Nevskii, and Ivan the Terrible restored to their previous dignity through the efforts of the best Soviet historians, writers, and film directors, who acted on direct instructions from the Politburo.²⁶ Similarly, Ukrainians witnessed the reinstallation of their “founding father,” Bohdan Khmel’nyts’kyi, the Cossack hetman who had created the first modern Ukrainian polity and, conveniently enough, presided over its union with Muscovy in 1654.²⁷ Oleksandr Korniiichuk wrote a play about the hetman in 1938, and Ihor Savchenko directed a film, *Bohdan Khmel’nyts’kyi* (1941). Both works were awarded Stalin Prizes. This was soon followed by the rehabilitation of Danylo of Halych, the thirteenth-century ruler of the Galician-Volhynian Principality, who fought the Tatars, Poles, and Teutonic knights. He was added to the canon of national heroes as the Ukrainian equivalent of Aleksandr Nevskii. Khmel’nyts’kyi and Prince Danylo belonged to the old tsarist pantheon of great men, but, oddly enough, no operas about them had been written during the tsarist era, making it impossible for the Soviet authorities to have them revised and solemnly performed.

Meanwhile, both Ukrainian bureaucrats and intellectuals came to realize that Korniiichuk’s award-winning play about Khmel’nyts’kyi was potential material for a representative historical opera. The Ukrainian composer Kostiantyn Dan’kevych set Korniiichuk’s play to music in 1938 and, according to his biographer, became interested in writing an opera on the subject as early as 1939. However, the management of the Kiev Opera had a much bigger celebrity in mind. In 1939, the company announced that the premier Soviet composer, Dmitrii Shostakovich, had agreed to write such an opera, based on Korniiichuk’s libretto.²⁸ While Shostakovich produced nothing (in fact, he never wrote another opera after the 1936 denunciation of *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*), Dan’kevych waited patiently for his hour to strike.

During the patriotic wartime fervor of 1942, the republican authorities planned to commission the writing of two heroic national historical operas, *Danylo of Halych* and *Bohdan Khmel’nyts’kyi*,²⁹ but work apparently never moved beyond the planning stage. When the Central Committee’s 1946 decree “On the Repertoire of Drama Theaters and Measures for Its Improvement” inspired a campaign against historical topics in the theater throughout the Soviet national republics, the Ukrainian ideologues could

26. See Timasheff, *The Great Retreat*, 167–76; Bernd Uhlenbruch, “The Annexation of History: Eisenstein and the Ivan Groznyi Cult of the 1940s,” in Hans Gunther, ed., *The Culture of the Stalin Period* (New York, 1990), 266–87; Maureen Perrie, “The Tsar, the Emperor, the Leader: Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great and Anatolii Rybakov’s Stalin,” in Nick Lampert and Gábor T. Rittersporn, eds., *Stalinism: Its Nature and Aftermath: Essays in Honor of Moshe Lewin* (London, 1992), 77–100.

27. However outdated, the best survey of the changing Soviet views on Khmel’nyts’kyi remains John Basarab, *Pereiaslav 1654: A Historiographical Study* (Edmonton, 1982), 162–213.

28. See M. Mykhailov, *Kostiantyn Fedorovych Dan’kevych: Narodnyi artyst SRSR* (Kiev, 1964), 15, 75 (Dan’kevych); Stanishevs’kyi, *Ukrains’kyi radians’kyi muzychnyi teatr*, 177 (Shostakovich).

29. TsDAHO, f. 1 (TsK KP[b]U), op. 23, spr. 441, ark. 5zv.

not find much to denounce in drama. They resolved to broaden the scope of their official statements on the theater to include opera, a genre traditionally preoccupied with the past. The Ukrainian Central Committee resolution “On the Repertoire of Drama and Opera Theaters of the Ukrainian SSR and Measures toward Its Improvement” criticized the republican opera companies for not having staged a single new opera on a Soviet subject during the previous three years.³⁰ Even so, the local authorities had only one composer to denounce for “preoccupation with the past,” namely Mykola Verykiv’s’kyi, the author of a lyrical opera on a theme from Taras Shevchenko and several symphonic works on historical subjects. In frustration, the ideological secretary of the Ukrainian Central Committee, Kost’ Lytvyn, set himself to criticize the libretti of unwritten operas—works submitted to the republican competition for best operatic libretto.³¹

The ill-fated premiere of the revived *Taras Bul’ba* came just a month after the decree. The 1946 redaction did not differ much from the 1939 version. This time, however, Ukrainian opera critics, composers, and artists hastened to impute every imaginable shortcoming to the untimely historical opera. The reviewers announced that *Taras* failed to create “an impression of Ukraine suffering under the yoke of the Polish lords,” for in act 1, *Bul’ba* and other Cossacks were seen to be drinking too cheerfully in the orchard. The colonel himself looked “inactive” and the whole opera “unfinished.”³² Still, the Stalin Prize Committee sent two Moscow composers, Reinhold Glière and Iurii Shaporin, to review the production. As Shaporin confided to Smolich, the composers had prepared a very positive assessment, but neither the republican “government nor the Central Committee gave their support” to the nomination.³³

For the next two years, with but a single exception, no composer attempted to work on a historical opera in Ukraine. The exception was a professor at the Kiev Conservatory, Mykhailo Skorul’s’kyi, who had received his musical education before World War I and apparently had never adjusted to the changing Soviet ideological prescriptions for musical works. In 1948, Skorul’s’kyi completed a grand historical music drama, *Svichka’s Wedding*, which clearly imitated Wagner’s musical language. Given the unofficial ban on the “Hitlerite” Wagner in the postwar years, Skorul’s’kyi could consider himself fortunate that his opera was never staged.³⁴ Although in Ukraine the 1948 campaign against “formalism” in

30. Emphasis added. The resolution was published in *Literaturna hazeta*, 12 October 1946, 2; *Radians’ke mystetstvo*, 15 October 1946, 1; Iu. Iu. Kondufor, ed., *Kul’turne budivnytstvo v Ukraini RSR: Cherven’ 1941–1950: Zbirnyk dokumentiv i materialiv* (Kiev, 1989), 271–76.

31. TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 1, spr. 729, ark. 149 (Lytvyn); *Radians’ke mystetstvo*, 1 October 1946, 1, and 15 October 1946, 1 (Verykiv’s’kyi).

32. TsDAML, f. 146 (M. P. Stefanovych), op. 1, spr. 203, ark. 1–15 (typescripts of negative reviews); f. 573, op. 1, spr. 46 (contemporary critical discussion); TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 3653, ark. 165–70 (later comments containing valuable insights into the causes of the 1946 fiasco); *Radians’ke mystetstvo*, 4 December 1946, 3 (dismissive review).

33. TsDAML, f. 71, op. 1, spr. 20, ark. 270. As a professor at the Kiev Conservatory from 1913 to 1920, Glière taught both Revuts’kyi and Liatoshyn’s’kyi.

34. L. Arkhimovych, *Shliakhy rozvytku ukrains’koi radians’koi opery* (Kiev, 1970), 290; M. Mykhailov, *M. A. Skorul’s’kyi: Narys pro zhyttia i tvorchist’* (Kiev, 1960), 71.

music focused on the prominent symphonist Borys Liatoshyn's'kyi, the local authorities and cultural figures ritualistically repeated the old accusations against Verykiv's'kyi, himself no modernist, but presumably guilty of "idealizing the past."³⁵ After the third unsuccessful revival of *Taras Bul'ba* in 1946, Ukrainian composers seemingly abandoned their attempts to create (or recreate) a national historical opera. In those years, the Kiev Opera twice (in 1947 and 1949) planned guest performances in Moscow. Both times the republican functionaries "postponed" the tours indefinitely—the second time for the explicit reason that the last redaction of *Taras* remained "unsatisfactory from an ideological and artistic point of view."³⁶ A strange impasse ensued: on the one hand, official ideology dictated that Ukrainians create a fully developed high culture, including patriotic historical operas, and Moscow indicated no dissatisfaction with Ukrainian historical operas after 1937. On the other hand, the republican functionaries remained unsupportive of any attempt to portray the nation's past, and local composers themselves shied away from problematic historical topics.

The Dialogic Dimensions of Cultural Production

Smolich's unpublished memoirs provide extraordinary details of the struggles and negotiations within an artistic community allegedly terrorized and completely controlled by the party, as well as between the intelligentsia and the local authorities. Smolich's scorn for Lysenko's music soon antagonized his Ukrainian colleagues, who strongly identified themselves with the promotion of indigenous high culture. Two episodes from the Kiev Opera's residence in Irkutsk and Ufa during the war illustrate the point well. First, after consuming hard liquor at a party, the premier Ukrainian poet and the company's dramaturge, Maksym Ryl's'kyi, pointedly announced to Smolich that "Ukrainian culture was older and more developed than Russian, that this was particularly true of music, and that Rimskii-Korsakov was not fit to hold a candle to Lysenko." On another occasion, Smolich publicly suggested that *Taras* might be improved by a new orchestration. The company's leading bass, Ivan Patorzhyn's'kyi, "turned pale and, twisting his mouth, sharply announced, 'If you, Nikolai Vasil'evich, treat the Ukrainian classics this way, you are not fit to head Ukraine's leading theater.'"³⁷ The remainder of Smolich's tenure at the Kiev Opera was marked by perennial clashes with Ryl's'kyi, Patorzhyn's'kyi, and others over politically sensitive questions of national musical heritage. At one point immediately after the war, Smolich complained to the first secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party, Nikita Khrushchev, that he could not work among "people with nationalistic tendencies. . . . Then Khrushchev delicately interrupted me and said in a confidential tone: 'Do

35. *Radians'ke mystetstvo*, 18 February 1948, 2; *Literaturna hazeta*, 4 April 1948, 2, and 27 May 1948, 1.

36. See TsDAMLM, f. 573, op. 1, spr. 144, ark. 15 (1947), and spr. 93, ark. 52–53 (1949).

37. TsDAMLM, f. 71, op. 1, spr. 20, ark. 237, 241.

you think I am in a different situation, surrounded by different people?’” Nevertheless, he gave the embattled artistic director valuable tactical advice—to join the party in order to obtain advance information about the intrigues within the company’s party group.³⁸

Of all the problems creating controversy at the Kiev Opera, the issue of staging Russian classical operas in Russian best underscored the “negotiability” of High Stalinist culture. Since the 1920s, producing Russian and west European operas in the various national languages had remained an important symbol of the “flowering” that major non-Russian cultures were said to be experiencing in the Soviet Union. Ukrainian intellectuals considered the linguistic “nativization” of the previously Russian opera theaters one of the most obvious gains of the Ukrainization campaign of the late 1920s.³⁹ But performing *Ivan Susanin* and *Eugene Onegin* in Ukrainian caused displeasure among numerous Russian and Russified professionals residing in Ukraine. According to Smolich, immediately before the war, the Central Committee’s new chief of the Department of Culture, a certain I. Lysenko, inquired about the possibility of reinstating the Russian libretti of Russian classics because of the “popular demand among Kievans.” (As one may conclude from this inquiry, Comrade Lysenko was not related to the famous composer and staunch nationalist Mykola Lysenko.) As Smolich heard later from Comrade Lysenko’s successor, Kost’ Lytvyn, and from the chairman of the Ukrainian Committee for the Arts, M. P. Kompaniiets’, discussion of this issue was halted by Mykola Bazhan, a prominent Ukrainian poet and translator who served during the war as deputy premier in charge of culture.⁴⁰

After the company returned to Kiev in 1944, Khrushchev raised the language question once again. Speaking to Smolich in the presence of three other key members of the Ukrainian Politburo, he complained that the Central Committee was receiving numerous letters demanding the production of Russian classics in Russian: “Perhaps this is right. This is what is being done in other republics and [other] Ukrainian cities. Is [returning to Russian] possible theoretically, and how much time would it take?” It would appear that Smolich supported the idea wholeheartedly. When he left Khrushchev, the matter seemed decided. The next day, together with the Ukrainian composers Revuts’kyi and Liatoshins’kyi, Smolich attended a party at the Ryl’s’kyis. There, Kompaniiets’ broke the news about the forthcoming language reform at the Kiev Opera. As Smolich described it, Ryl’s’kyi reacted immediately:

He jumped to his feet, saying:

“What is this? Does Ukraine not have the right to possess at least one opera theater of its own? Would Russian or foreign operas be staged in the language of the original somewhere in Spain or France? I will call Nikita Sergeevich [Khrushchev] at once.”

38. Ibid., ark. 270zv–271.

39. See George O. Liber, *Soviet Nationality Policy, Urban Growth, and Identity Change in the Ukrainian SSR, 1923–1934* (Cambridge, Eng., 1992), 112, 176; Myroslav Shkandrij, *Modernists, Marxists and the Nation: The Ukrainian Literary Discussion of the 1920s* (Edmonton, 1992), 92.

40. TsDAMLM, f. 71, op. 1, spr. 20, ark. 216, 272.

However, since it was late, Ryl's'kyi's wife kept him from dialing.

[Ryl's'kyi] concluded, "Tomorrow we will all protest to Nikita Sergeevich. And as for you, Nikolai Vasil'evich [Smolich], I volunteer to teach you literary Ukrainian within several months. You will manage it quickly."

After this, no additional instructions on staging Russian operas in Russian were handed down, and everything was left unchanged.⁴¹

The republican authorities returned to the language question many times, without ever resolving it. In Kiev, western operas continued to be staged in Ukrainian without provoking much public discontent. Meanwhile, the 1950 audit of the leading companies revealed that the Odessa and Kharkiv operas each performed eleven Russian classics in Russian that season, including in both cases *Ivan Susanin*, *Prince Igor*, *The Tsar's Bride*, *Eugene Onegin*, and *The Queen of Spades*. In L'viv, a western Ukrainian city presumably sensitive to the rights of the national culture, most Russian operas were staged in Russian, while such a signature Stalinist spectacle as *Ivan Susanin* was sung in Ukrainian.⁴² Interestingly, *Susanin* was the most popular Russian classical opera in L'viv. In 1950, the average attendance at Russian-language productions of *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades* was 550, or about 100 percent of the "plan," while attendance at the Ukrainian-language production of *Susanin* was 970, or 180 percent of the "plan."⁴³ (Aside from improved comprehension, almost a nonissue for educated western Ukrainians, these attendance figures suggest that at least part of the public was boycotting productions in Russian.) Only one company, the Kiev Opera, presented all Russian classical operas in Ukrainian translation, which some visiting Moscow critics considered an affront to Russian culture. In 1952, Igor' Belza, an inspector from Moscow, found it outrageous that the Kiev company had staged *The Queen of Spades*, *Ivan Susanin*, and *Eugene Onegin* in Ukrainian. Although Belza did not object to the quality of Ryl's'kyi's translations, he questioned the very need for Ukrainian libretti: "Why could one not use the Russian text and, indeed, the text by [Aleksandr] Pushkin?"⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the practice of performing the Russian classics in Ukrainian remained, at least in Kiev. The Ryl's'kyis, Patorzhyns'kyis, and Bazhans proved their ability to exploit the official discourse of ethnic "flowering" to defend their cultural domain.

By the late 1940s, both the republican authorities and the local artistic elite came to understand that they should resolve the impasse involving

41. Ibid., ark. 272zv. Today, to be sure, Russian classical operas are customarily performed in Russian in both France and Spain. It should be remembered, however, that staging operas in the language of the original is a relatively recent innovation in the west.

42. TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 2051, ark. 176–77 (audit); RGALI, f. 962 (Vsesoiuznyi komitet po delam iskusstv pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR), op. 11, d. 560, ll. 51–53 (*Susanin* in L'viv). The ostensible aim of the 1950 audit was to ensure that Ukrainian opera companies were complying with the rule on performing Russian operas in Ukrainian translation. Nevertheless, the republican officials did not seem overly concerned about poor compliance on the part of opera companies outside Kiev.

43. TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 2015, ark. 185.

44. RGALI, f. 962, op. 11, d. 558, l. 82. Of course, "Pushkin's text" did not refer to *Ivan Susanin*.

national historical operas, if only to display the “flowering” of Ukrainian culture to outsiders. In a manner characteristic of the idiosyncratic and confusing late Stalinist “dialogue” between the party hierarchy and the local elites, the impetus prompting them to start working on a Ukrainian historical opera came unexpectedly, indirectly, and rather enigmatically. To reconstruct the event, we have only a stenographic record of the amusing remarks made by Kompaniiets’ at a meeting at the Committee for the Arts in Moscow sometime in the early 1950s. The story goes as follows. In May 1948, the Soviet president, Marshal Kliment Voroshilov, visited Kiev. Known for his love of opera, Voroshilov asked Khrushchev to arrange for him to attend performances by two prominent Ukrainian singers, Mariia Lytvynenko-Vol’hemut and Ivan Patorzhyns’kyi, whom the marshal remembered from the 1936 dekada. For the marshal’s benefit, the Kiev Opera changed its schedule on short notice to put on Hulak-Artemovs’kyi’s *The Zaporozhian Cossack* with Patorzhyns’kyi and Vol’hemut. Deeply moved by the performance, Voroshilov issued an invitation to the Kievans: “Come to Moscow.” After he left, the Ukrainian ideologues and artistic elite plunged into a feverish discussion of what to do. “Korniichuk was there and, properly speaking, that [comment by Voroshilov] became the impetus to write *Bohdan Khmel’nyts’kyi*, for we needed to bring something to Moscow; one could not go up against the Bolshoi Theater with *Faust*, *Ivan Susanin* or *The Tsar’s Bride*. We needed to bring national art—national in form and socialist in content.” Significantly, with the postwar cult of the “elder Russian brother” on the rise, the Ukrainian side preferred writing a new work celebrating the union with Russia to reviving a classical *Taras Bul’ba* that did not explicitly conform to the rhetoric of the “friendship of peoples.” In two months, the resourceful Korniichuk produced a verse libretto of *Bohdan Khmel’nyts’kyi* co-authored with his wife, Wanda Wasilewska. In July, the press reported that the composer Kostiantyn Dan’kevych was already working on the score.⁴⁵

Although Voroshilov’s spur-of-the-moment invitation did not specify any date, the republican functionaries and cultural figures turned the writing of *Bohdan Khmel’nyts’kyi* into an affair of state. As soon as the Odesan Dan’kevych completed the first draft of the score on 27 January 1950, he telegraphed the news to both the second secretary of the republican Central Committee, Oleksii Kyrychenko, and the secretary for propaganda, Ivan Nazarenko. As early as 15 February, the newspapers announced that the first audition of the score at the Ukrainian State Committee for the Arts was a success. By August, the final version of the score was ready.⁴⁶ *Bohdan* turned out to be a grand historical opera, a work having little in common with the conventions of twentieth-century western

45. RGALI, f. 962, op. 11, d. 558, ll. 21, 48, 17. At the time, Kompaniiets’ served as head of the Administration of Theaters at the Ukrainian Committee for the Arts. The first draft of the libretto can be found in TsDAML, f. 435 (O. Ie. Korniichuk), op. 1, d. 297. On Dan’kevych, see *Radians’ke mystetstvo*, 28 July 1948, 3.

46. TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 2041, ark. 1 (telegram to Nazarenko), and spr. 2051, ark. 1 (telegram to Kyrychenko); *Radians’ke mystetstvo*, 15 February 1950, 3 (first audition), and 23 August 1950, 3 (score ready).

musical theater. Although the work was based on national motifs, it imitated the form and dramatic structure of nineteenth-century Russian and west European operas. *Bohdan* also contained direct musical quotations. Glinka's "Glory" from *Ivan Susanin* reverberated as the theme of the Muscovite ambassador and sounded again in the finale. The plot, based on Korniiichuk's own play, developed against the background of the Cossack war with Poland, ending with the decision to ask the tsar for protection (but not with the act of union itself). Both Ukrainian newspapers and internal memos characterized the Kiev premiere of *Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi* in January 1951 as a true "popular drama," a great success.⁴⁷

An opportunity to take up Voroshilov's invitation and bring the Kiev Opera to Moscow soon presented itself. By February 1951, the republican and central bodies were already planning a new dekada of Ukrainian Art in Moscow for the coming summer. The directives issued by the republican Committee for the Arts envisaged a triple aim for the dekada: (1) to demonstrate "the Ukrainian people's deepest love and gratitude to their father, comrade, and teacher—the leader of the peoples, Comrade Stalin"; (2) to reflect the flowering of Soviet Ukrainian culture, "socialist in content and national in form"; and (3) to manifest the deepest love and devotion to "the elder brother—the great Russian people."⁴⁸ Every draft of the Moscow repertoire of the Kiev Opera included *Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi* and *The Zaporozhian Cossack*.⁴⁹ Although no official document mentions this, Stalin apparently expressed a desire to see *Taras Bul'ba* during the Ukrainian dekada. This presumably verbal request could not be accommodated in time, and our only source for it is a chance remark made by the Ukrainian director Mar'ian Krushel'nyts'kyi in 1952: "We failed to fulfill Comrade Stalin's wish to bring *Taras Bul'ba* for the dekada."⁵⁰

On 27 May 1951, the entire Politburo of the Ukrainian party's Central Committee attended the performance of *Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi* in Kiev. Propaganda Secretary Ivan Nazarenko and the nominal Ukrainian president, the chairman of the republic's Supreme Soviet, Mykhailo Hrechukha, joined the lesser administrators on the following day to discuss the changes that had to be made before taking *Bohdan* to Moscow. The members of the Politburo felt that four and a half hours was too long for an opera, but they were reluctant to cut anything, suggesting instead that even more ideologically correct statements be inserted into *Bohdan*'s lengthy arias. Most of all, however, the local hierarchs concerned themselves with appearances and good impressions. They suggested putting

47. *Radians'ke mystetstvo*, 31 January 1951, 1; *Literaturna hazeta*, 8 February 1951, 3 (the quotation is from the second article); RGALI, f. 962, op. 2, d. 2336, l. 13, and op. 3, d. 2306, l. 6. Even such a discriminating and cultured singer as Borys Hmyria genuinely liked the role of Colonel Kryvonis. After reading the score in October 1950, he immediately wrote to a friend: "A good role—both for singing and acting." In February 1951, he again characterized this role as "significant both musically and artistically." See TsDAMLM, f. 443 (B. R. Hmyria), op. 1, spr. 58, ark. 105, 108.

48. TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 2050, ark. 3.

49. TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 2050; RGALI, f. 962, op. 3, dd. 2306, 2336.

50. TsDAVOV, f. 4763 (Komitet u spravakh mystetstv URSSR), op. 1, spr. 360, ark. 25; TsDAMLM, f. 573, op. 1, spr. 171, ark. 25.

the prettiest girls in the first row of the chorus, including more picturesque scenery, making the hetman's study more luxurious, and rolling out a finer carpet before the tsar's ambassadors. "President" Hrechukha, whose impromptu speeches were always entertainingly illiterate, asked: "Why are all the Cossacks dressed so badly? One might think that they were poor." Significantly, nobody objected, while Dan'kevych himself made an argument for "the element of pomp that is required for historical veracity." Nazarenko expressed the party line on *Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi* in the most telling words: "It is our signature [*koronna*] performance. . . . We want this opera, after being approved for staging, to become an opera for everyone."⁵¹ The secretary for propaganda did not utter the bourgeois-sounding phrase "Ukrainian national opera," although that is apparently what he had in mind.

Mechanisms of Criticism and Self-Criticism

The dekada of Ukrainian Art opened in Moscow on 15 June 1951. In the evening, the first performance of *Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi* (in Russian) took place at the Bolshoi Theater. Nazarenko's daily reports to First Secretary Leonid Mel'nikov, which for some reason were sent by the "VCh," the secure high-frequency telegraph channel used by the Soviet military command during the war, allow us to reconstruct the sequence of events blurred in other sources by the subsequent criticism of the opera. Nazarenko considered the Moscow premiere a success. Stalin, Viacheslav Molotov, Georgii Malenkov, Lavrentii Beria, Voroshilov, Lazar' Kaganovich, and Khrushchev were present from beginning to end. The public applauded after many arias, clapping enthusiastically and shouting "bravo" after the finale. On 17 June, the Kievans repeated *Bohdan* to a less blue-ribbon audience, which "received [the opera] warmly, much better than on the 15th." Altogether, the company performed *Bohdan* four times, *The Zaporozhian Cossack* thrice (the Muscovites reportedly complained that three times was not enough), and *The Tsar's Bride* twice. All three operas were broadcast by all-union radio and television at least once. On the last day of the dekada, 24 June, Nazarenko concluded that *Bohdan* had "earned the approval of the metropolitan audience" and ordered that selected arias from the opera be included in the final concert.⁵²

This account mysteriously passes over in silence a critical remark that appeared in *Pravda* on 16 June. After discussing the launch of the dekada and the merits of *Bohdan*, the unsigned article, entitled "The Opening of the Dekada of Ukrainian Art in Moscow," announced:

Its virtues notwithstanding, the opera has serious shortcomings, stemming primarily from the weak libretto (written by W. Wasilewska and O. Korniiichuk).

51. TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 1875, ark. 47–94, esp. ark. 73 (Hrechukha), 88 (Dan'kevych), and 75 (Nazarenko).

52. TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 2428, ark. 3–85. Compare the official chronicle of the decade in *Pravda*, 16–28 June 1951, and in *Dekada ukrains'koho mystetstva u Moskvi 15–24 chervnia 1951 r.: Zbirka materialiv* (Kiev, 1953).

One of the major drawbacks of the libretto is that it departs from historical truth. It does not reflect the struggle between the Ukrainian people and the Polish gentry, the enemy camp is not shown on stage, and the Polish gentry is not depicted, but hidden from the spectator for some reason.

Another serious drawback. The events portrayed in the opera take place during the Ukrainian people's war for independence from the Polish gentry, yet the spectator does not see a single battle scene in this production.

The opera also has other drawbacks that will be exposed in due course.⁵³

This critique, which apparently emanated from the highest party leadership, was published in *Pravda* the morning after the performance. It seems to have been written after the final curtain (toward midnight), in the short time available before the newspaper went to print in the early morning hours. To those who read the review, it might have appeared that the attack on *Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi* was nothing more than an isolated low-key critique of insignificant errors in an otherwise laudable work. It might have seemed, furthermore, that the critics simply wanted to tone down the anti-Polish animus of the opera by specifying that the Cossacks fought the Polish gentry and not the "fraternal" Polish peasantry.

As there were no other signals from above after the premiere, the middle-level bureaucracy remained somewhat confused. *Bohdan* was not banned immediately after its first performance in Moscow. Moreover, as we have seen, Nazarenko effectively ignored *Pravda's* intervention, proclaiming the performance a success and planning to include excerpts from the opera in the festival's final concert.⁵⁴ The all-union television channel showed *Bohdan* in full on 15 June but canceled *The Zaporozhian Cossack* on the next day, citing technical problems, but probably just playing it safe ideologically.⁵⁵ However, the all-union government went ahead with awards and honors for Ukrainian artists.⁵⁶

On 26 June, the Union of Soviet Composers held a conference to review the works performed during the dekada. Although some participants

53. *Pravda*, 16 June 1951, 1.

54. As both the printed program of the concert of 24 June 1951 and the transcript of the television coverage attest, no arias from *Bohdan* were performed that evening. The archival materials do not reveal who overruled Nazarenko on this matter or when the decision occurred. See TsDAML, f. 146, op. 1, spr. 215, ark. 1–3zv (program); GARF, f. 6903 (Komitet po radioveshchaniiu i televideniiu pri Sovete Ministrov SSSR), op. 26, d. 21, program listing for 26 June (this folder has no continuous pagination).

55. GARF, f. 6903, op. 26, d. 21, programs for 15 and 16 June. Interestingly, the record shows that *Bohdan* was supposed to end by 11:30 P.M. on 15 June but continued until midnight.

56. On 30 June, Orders of Lenin were conferred on Mykhailo Hryshko (*Bohdan*) and Mykhailo Romens'kyi, who sang the role of the Muscovite ambassador in *Bohdan*. Dan'kevych received the Order of the Red Banner for Labor, while Honored Artist of Ukraine Borys Hmyria (Colonel Kryvonis in the opera) skipped a step in the hierarchy of Soviet actors to attain the highest rank of People's Artist of the Soviet Union. See *Pravda*, 1 July 1951, 1–2.

repeated *Pravda's* criticisms, the discussion did not turn into a denunciation. The Moscow critics noted that *Bohdan* had an effective “operatic” subject, that “the opera [had] considerable material for voice, and that of high quality, which immediately attract[ed] the attention and interest of the listener.” They found fault with the plot, with devices borrowed from the “old romantic opera,” with too many (five) arias for Bohdan and too few (one) ensembles—although the musicologist V. Kukharskii pointed out that *Boris Godunov* also has no ensembles. In the end, Dan'kevych thanked the participants and announced that he, together with Kor-niichuk and Wasilewska, would prepare a new redaction of the opera.⁵⁷

On 2 July, however, *Pravda* unexpectedly fired a devastating ideological salvo with an editorial “Against Ideological Distortions in Literature.” This long article was ostensibly devoted to just one “distortion,” Volodymyr Sosiura’s short poem “Love Ukraine” (1944), which appeared in Russian translation in the Leningrad journal *Zvezda* (1951, no. 5). Written during the patriotic fervor of 1944, the poem was now accused of glorifying “some primordial Ukraine, Ukraine in general,” rather than Soviet Ukraine. In an aside, the article announced that, in addition to the ill-fated poem, the ideological work of the Ukrainian party’s Central Committee displayed other serious shortcomings. One of them was the faulted libretto of *Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi*. The article triggered a comprehensive campaign of ideological purification in the republic, complete with denunciations of “nationalist deviations” in all areas and genres of creative activity. Writers, artists, composers, and party functionaries all repented their “ideological blindness.” The campaign reached a high point in November, when the plenary meeting of the republican Central Committee set the seal on the unmasking of nationalism in the arts.⁵⁸

While the ideological offensive in Ukraine was just beginning, *Pravda* intervened again on 20 July with an equally long editorial, “On the Opera *Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi*.” Even then the newspaper did not classify the opera’s shortcomings as “nationalistic,” however, nor did it demand a better portrayal of the Russian “elder brother.” The article praised the opera’s subject and music, as well as the singers’ performances. Yet it also repeated the earlier comments of the Politburo box and developed the critical points in greater detail: no proper depiction of the enemies, no suffering of the popular masses, no battles, and no more than one duet. Moreover, *Khmel'nyts'kyi* was too static and the plot was too traditional.⁵⁹ As the following analysis will show, Ukrainian functionaries and intellectuals themselves developed the critique of *Bohdan*, interpreting the pronouncements from Moscow to mean that the opera was guilty of insufficiently glorifying the eternal Russian-Ukrainian friendship.

57. TsDAML, f. 661 (Spilka radian's'kykh kompozytoriv Ukrainy), op. 1, spr. 130. To be sure, *Boris* had some ensembles, but apparently not enough for the 1950s notion of a classical opera.

58. *Pravda*, 2 July 1951, 2. See Yaroslav Bilinsky, *The Second Soviet Republic: The Ukraine after World War II* (New Brunswick, 1964), 15–17; Volodymyr Baran, *Ukraina 1950–1960-kh rr.: Evoliutsiia totalitarnoi systemy* (L'viv, 1996), 60–65.

59. *Pravda*, 20 July 1951, 3–4.

Meanwhile, the campaign against *Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi* proceeded according to the well-established rules of the Stalinist ideological game.⁶⁰ Dan'kevych wrote a penitential letter to *Pravda*, promising, together with Korniiichuk and Wasilewska, to eliminate all the opera's faults. At a meeting of the Union of Soviet Writers of Ukraine hastily convened in the last days of July, Korniiichuk acknowledged his "errors" and those of his wife. He then concentrated on denouncing Sosiura and Ukrainian writers working in the historical genre for their supposedly inappropriate infatuation with the national past.⁶¹ The First Secretary of the Ukrainian party organization, Leonid Mel'nikov, diligently reported to Moscow on the measures taken against the newly discovered ideological deviation. On 27 July, the republican Central Committee hurriedly adopted a resolution condemning its own negligence and duly repeating all the critical points made in *Pravda's* editorial "Against Ideological Distortions in Literature." Mel'nikov immediately couriered the resolution to Stalin's deputy for party affairs, Georgii Malenkov. Two weeks later, the republican party chief wrote to Stalin, reporting on the course of the ideological campaign in Ukraine. A subtle but important shift of emphasis could be detected in these documents: while *Pravda* spoke of the poor depiction of "historical truth" in one opera and the failure to stress love for *Soviet* Ukraine in one poem, the republican bureaucrats read larger ideological significance between the lines. In his report to Stalin of 14 August, Mel'nikov regretted that the Ukrainian leadership had overlooked "attempts to portray the historical processes in Ukraine as separate from the history of the peoples of the USSR."⁶² Generally, the ideological rallies held in the republic rejected the "harmful obsession" with the Ukrainian past and culture in favor of glorifying the eternal friendship with the great Russian people.

At the November plenary session of the republican Central Committee, Mel'nikov announced that *Pravda's* articles represented valuable assistance from Moscow's Central Committee "and from Comrade Stalin in person." This applied especially to *Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi*, which the members of the Ukrainian Politburo had "heard and discussed, but proved unable to uncover its vices." Korniiichuk again reproached himself, Wasilewska, and Dan'kevych (absent owing to illness) for the opera's grave shortcomings.⁶³ "President" Hrechukha announced in his untranslatable macaronic Ukrainian: "This deviation from contemporary topics and pottering about in those histories of ancient times—it should be considered a certain manifestation of nationalism."⁶⁴

60. Which is not to say that the games themselves were ideologically coherent. See an excellent recent study: Alexei Kojevnikov, "Rituals of Stalinist Culture at Work: Science and the Games of Intraparty Democracy circa 1948," *Russian Review* 57, no. 1 (January 1998): 25–52.

61. *Pravda*, 24 July 1951, and *Literaturna hazeta*, 26 July 1951, 4; TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 2424, ark. 5–76 (Korniiichuk, esp. ark. 13–14, on his own mistakes).

62. RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 133, d. 311, ll. 34–39 (26 July 1951); TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, spr. 785, ark. 61–67 (14 August 1951).

63. TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 1, spr. 976, ark. 12, 18–20 (Mel'nikov), 227–29 (Korniiichuk).

64. *Ibid.*, ark. 208: "Tse ukhlyliannia vid suchasnykh tem i koposhinnia v tsykh istoriakh drevnosti—tse tezh slid rozhlaiadaty iak svoieridnyi proiav natsionalizmu."

Reinventing the Classics

At the November 1951 plenary session, First Secretary Mel'nikov offered the intensification of party propaganda as a universal remedy for "ideological distortions." However, he also proposed a more specific prescription for Ukrainian opera. Predictably, the first secretary suggested turning to contemporary subjects but also recommended reviving the classics, especially Aleksei Verstovskii's long-neglected *Askold's Tomb*, a nineteenth-century Russian opera set in ancient Kiev. Lysenko's *Taras Bul'ba* had "not yet been presented in its true form," while the works of Petro Sokal's'kyi, that "Ukrainian follower of Glinka, [who was also] close to the Mighty Five," had been completely forgotten.⁶⁵

But the classics were by no means a safe haven. Even the politically harmless and genuinely entertaining *Zaporozhian Cossack* (1863) caused the Ukrainian functionaries and artistic elite a good deal of trouble. The story is worth elaborating upon, since it once again highlighted the "dialogue" and compromises inherent in Stalinist cultural production. On 11 October 1950, the jubilee five hundredth performance of the opera in Kiev was broadcast throughout the Soviet Union. Although *The Zaporozhian Cossack* was performed in Ukrainian, sensitive bureaucratic ears in Moscow detected several ideological heresies. The opera's plot concerned Cossacks who fled to Turkish-controlled territory after Catherine II ordered the destruction of the Zaporozhian Host in 1775. After some humorous and romantic adventures, which are actually central to the plot, the Sultan allows the Cossacks to return home in the finale. To a Moscow official, all this was a "slandorous story." Moreover, it was discovered that the "bourgeois historian" Mykola (Nikolai) Kostomarov, who wrote the dialogue for Hulak-Artemovs'kyi's opera, had "distorted historical reality." In particular, Kostomarov portrayed the Cossacks as mercenaries of the Sultan and made the main character, Ivan Karas', boast of bloody Cossack victories over the *Arnauts*, who unfortunately turned out to be the ancestors of the fraternal modern-day Albanians. The libretto inappropriately represented the Sultan as a magnanimous ruler, friendly to the Cossacks, while "in reality, the Cossacks had been returned to their country thanks to the intervention of the Russian ambassador in Turkey." It appeared, furthermore, that although Soviet censorship had banned the *Russian* text of *The Zaporozhian Cossack's* libretto in 1948, the Kiev, Kharkiv, L'viv, and Odessa opera companies were continuing to use a slightly edited version of an old *Ukrainian* text, presumably because of a bureaucratic error.⁶⁶

Meanwhile, and also in October 1951, the Stanislavskii and Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theater in Moscow premiered *The Zaporozhian Cossack* "in a new Russian translation by G. Shipov." The newspapers advertised the new redaction as "prepared on the basis of historical documents."⁶⁷ A closer look at the new Russian libretto, approved by the cen-

65. *Ibid.*, ark. 77–82.

66. RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 419, ll. 219–21.

67. *Radians'ke mystetstvo*, 24 October 1951, 4. The party's Central Committee requested a copy of the libretto for review and approved it. See RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 132, d. 419, ll. 222–52.

sors for publication and staging throughout the Soviet Union three months after the premiere, reveals heavy-handed editing and rewriting. What Ukrainian bureaucrats and intellectuals presented as their “first national opera,” Shipov rechristened “popular musical comedy.” He introduced a negative Cossack character, the clerk Prokop, as if to set off the new positive one—the Russian ambassador who sings the aria “The hour of liberation approaches.” Throughout the libretto, Shipov skillfully cast aspersions on the Turks and made the Cossacks complain of their life in the Ottoman empire. To improve Hulak-Artemovs’kyi’s work, he also included several of the most popular Ukrainian folk songs as additional arias.⁶⁸

The “musical comedy” ran in Moscow with considerable success for two and a half years until the Ukrainian secretary for propaganda, Ivan Nazarenko, attended a performance during one of his visits to the capital in April 1953. The theater-loving Ukrainian ideologue stormed out of the house in indignation and immediately submitted a report to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The production, he wrote, had “little in common with the authentic version presented in Ukrainian theaters.” The inclusion of new and improbable characters, together with well-known folk songs absent from the original score, turned the Moscow production into the “crudest falsification of the widely known and beloved opera.” Applying the official rhetoric of “authenticity” to this Ukrainian operatic classic, Nazarenko demanded nothing less than the banning of the new Russian libretto. But the Moscow functionaries justified the company’s right to “adjust” (*podvodit’*) classical opera by referring to the precedent of Russian works *Ivan Susanin*, *Boris Godunov*, and *Khovanshchina* in the Bolshoi. At the same time, the Central Committee’s functionaries also saw the staging of two different versions of *The Zaporozhian Cossack*—one in Ukrainian in Ukraine and another in Russian in Russia—as inappropriate. They suggested that a joint commission be appointed to work out a standard synopsis and libretto.⁶⁹

Nonetheless, the archives preserve no trace of such a commission. Ten months later, the artistic director of the Kiev Opera referred at the local meeting to certain “discussions about a macaronic approach to the classics” provoked by the Moscow production of *The Zaporozhian Cossack*, but that was all.⁷⁰ Nazarenko’s motivation bears closer scrutiny. He was surely aware of the various adjustments made in the opera’s libretto and score by Ukrainian companies. In the mid-1930s, when Nazarenko served as secretary for propaganda of the Kharkiv oblast party committee, the local company made Ivan Karas’ curse Catherine II and Prince Grigorii Potemkin, who had ordered the destruction of the Zaporozhian Host. During the 1936 dekada in Moscow, the Kievans’ Karas’ also condemned that “op-

68. RGALI, f. 962, op. 11, d. 613, ll. 1–47. The censorship permit stamp no. Sh-00125, dated 30 January 1952, is on l. 1.

69. TsKhSD, f. 5 (TsK KPSS), op. 17, d. 445, ll. 35–38. As an example of the “Ukrainian reading” of *The Zaporozhian Cossack*, Ryl’s’kyi wrote in 1949 about the “lofty patriotism that permeates this opera from first note to last.” See TsDAMLM, f. 146, op. 1, spr. 192, ark. 2.

70. TsDAMLM, f. 573, op. 1, spr. 216, ark. 5.

pressor of the Zaporozhian Host,” Potemkin, although apparently not the tsarina. This cue was, of course, absent from the original libretto and soon disappeared from the text with the rehabilitation of the Russian state tradition in the late 1930s.⁷¹ In 1934–36, the Kiev Opera staged *The Zaporozhian Cossack* with the additional third act, “At the Sultan’s Palace,” written especially for that production. Even the postwar Ukrainian “authentic version” was subject to minor ideological editing from time to time, of which Nazarenko must have been aware. In other words, the secretary for propaganda was defending not so much the “authenticity” of Ukrainian cultural heritage as the exclusive right of local ideologues, poets, and musicians to edit “their” classics.

Significantly, the clash between Moscow and Kiev concerning *The Zaporozhian Cossack* ended in an implicit compromise. The Stanislavskii and Nemirovich-Danchenko Theater staged the “new” version of the opera, in which the Russian ambassador liberated the Cossacks, while the Ukrainian companies stuck to the traditional plot, with the Sultan performing this feat. Ryl’s’kyi made only two changes to the libretto, eliminating the mention of the Arnauts and making one episodic character hint that the Cossacks had received letters from Muscovy.⁷² Yet in that same year, 1951, when the Kiev Film Studios commenced work on the film version of *The Zaporozhian Cossack*, which would be seen in every corner of the Soviet Union, Ryl’s’kyi had to produce a very different script. Although the Russian ambassador did not put in an appearance, the overture was accompanied by the following explanatory text: “Realizing that Russia would support the Cossacks’ demands and that the Zaporozhians were preparing an armed mutiny, the Turkish Sultan was forced to allow them to return to their homeland.” In this script, Ivan Karas’ marks his first appearance with the announcement that “we and the Muscovites are of the same faith and blood, so perhaps we will attain a better life together.” (Ironically, just before making this important ideological pronouncement, Karas’ complains about having a terrible hangover and drinks hard liquor.) Furthermore, even the Sultan acknowledges that “it is not easy to rule over [the Cossacks]. They have a mighty defender.”⁷³ The Kiev Film Studios released the film in the summer of 1953, thus giving birth to a third version of the popular opera, a strange hybrid of the Kiev and Moscow productions.⁷⁴

Desperate for more “classics,” republican bureaucrats examined the most promising candidate for revival, Verstovskii’s *Askol’d’s Tomb*, with dis-

71. S. Hulak-Artemovs’kyi, *Zaporozhets’ za Dunaiem*, Kharkiv’s’kyi akademichnyi teatr opery ta baletu: Sezon 1935–36 r. (n.p., n.d.), 10; *Zaporozhets’ za Dunaiem: Postava Derzhavnogo akademichnogo teatru opery ta baleta URSSR*, Kyiv, Hastrol’ u Moskvi 11–21 bereznia 1936 roku (n.p., 1936), 52. The copy of the original libretto from the 1860s can be found in TsDAML, f. 1106 (I. S. Patorzhyns’kyi), op. 1, spr. 22, ark. 166–94, here 172.

72. TsDAML, f. 573, op. 4, spr. 17, ark. 17 and 25. Compare the 1949 libretto in TsDAML, f. 146, op. 1, spr. 192, ark. 5–39. Interestingly, after Ukrainian independence, the Kiev Opera restored some elements of *The Zaporozhian Cossack*’s original score, including the references to God—but not the Arnauts. The 1951 prohibition of Moscow ideologues was still in force as late as May 1999.

73. TsDAML, f. 1106, op. 1, spr. 22, ark. 1–166, here 1a, 9–10, 21.

74. TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 3268, ark. 29 (released in July 1953).

appointing results. The work required an entirely new libretto and extensive editing of the score to fit the Stalinist ideal of programmatic grand historical opera. The same applied to Sokal's'kyi's little-known *Siege of Dubno* (1878), also based on Gogol's *Taras Bul'ba*. The functionaries of the Ukrainian Committee for the Arts even unearthed the libretto of Vladimir Aleksandrov's musical play *Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi* (1892). Although no musical score survived, and Aleksandrov was better known for having sued the prominent Ukrainian writer Mykhailo Staryts'kyi for plagiarism than as a dramatist in his own right, Nazarenko took time to read the text attentively. The secretary for propaganda even made a couple of thoughtful remarks in the margins—for example, “These are very forceful and important words,” beside the sentence “Glory to the Russian people, glory to the Russian tsar!” or “important” next to the description of taking a solemn oath to the tsar.⁷⁵

As late as August 1954, *The Zaporozhian Cossack* and Lysenko's lyrical *Natalka from Poltava* remained the only two Ukrainian classical operas in the repertoire of the Kiev Opera. While the newspapers labeled the situation “intolerable” and published long lists of “forgotten treasures,” the two operas with their unsophisticated plots were probably more than adequate to satisfy the public interest in celebrating accessible ethnic music. Khrushchev listened to *The Zaporozhian Cossack* with delight during his visit to Kiev in October 1953, resulting in an elevation of the company's financial status.⁷⁶ Yet neither *The Zaporozhian Cossack* nor *Natalka* offered an appropriately serious, programmatic, and magnificent depiction of the national past. The quest for a national historical grand opera continued. As other options fell away, the authorities returned to the familiar dilemma of either reviving *Taras Bul'ba* or revising *Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi*.

In late 1951, the Kiev Opera was feverishly preparing yet another revival of *Taras* for the 1952–53 season. The management intended the premiere both to mark the one hundredth anniversary of Gogol's death (1952) and to satisfy the need for a “classical spectacle [that would] constitute the jewel of our repertoire.” A brigade of leading Ukrainian writers, composers, and theater directors examined the production history of *Taras Bul'ba*, as well as the different versions of the score and libretto. All agreed that the opera needed a new imposing and “optimistic” finale, probably developing Lysenko's original ending, with the Cossacks storming the Polish fortress. Maksym Ryl's'kyi complained about Ostap's aria, “What have you done?” sung over the body of his dead brother, the traitor Andrii. When someone in the audience termed this episode “ideologically harmful,” the poet shouted in puristic fervor, “This is an Italian aria. What is the need of it?” But Ostap's “non-Ukrainian” bel canto aria was one of the parts of Lysenko's original score most beloved by the public, and the musicians successfully defended it. In the end, the manager of the

75. TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 3266, ark. 117, 120–27 (*Askol'd's Tomb*), 119 (*The Siege of Dubno*), and spr. 3265, ark. 96–138 (Aleksandrov's libretto; Nazarenko's quoted notes are on ark. 133 and 136).

76. *Radians'ke mystetstvo*, 11 August 1954, 1 (“intolerable situation”), 2 (“forgotten treasures”); TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, spr. 3528, ark. 21–22 (Khrushchev at the opera).

Kiev Opera, Pashchyn, informed the gathering that Lev Revuts'kyi was to be charged with the final polishing of the score, and Ryl's'kyi with the libretto.⁷⁷

Nevertheless, during the same meeting on 15 January 1952, several Ukrainian intellectuals expressed serious reservations about the revival of *Taras Bul'ba*. The theater director Mar"ian Krushel'nyts'kyi suggested that "after *Pravda's* article about *Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi*, we should be in no hurry" with *Taras*. The leading Kievan specialist on nineteenth-century Russian literature, Professor Nina Krutikova, cautioned that the "motif of unity of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples should be clearly heard in your redaction."⁷⁸ The Ukrainian bureaucrats, who had initially pressured the company to produce *Taras* in time for the Gogol' anniversary, immediately relented. On the day after the meeting, the company's leading bass-baritone, Borys Hmyria, wrote to a friend in Kharkiv: "I cannot help telling you the astonishing news. Yesterday, it was decided to halt work on *Taras Bul'ba* and proceed to stage *Boris Godunov*. How do you like that?"⁷⁹

The Ultimate Patriotic Opera

Mindful of the imminent three hundredth anniversary of Ukraine's reunion with Russia (January 1954), the republican authorities resolved by early 1952 to make *Bohdan* a priority. But Korniiichuk, Wasilewska, and Dan'kevych had not yet completed the revisions. The Kiev Opera then proceeded to determine the amount of work that would be required on *Taras*, with the understanding that "should the theater receive the score of *Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi*," this work would be halted.⁸⁰ However, *Bohdan* again became the center of attention in mid-April 1952, when the All-Union Central Committee finally issued its approval of the new libretto. In fact, Korniiichuk and Wasilewska had produced a new libretto as early as January of that year, but several exhaustive discussions of the text at the republican Writers' Union, the Academy of Sciences, the Committee for the Arts, and the Composer's Union—both before and after the Moscow resolution—took months, as each resulted in dozens of minor critical comments and new revisions. The first draft of the new libretto contained a new act 1, scene 1 portraying the execution of Cossack rebels and the

77. TsDAVOV, f. 4763, op. 1, spr. 360, ark. 1–55 (Ryl's'kyi on ark. 50); TsDAMLM, f. 573, op. 1, spr. 171, ark. 2–56.

78. TsDAMLM, f. 573, op. 1, spr. 171, ark. 23, 47.

79. TsDAMLM, f. 443, op. 1, spr. 58, ark. 115–16. Previously, the Ukrainian Committee for the Arts had wanted the Kiev Opera to renew *Taras* for the 1951 dekada in Moscow. The management avoided the issue, arguing that only Patorzhyns'kyi could sing *Taras* and that he was too busy with other roles. See TsDAMLM, f. 573, op. 1, spr. 141, ark. 5. In fact, the republican artistic elite was simply reluctant to become involved with the much-criticized work. The prominent theater artist Oleksandr Khvostenko-Khvostov openly told the company's director that "he would not like to be held responsible for this spectacle." See TsDAMLM, f. 573, op. 1, spr. 171, ark. 4. After three more years of heavy editing, the Kiev Opera finally produced a successful *Taras Bul'ba* in 1955. See TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 3653, ark. 165–70; TsDAMLM, f. 573, op. 4, spr. 26; op. 1, spr. 241, ark. 10–22; spr. 250, ark. 3–4zv; E. N. Iavors'kyi, "Taras Bul'ba": *Opera M. Lysenka* (Kiev, 1964).

80. TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 2773, ark. 97–98.

people's suffering under the yoke of the Polish lords. Another addition showed the Polish gentry hatching its evil plans and Cossacks storming a Polish castle in act 2, scene 2. Finally, the fraternal Don Cossacks appeared on the scene, and a whole new fourth act depicted the Pereiaslav Council of 1654 as the apotheosis of eternal friendship with the Russian people.⁸¹

Critical comments on the draft libretto in Ukraine revealed just how unanimously republican officials and intellectuals had "developed" Moscow's vague critique. The apparatus of the Ukrainian Central Committee, in particular, demanded more depiction of fraternal assistance from the Russian people (the librettists decided to show the arrival of a cart with Russian weapons). The quoted list of flaws also included such gems as "the word 'Ukraine' is used too often" and "Bohdan's aria shows him as a weak man with no will."⁸² "Starless Night," the Hetman's aria that opens the second scene of the first act, caused Korniiichuk and Wasilewska very considerable difficulty. All critics agreed that it was Dan'kevych's greatest musical achievement. But the text of the anguished soliloquy did not correspond to the critics' idea of what the great military leader should be thinking about before the decisive battle. During the discussion, the playwright and head of the republican commission on theatrical repertoire, Oleksandr Levada, shouted, "This is a decadent aria!" and contrasted it with the "optimistic" aria sung by Prince Igor in captivity. The composer Pylyp Kozys'kyi and the writer Iurii Dol'd-Mykhailyk supported him. Salvaging the well-turned musical fragment, Korniiichuk and Wasilewska rewrote the aria at least twice.⁸³ Less subtly, the Ukrainian reviewers suggested changing the last words of the final chorus from "Glory to Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi!" to "Glory to the Russian people!" which was duly implemented. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian Composers' Union still demanded "a more powerful representation [of the Ukrainian people's] striving to unite with the great Russian people."⁸⁴

In late March 1952, three experts on the arts at the Central Committee in Moscow, Vladimir Kruzhkov, Boris Tarasov, and Boris Iarustovskii, finally expressed their opinion of the new libretto of *Bohdan*. They felt that the "direct clash of the Ukrainian people with the Polish gentry" was still not dramatized appropriately. Echoing the criticisms from Ukraine, they also wanted to see "the theme of the unity of the Russian and Ukrainian people" developed further. All in all, the review effectively killed the new redaction of the opera. The chief ideologue, Mikhail Suslov, for-

81. TsDAMLM, f. 435, op. 1, spr. 305 (manuscript changes to the libretto); TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 2747 (printed copy from the archive of the Central Committee, dated January 1952); TsDAVOV, f. 4763, op. 1, spr. 357, ark. 2–5, 44; TsDAMLM, f. 435, op. 1, spr. 304, ark. 1–8 (outline of changes); N. Pirogova, *Opera "Bogdan Khmel'nytskii" K. Dankevicha: Poiasnenie* (Moscow, 1959), 8–9.

82. TsDAMLM, f. 435, op. 1, spr. 2012, ark. 5–6, 8.

83. See TsDAMLM, f. 673, op. 4 (10), spr. 16, ark. 19 (old text); TsDAMLM, f. 146, op. 1, spr. 194, ark. 22, and TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 2851, ark. 23 (new text).

84. TsDAMLM, f. 435, op. 1, spr. 1959, ark. 25 (Levada), 31 (Kozys'kyi), 57 (Dol'd-Mykhailyk), 15 (Composers' Union); TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 2851, ark. 23 (second draft of the aria submitted to the Ukrainian Central Committee); TsDAVOV, f. 4763, op. 1, spr. 357, ark. 95 (concluding words).

warded both the new libretto and the comments of the three critics to Molotov. Surprisingly, the latter disagreed. Molotov replied that Korniiichuk and Wasilewska had “generally” succeeded in reworking the libretto, while the critique made by Kruzhkov, Tarasov, and Iarustovskii “exaggerated its shortcomings.” The libretto needed to be abridged, hence Molotov recommended “not becoming obsessed with [implementing] the suggestions of the three.” After reading this reply, Suslov made his own comments on the margins of the report. In addition to the demand to develop the notion of Russian-Ukrainian unity, he noted: “One should not permit the obtrusiveness that would be felt if one were to follow these suggestions.” On 15–16 April, Central Committee secretaries Malenkov, Khrushchev, and Ponomarenko read the file and agreed with Suslov’s proposal to proceed with completing the score of the opera, to be followed by its “audition and discussion.”⁸⁵

The supportive attitude of the highest leadership may be ascribed to two considerations, pragmatic and strategic. On the one hand, the Ukrainian ideological purge of 1951 had passed, and the increasingly influential Khrushchev probably wanted to avoid a new blow to the republic that was his power base. Furthermore, Korniiichuk and Wasilewska were known to have strong personal connections in the Soviet hierarchy. In February 1952, Korniiichuk announced at the Ukrainian Committee for the Arts that he and his wife planned to bring the new libretto to Moscow themselves “in order to receive a ‘blessing’ for the work there.”⁸⁶ On the other hand, the Politburo had never accused *Bohdan Khmel’nyts’kyi* of serious ideological faults to begin with, and the search for “nationalist errors” in an opera that glorified the union with Russia was actually initiated by the Ukrainian functionaries and intellectuals themselves. The “dialogue” between the authorities and the intelligentsia did not necessarily undermine ideological hegemony. The local elites could be more “Stalinist” than the Soviet hierarchy. The party leadership could not have banned (nor did it intend to ban) all non-Russian historical operas as a genre, for that would have contradicted the “flowering” of the Soviet national cultures. In this case, the diktat of the party hierarchy overruled a more conservative consensus among the reviewers and experts.

On 3 November 1952, a select 115 Ukrainian bureaucrats, scholars, writers, and composers attended a private performance of *Bohdan*. The next day, they offered final minor suggestions on ways to stress that the Cossacks had fought the Polish lords but not the Polish peasants, on choreography, and on the appropriateness of kissing the cross in act 4. On 15 November, the Politburo of the republican Central Committee gathered at the theater at 11:00 A.M. for a final check of the opera’s ideologi-

85. RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 33, d. 369, ll. 14–24. Molotov’s note is on l. 20, the decision on ll. 22–24. By 1952, the ailing Stalin had fully entrusted Malenkov with running everyday party business. As the party archives reveal, Malenkov normally circulated documents among the other secretaries of the Central Committee (Stalin was not included, although he was probably consulted verbally on major questions); decisions were reached by consensus.

86. TsDAVOV, f. 4763, op. 1, spr. 357, ark. 44.

cal acceptability. By then, some of the plot lines had undergone confusing metamorphoses, but the zealots of operatic form were satisfied with “two duets and several distinct ensembles with chorus,” even if these made *Bohdan* almost unbearably long. The members of the Politburo were satisfied as well, perhaps also because they attended a private matinee performance and did not have to sit in the theater past midnight.⁸⁷

The Kiev Opera presented the new redaction of *Bohdan* on the last two days of its 1952–53 season, 21 and 22 June, but the Ukrainian newspapers reported the premiere in an unusually laconic manner.⁸⁸ Finally, on 27 September 1953, the Kiev Opera opened its new season with *Bohdan*. This time, with the old friend of the Kiev Opera, Khrushchev, installed as First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the republican authorities indulged in unreserved glorification of the work. The flood of lengthy reviews promptly announced a “great achievement” of the Soviet Ukrainian musical theater.⁸⁹ The subsequent lavish celebration of the Pereiaslav Treaty’s tercentenary in May–June 1954 cemented the opera’s place in the canon of Soviet Ukrainian culture. The Kharkiv, Odessa, and Stalino opera companies staged *Bohdan*—reportedly with phenomenal success—in the spring of 1954. In May, the Kiev Opera went to Moscow again for the dekada of Ukrainian art and presented *Bohdan*, *Prince Igor*, and *Natalka from Poltava*.⁹⁰ Soviet television broadcast *Bohdan* live from the Bolshoi on 10 May. Dan’kevych made the introductory comments, claiming that the Kievians had come to the Bolshoi to express “the feelings of brotherly love and boundless gratitude” to the Russian people. The opera was also repeatedly broadcast in full on all-union and republican radio and released on gramophone disks. The festive concert to celebrate the three hundredth anniversary of the union in Kiev included no less than three arias from Dan’kevych’s work. The composer himself became a People’s Artist of the Soviet Union.⁹¹

The lack of reliable sources makes it difficult to reconstruct the role of the audience in its “dialogue” with cultural producers. Tens of thousands

87. TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 2775; TsDAVOV, f. 4763, op. 1, spr. 356 (discussion on 4 November); TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 2773, ark. 165, 167 (the logistics of two closed performances), 165–66 (summary of opinions).

88. *Radians’ke mystetstvo*, 24 June 1953, 1; *Literaturna hazeta*, 25 June 1953, 3 (premiere).

89. *Radians’ke mystetstvo*, 30 September 1953, 3 (*Bohdan* as season opener); 14 October 1953, 3; and *Literaturna hazeta*, 1 October 1953, 3, and 29 October 1953, 2 (reviews). Apparently, Khrushchev did not attend a performance of *Bohdan* during his visit to Kiev in October 1953. As noted earlier, he definitely went to see *The Zaporozhian Cossack* and possibly indicated his general approval of the theater’s work.

90. TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 3632, ark. 20–22; TsDAVOV, f. 5116 (Ministerstvo kul’tury URSR), op. 4, spr. 19, ark. 1–2 (*Bohdan* produced in Ukrainian theaters); TsKhSD, f. 5, op. 17, d. 402, l. 71; TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 24, spr. 3504, ark. 24; TsDAVOV, f. 5116, op. 4, spr. 15, ark. 44, and spr. 20, ark. 1–7, 25.

91. GARF, f. 6903, op. 26, d. 39 (television program and transcripts for 10 May—no pagination); TsKhSD, f. 5, op. 17, d. 402, ll. 76–77 (all-union radio); TsDAHO, f. 1, op. 30, spr. 3631, ark. 25 (republican radio); spr. 3633, ark. 47–54 (gramophone disks); spr. 3632, ark. 180–86 (major concert in Kiev to celebrate the anniversary); *Radians’ke mystetstvo*, 17 November 1954, 1 (Dan’kevych’s accolade).

of Soviet Ukrainians attended performances of *Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi*, and millions heard the opera on radio. Yet nobody carried out an objective independent poll of the listeners in 1954 to determine just how they “read” this cultural product. In January 1954, the Paris correspondent of the Ukrainian émigré newspaper *Novyi shliakh* (Toronto) was allegedly told by visitors from Soviet Ukraine: “One must buy tickets to the Kiev Opera three or four weeks in advance to attend *Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi*. The public enthusiastically applauds the excellent Ukrainian settings and costumes; Ukrainians serving in the military greet the Cossack banners loudly. And the whole house listens as if in a trance to Bohdan’s boring aria on the need to “reunite” [with Russia].”⁹² Although some Canadian informants deemed this passage important enough to report it to the Soviet All-Slavic Committee, which supervised contacts with foreign Slavs,⁹³ the émigré newspaper’s information is not corroborated by any other source. Reading both the Soviet archival documents and the press of the time, one might just as easily arrive at the conclusion that *Bohdan* was popular precisely because it embodied the idea of a union of Russians and Ukrainians. The archives, however, shed interesting new light on the extent of the opera’s popularity. The attendance records of the Kiev Opera for 1954 show that *Bohdan* was the absolute public favorite: the company performed it thirty-six times that season and sold a total of 52,768 tickets, giving an average audience of 1,466 people. That same season, the company performed the “official” Russian patriotic opera *Ivan Susanin* eight times for a total of 6,950 listeners (an average of 869 at each performance), *Boris Godunov* seven times for a total audience of 7,183 (an average of 1,026), and *Carmen* nine times for a total audience of 9,894 (an average of 1,099).⁹⁴

These statistics are convincing: *Bohdan* enjoyed unprecedented popularity in Ukraine. How many listeners craved a Ukrainian patriotic opera, and how many the authorities “organized” to hear a new and topical musical work about the Russian-Ukrainian friendship, is open to discussion. But for all practical purposes, *Bohdan* did become *the* Ukrainian national historical opera for the 1950s. Whatever its intended propaganda message, the operatic synthesis of the representation of the nation’s past with the grand spectacle and ritual of theatrical tradition filled an important

92. *Novyi shliakh*, 15 January 1954, 4. The reference to Bohdan’s “boring” aria on the need for reunification seems to add some credibility to the story. Indeed, two of the hetman’s arias were devoted to this subject.

93. GARF, f. 6646 (Slavianskii komitet SSSR), op. 1, d. 356, ll. 14–18.

94. RGALI, f. 2329 (Ministerstvo kul'tury SSSR), op. 3, d. 168, l. 35ob. Only a rarity, Puccini’s *Tosca*, surpassed the record average attendance: 2,959 people showed up at a mere two performances of this opera in Kiev. A general statistical survey of all Soviet opera companies in 1954 revealed that seven theaters—Kiev and six other smaller oblast houses, all of them in Ukraine—staged 129 performances of *Bohdan* for a total of 136,123 spectators, an average of 1,055. No Russian classical opera enjoyed such an average attendance unionwide that year. *Ivan Susanin*, staged by all the largest theaters, came close, with 15 theaters, 126 performances, and 128,276 patrons (1,018). *Eugene Onegin*, *The Queen of Spades*, and other classics lagged far behind. The most frequently performed opera on a Soviet subject, Iulii Meitus’s *The Young Guard*, incidentally also a work by a Ukrainian composer, scored 9—87—49,980 (574). See RGALI, f. 2329, op. 3, d. 111, ll. 1–3.

institutional niche among the vehicles of the national imagination. While *Bohdan*'s content duly glorified the "elder brother," the opera also exalted the heroic Cossack past and the liberation of the homeland from foreign oppression. Thus, *Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi* offered Ukrainian listeners the experience of identifying with their heroic national ancestors. In an angry and touching letter to Khrushchev, Mykhailo Hryshko, unhappy with critics' comments about his "static" portrayal of Bohdan, expressed this sense of belonging to a historical community. The singer had read the scholarly books, chronicles, and historical novels, sometimes almost feeling as if he were meeting Khmel'nyts'kyi's colonels on the street. Hryshko thought of himself as "a son of [his] people, in whose veins runs the blood of ancestors who passed into eternity and dreamt of seeing their Fatherland free and independent."⁹⁵ The students of a small-town school wrote to Korniichuk in 1954 that his play *Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi* "teaches us to love and be proud of our people, who defended their independence in arduous struggle."⁹⁶ It was precisely the possibility of such a selective "reading" of non-Russian Soviet representations of the national past that undermined the principal message of the Russian-dominated "friendship" encoded in the authoritative discourse.

The production of patriotic historical operas in Soviet Ukraine underscored the lack of uniformity—indeed, the abundance of irregularities—in Stalinist culture. The Moscow authorities sought to achieve total control over cultural production, but their efforts were frustrated by the relative autonomy of the local bureaucracy and intellectuals. In their "dialogue" with Moscow, the republican elites sometimes demonstrated extreme servility by inflating ideological campaigns and pushing for more denunciations. At other times, they skillfully exploited the Stalinist linguistic code in defense of their cultural domain. In both cases, the local functionaries and the intelligentsia acted as historical agents who shaped the very nature of Stalinism by negotiating the meaning of the official discourse.

95. TsKhSD, f. 5, op. 17, d. 445, ll. 85–86. Amusingly, there is every likelihood that Hryshko met Borys Hmyria (Colonel Kryvonis) regularly on Pasazh Street, where both men lived.

96. TsDAMLM, f. 435, op. 1, spr. 1302, ark. 1–2.