# Creating a National Style: Soviet Drama-Ballet and the Elevation of the Word

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Curriculum Vitae

Tara Wheelwright holds a bachelor's degree in biology (Hamilton College, 2011), and master's degrees in Regional Studies: Russia, Eurasia and Eastern Europe (Columbia University, 2014), Slavic Studies (Brown University, 2018), and Theater Arts and Performance Studies (2021). She is the author of "Harmony in the Ballroom: Tolstoy and Social Dance," published in *South Atlantic Review*, as well as translations in *Brooklyn Rail*, and articles on Russian literature and culture in NYU Jordan Center's *All the Russias*. She is the recipient of a Fulbright U.S. Student Research grant, a Fulbright-Hays award, and a Mellon Foundation funded Open Graduate Education Fellowship for a concurrent MA in Theater Arts and Performance Studies, among other awards. At Brown, she has taught courses on Russian literature, Russian language, and the performing arts.

Acknowledgements

There are many people in my life that deserve thanks for playing a role in this dissertation journey. I assumed that I would go to Brown and focus purely on Russian literature, moving away from ballet. Yet, time and again I found myself drawn to ballet. My enthusiasm and love for the artform was hard to ignore.

In my first semester, I wrote about *Romeo and Juliet* in Prof. Fabrizio Fenghi's course and his support of the topic provided the focus I needed as I continued year after year. As I bounced between Providence, Moscow, Tbilisi, and New York, Prof. Fenghi was a reliable and comforting tether to Brown as I often felt that I had spiraled out to the abyss. Each chapter sent was returned with a frightening number of comments followed by a discussion on Zoom that always put me back on track and made me feel that perhaps I had achieved a small degree of progress.

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I always advise other students that the greatest anti-procrastination tool is not an app but something more tangible: children. Nothing makes your research feel more insignificant than stepping outside with a bunch of tiny tots and going for a scoot, or to the top of Mtatsminda, or endless play in the sweltering Merida heat. You learn that nothing on your computer really matters, until you desperately need to google “Hand, Foot and Mouth disease.” Grant, Odelia and Desmond are my world and everything else pales in comparison.

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# Introduction

## From Satire to Drama

Soviet ballet attained a national identity in the 1930s due to the demands of socialist realism and the use of canonical literary texts, both domestic and foreign, that led to the creation of a new genre of ballet, *dramaticheskii balet,* drama-ballet. Despite a long history of ballet in Imperial Russia and in the first decade of the Soviet Union, ballet before the 1930s was an amalgamation of pedagogical technique and choreography from Western Europe, namely France and Italy. In the 1930s a national ballet pedagogy was developed by Agrippina Vaganova, the eponymously named Vaganova Method, which is the technical foundation of drama-ballet. By creating a new style of ballet used to express canonical works from the likes of such 19th century Russian writers as Pushkin, Gogol and Lermontov, followed by foreign works by Shakespeare, Lope de Vega and Félix Gras, drama-ballet became a means of opening a high art form to the masses and communicating Marxist-Leninist ideology first to audiences within the Soviet Union and later to international audiences.

The genre of the drama-ballet marked a significant turn in ballet history due to this relationship between movement and text and resulted in the formation of a uniquely Russian/Soviet ballet style. My dissertation examines drama-ballet through three frames: the written, including the original source material and libretto; the performative, namely the choreography and technical features from the Vaganova Method; and, the ideological, including the intended message embedded within a ballet and how a ballet is presented. In charting the development of drama-ballet, I focus on the productions of *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*

(*Бахчисарайский фонтан,* 1937) and *Romeo and Juliet* (*Ромео и Джульетта,* 1939), as prominent examples of ballets based on a work of a national author, Pushkin, and a work of a foreign author, Shakespeare, respectively. I then shift focus to how this development took root away from the center of cultural production by exploring the works of the Georgian dancer, choreographer and artistic director, Vakhtang Chabukiani, particularly the first Georgian national ballet, *Mzechabuki* (1936). Through these ballets, I examine how the mandates of socialist realism affected and shaped the evolution of Soviet ballet during the decade, creating a style that persists today. Ultimately, I argue that drama-ballet is not a return to pre-revolutionary classical ballet, but rather the first innovative form that exemplifies a truly national Russian style that is later exported back out to the West. Furthermore, the genre develops as a kind of template for staging nationalism. In the case of Georgia, Chabukiani's ballets demonstrate how drama-ballet can serve as a template, but not always as authorities in Moscow may have planned given the opportunity for ideological ambiguity.

Scholarship on Soviet ballet in the 1930s is very limited and rarely includes an analysis of the performative aspect alongside the ideological. The Soviet dance scholar Elizabeth Souritz wrote one of the most informative texts on Soviet ballet in the 1920s, which documents the experimental turn in ballet in the post-revolutionary years at the Bolshoi and Mariinksy theaters.[1] Yuri Slonimsky's collected dance writings gives a broad temporal view of Soviet ballet, but serves more as a reference point about the people involved in productions rather than focusing on any one ballet.[2] Vera Krasovskaya's scholarship on Vaganova and the history of

[1] Elizabeth Souritz and Sally Banes, *Soviet Choreographers in the 1920s* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990).
[2] Yuri Slonimsky, *The Soviet Ballet*, No Statement of Printing edition (Philosophical Library, 1947).

Imperial Russian ballet provides illuminating context to analyzing the performative side of drama-ballet.[3] Outside of Russia, a number of dance scholars stand out in the context of Russian and Soviet ballet. Mary Grace Swift provides an overview of Soviet ballet from the 1920s to the 1950s and uses archival sources to confirm how each ballet was utilized by Soviet authorities.[4] Tim Scholl's scholarship on the ballet *Sleeping Beauty* focuses exclusively on how that classical 19th century ballet is reimagined in Soviet ballet.[5] Scholl's work provides a useful context at how Soviet mandates affect a production and complements my own research. Christina Ezrahi focuses on ballet and politics, outlining the changes in the ballet world starting with the October Revolution and focusing particularly on ballet in the later Stalin period.[6] Janice Ross's scholarship focuses on ballet as a form of political resistance, primarily from the 1930s to 1960s through the work of the choreographer Leonid Yakobson.[7] Lastly, Anthony Shay's work on the Igor Moiseyev Dance Company focuses on the rise of folk dance in the 1930s and provides valuable insights into the use of large group spectacle dance and the use of folk materials in the context of socialist realism.[8]

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[3] Vera Krasovskaya, *Russian Ballet Theatre of the Second Half of the XIXth Century* (Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1963); Vera Krasovskaya, *Vaganova: A Dance Journey from Petersburg to Leningrad*, trans. Vera M. Siegel, 1st edition (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005).
[4] Mary Grace Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1968).
[5] Tim Scholl, *Sleeping Beauty, a Legend in Progress* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=187726&site=ehost-live; Tim Scholl, *From Petipa to Balanchine: Classical Revival and the Modernisation of Ballet* (London: Routledge, 1994).
[6] Christina Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia*, Pitt Series in Russian and East European Studies (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012).
[7] Janice Ross, *Like a Bomb Going Off* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), https://yalebooks.yale.edu/9780300207637/like-a-bomb-going-off.
[8] Anthony Shay, *The Igor Moiseyev Dance Company: Dancing Diplomats* (Intellect Ltd, 2019), https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/distributed/I/bo40060271.html.

My dissertation departs from the existing scholarship on Soviet dance by analyzing the origins and early evolution of drama-ballet specifically in the context of the relationship between the word and movement. While the scholarship noted above has played a large role in my own research, the genre of drama-ballet is often overlooked as an uninventive genre that mimics pre-revolutionary ballet. Focus tends to fall on either side the of the 1930s, the experimental productions of the 1920s or the political implications of the Cold War era ballets. However, I argue that drama-ballet is the first manifestation of a uniquely Russian style centuries in the making, and that it achieved that by relying on literature and elevating the word. By emphasizing the word above all else, drama-ballet was accompanied by innovative new approaches that differentiated it from pre-revolutionary classical ballet. These innovations were all intended to increase a ballet production's reception with the audience, both at home in the Soviet Union and internationally.

## BEFORE DRAMA-BALLET

Throughout the seven decades of the Soviet Union, artistic guidelines underwent extreme and often rapid changes. Initially after the October Revolution, the Soviet government's priority for the arts was to disassemble the imperial patronage system that they deemed corrupt and an inhibitor of creative freedom. Anatolii Lunacharsky (1875-1933), appointed as Commissar of Enlightenment by Lenin between 1917 to 1929, directed cultural affairs in a neutral manner; avoiding any governmental favoritism to allow new forms of art to develop. Keeping with the party's initiatives, Lunacharsky encouraged artists to seek "revolutionary inspiration" in their art. Yet he also acknowledged the pre-Revolutionary artistic achievements as the legitimate inheritance of the proletariat. Moreover, he recognized the need for creative freedom and

individuality of expression.[9] However, in December 1927 at the Fifteenth Congress, nearly a decade after the liquidation of the Imperial Academy of Arts and coinciding with the rise of Stalin's power, the Party expressed their desire to reshape "people's psychological and emotional dispositions both as they were and as they could and should become."[10] In short, the Party wanted to provide structure and ideological leadership for the arts. This occurred simultaneously with the end of the New Economic Policy (NEP) period and the start of the first Five Year Plan, when the Soviet Union faced a great transformation due to a rise in industrialization and collectivization, which resulted in a demand that art fulfill practical and political functions. This change in Party priorities led the way for future cultural policies within the Soviet regime, and also marks the beginning of the authoritative and repressive art policies that were fully implemented in the 1930s.

This decade after the revolution when the authorities were trying to determine what role the arts should play coincided with an era of experimentation in ballet. It would even be more accurate to simply say in dance because the future of ballet was in question. While the first half of the 1920s still saw classical pre-revolutionary ballets performed in Moscow and Leningrad, there was a combination of low censorship, scarce resources and a limited number of well-trained dancers. Such conditions led to an era of experimental works. For example, the choreographer Fyodor Lopukhov unsuccessfully attempted a production of *The Firebird* (1921), diverging widely from the 1910 Ballets Russes production by dividing the ballet into seven main

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[9] Anna Ferenc, "Music in the Socialist State," in *Russian Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, ed. Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 110.
[10] Brandon Taylor, "Socialist Realism: 'To Depict Reality in Its Revolutionary Development,'" in *Adventures in Realism*, ed. tthew Beaumont (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), 145, http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/doi/10.1002/9780470692035.ch8/summary.

ideas, each allegorically correlating to the struggle between good and evil. After this, he created a more plot-driven ballet, *The Serf Ballerina* (1927), but it contained scenes where serfs were beaten, and overall was deemed too realistic and brutal. With a directive to educate the masses through the arts, ballets during this time could veer towards the moralizing as it seemed unclear how in fact ballet should become educational.

A decade after the revolution, debates emerged regarding the role of form and content in ballet. In 1927 the dance critic Ivan Sollertinsky sparked this debate with his article “What Kind of Ballet Do We Need?” The article questioned whether or not ballet was needed as he considered it an artform that could not carry content or ideology, and he also pushed for ballet to incorporate other movement vocabularies, such as acrobatics and athletics. He condemned classical dance as a decorative ornament incapable of any meaningful artistic expression and argued that dance needed to be turned into danced drama, with dancers attaining the same degree of expressiveness as actors.[11] Sollertinsky was countered by Alexander Cherepnin, who viewed Sollertinsky’s push for dance drama as another movement idiom that would be just as foreign to ballet as athletics or any of the other experimental styles from earlier in the decade. Cherepnin instead argued that classical dance and classical ballet are two separate entities; classical dance has not aged and can still be used for a new type of ballet while classical ballet is stuck in the storybook classics – Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty, Coppelia, etc. – of the 19th century. In the frame of the form-content debate, Cherepnin finds that classical dance represents form with content, and its antithesis as content with form, or rather danced drama or symphonic dance.[12] Ultimately, the debate was significant in the context of the inception of drama-ballet as it

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[11] Sollertinsky, Ivan. “Kakoi balet nam v sushchnosti nuzhen?” *Zhizn iskusstva*, 1929
[12] Cherepnin, Alexander. “Dialektika baleta” *Zhizn iskusstva*, 1927

questions whether dance should center on the relationship between purely movement and music, or movement, music and narrative.

The debate also opened the doors to contemplating other ways to connect ballet to Soviet life. In 1929 the Leningrad Theatre of Opera and Ballet held a libretto competition for a new ballet. Alexander Ivanovsky, a film scriptwriter, won the competition with his libretto for *Dynamiada*, which was eventually renamed *The Golden Age* (1930). Dmitri Shostakovich wrote the score, which marked the first of three ballets he would go on to compose, all of them in the first half of the 1930s. Ivanovsky set the ballet in the form of a revue, intending to create a striking spectacle rather than a drama in ballet form. Ivanovsky wanted to contrast the Soviet people and Soviet relationships with bourgeois ones, a fairly commonplace theme at the time. Notably, *The Golden Age* was considered by the theatre's management as a "transitional style in Soviet ballet," marking the beginning of Soviet ballet's own golden age.[13]

Set against a background of constructivist buildings and factory chimneys, *The Golden Age* relates the visit of a Soviet soccer team to an industrial exhibition called "The Golden Age" in an unnamed capitalist city. The Soviets receive a hostile reception to the city, which is sharply contrasted to the warm reception of their opponents, the fascists. When the two teams meet, the captain of the Soviet team refuses to drink to the health of the fascists, causing a fight to break out. In the following act, the Soviet captain, a young *Komsomolka* and the Negro are strolling through the city when they are suddenly arrested. The fascists had secretly planted leaflets on the captain. As the police drag the captain away, the Negro rescues the girl from the police and they

[13] Marina Ilichova, "Shostakovich's Ballets," in *The Cambridge Companion to Shostakovich*, ed. Pauline Fairclough and David Fanning (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 200.

escape together. When the two teams compete in the stadium, with each team is represented by its own style of dance.

The final act is set in the hall of "The Golden Age," which is portrayed as a cabaret style club. The act opens with an advertisement by the Negro for shoe polish, which leads into his dance routine, which was "not a genuine negro dance, rather it was a stylization, syncopated, with vigorous rhythm and with an abrupt and disjointed depiction of its movements."[14] Next comes a satirical polka, which depicts the mindless and empty chatter of the bourgeoisie. The central number of the act, though, is the pas de deux performed by the Diva and the captain of the fascists, who is dressed in the Soviet captain's clothes. The Diva is the star of "The Golden Age" and is meant to portray the decadence of the Western world with her foxtrot and tango styled dance. To conclude the ballet, a cancan takes the stage, while a jail is shown on the side with political prisoners being released and moving about.

In the 1930-31 season, *The Golden Age* was performed nineteen times and was initially warmly received. Many of the ballet's divertissements were regularly repeated during a performance due to audience demand, especially the pas de deux with the Diva and Fascist. Suddenly though the positive reactions to the ballet became negative. What was intended to be a satire and mocking of bourgeois ideals was suddenly misconstrued and critics began interpreting the ballet as support for the Western world. The plot of the ballet was seen as naïve and lacked any strong relationships between characters other than the animosity between the Soviets and Fascists. Furthermore, as the ballet went on events tended to lose logic and any connection to the ballet as a whole. The greater problem, which no one could have foretold, was the dancers. The Diva was meant to be the anti-heroine, contrasting sharply against the athletic *Komsomolka* with

[14] Ilichova, 203.

the “elastic body of a gymnast and crystalline soul.”[15] However, the role of the Diva, which was danced by the young Olga Iordan, a dancer known for her elegance and beauty, was much more vivid and enticing than the *Komsomolka*, performed by the more restrained Galina Ulanova, that she won over audiences. The success of Iordan consequently weakened the denunciatory aspect of the ballet, leading critics to believe that the ballet was touting the Diva as the heroine.

Suddenly scathing reviews began to be written about *The Golden Age*. Yuri Brodersen’s review in *Rabochiy i teatr* (*The Worker and the Theatre*) was the most devastating of all,

> How could it happen that the ideology of the bourgeois music hall, that urban mongrel, that ideology hostile to the Soviet theater, could penetrate, and to such an immodest degree, the stage of the State Ballet Theatre?[16]

Brodersen’s review prompted other critics to attack the ballet, although interestingly Shostakovich’s score was the only component of the ballet that remained in good light. Shostakovich himself had doubts about the libretto of the ballet from its inception, but he staunchly defended his own score.[17]

The following year, on April 8, 1931, *Bolt*, premiered in Leningrad for the first and last time. The ballet was choreographed by Fyodor Lopukhov with music composed by Shostakovich. Despite the artists involved, the libretto remained the greatest issue. Written by Viktor Smirnov, the then director of the Moscow Art Theatre, the libretto focuses on factory sabotage, a very serious crime at the time, which was counterbalanced by a heavy dose of satirical comedy. The ballet is set in a factory, whose workers include Olga, a loyal

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[15] Ilichova, 201.
[16] Yuri Brodersen, “Legalizatsiya Prisposoblenchestva (The Legalization of Time-Serving),” *Rabochiy i Teatre*, 1930, 60 edition.
[17] Solomon Volkov, *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich* (New York [u.a.: Harper & Row, 1979), 37.

*Komsomolka*, Boris, the team leader, Kozelkov, the ill-intentioned chief clerk, and several drunken workers. Kozelkov and the drunks hatch a plan to sabotage the factory in order to secure a day off on Holy Trinity. The young Goshka is caught eavesdropping on this plan and is forced to enact it, but placing a bolt within the machinery. At the last minute, Boris exposes the plan and saves Goshka from committing the crime.

*Bolt* received immense criticism immediately after the premiere. Fortunately for Lopukhov and Shostakovich, the ballet was condemned purely from an ideological standpoint, with the greatest fault lying in the plot's stark division of good versus evil, or *Komsomol* members versus drunks. Furthermore, even the satirical representation of the "positive" characters was viewed as slanderous. A critic for *The Worker and the Theatre* wrote,

> The intrigue is confined to five minutes of havoc in the third act, while the first two acts live independent lives, repeating the long-familiar devices of ballet divertissements. There is a gym class, a choreographic interlude about the opening of a workshop, and an episode bearing absolutely no relationship to the story line, based on grotesque pantomimic movement, specifically the dances of negative characters. There is also an interlude spurred by a get-together in a club…When this kind of material falls into the hands of the stage director, he not only evinces his complete lack of understanding of the material, specifically the atmosphere of a factory, but also quite clearly demonstrates his political non-preparedness for the creation of a Soviet spectacle.[18]

Critics seemed to overlook or completely ignore that the ballet was meant to be a satirical comedy, instead taking the polarizing characterizations at face value.

[18] M Iankovskii, "Bolt," *Rabochiy i Teatre*, April 21, 1931.

The critics were not the only ones who disapproved of *Bolt*. Shostakovich himself had doubts about the ballet from the beginning. In a letter to a friend about Smirnov's libretto he wrote,

> Comrade Smirnov has read me the libretto for a ballet, *The New Machine*. Its theme is extremely relevant. There was once a machine. Then it broke down (problem of material decay). Then it was mended (problem of amortization), and at the same time they bought a new one. Then everybody dances round the new machine. Apotheosis. This all takes up three acts.[19]

Despite the sarcasm, Shostakovich was still evidently interested in composing the score, although at only 24 years old he was willing to work on as many projects as he could. Similarly to the score of *The Golden Age*, Shostakovich incorporated "Western" themes, such as a tango melody and Strauss-like waltzes, for dances featuring the "negative" characters. For example, the first appearance of the drunken workers is accompanied by a languid waltz, reminiscent of the Viennese waltzes that were immediately recognized as symbols of bourgeois contentment. A scene with a village priest begins with a woeful, low melody that suddenly turns to a festive, upbeat melody, highlighting his hypocrisy as he dances amongst the drunken workers.[20]

In 1932, shortly after *Bolt's* short-lived life, the Party resolved to fully integrate all artistic groupings under one umbrella organization, eliminating all separate groupings that flourished during the NEP period. Subsequently, in 1934, at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, the Party declared Socialist Realism as the only style officially acceptable for Soviet art. Socialist realism embraced the idea of art having a purpose rather than art for art's

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[19] Elizabeth Wilson, *Shostakovich: A Life Remembered* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 121.
[20] Ilichova, "Shostakovich's Ballets," 206.

sake. The main objective of Socialist Realism was to "depict reality in its revolutionary development," focusing content on the transformation of the Soviet state into the ideal Communist society.[21] Whether in literature, music or theater, socialist realism glorified the working class and their fight against the ideals of the bourgeoisie from the imperial era. A classic socialist realist archetype involved a character transforming from an ignorant, illiterate, oppressed person into an educated and inspired revolutionary risking all to fight for the proletariat. In regard to cultural policies, Stalin is infamous for his life-altering decrees on art. Many artists faced imprisonment, psychological torment, and occasionally death, for creating what Stalin deemed as either subversive or "formalist," a criticism implying that the art was not accessible to the public because it relied on form rather than meaning. This fear of creating a formalist work influenced many of the ballets that were created in the 1930s, from the Shostakovich ballets to *Romeo and Juliet*, which while it premiered in Leningrad in 1940 began development as early as 1934.

After the pronouncement for socialist realism, there was one more satirical Shostakovich ballet. The productions of *The Golden Age* and *The Bolt* were terminated because censors thought that the overtly pro-working class theme was so blatant and the anti-hero so appealing that the producers must have actually had hostile intentions towards Soviet ideology.[22] *The Bright Stream* (1935) tried to create a Soviet ballet with a greater emphasis on ballet instead of simply overarching Soviet ideals, such as Soviets versus Fascists, or Western capitalism versus communism. The ballet is moved from industrial centers and set in a *kolkhoz*, collective farm, in

[21] Andrei Zhdanov, "From Speech at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers 1934," in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, ed. Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman, and Olga Taxidou, 1 edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 525.
[22] Ilichova, "Shostakovich's Ballets," 204.

southern Russia. The plot centers on a harvest festival and the arrival of an unknown girl. Romance, deception and even cross-dressing is involved, creating a ballet that focused more on the characters rather than polarized sides. In terms of production length, *The Bright Stream* was the most successful of the three at the time of the original staging, due to the accessibility of the music to the audience, the star talent of the dancers and the general entertaining nature of the plot. Other ballets in production at the time, such as the works of Kasyan Goleizovsky (1892-1970), were less warmly received. Goleizovsky's works from the end of the 1920s, such as *The Whirlwind* (1927), met fierce opposition from both ballet traditionalists and the censors due to the experimental nature of the choreography, on-stage eroticism and the daring depiction of and the individual's struggle for freedom. After years of condemned ballets, Goleizovsky's only option as a choreographer was to re-stage classic ballets, such as *Sleeping Beauty* (1935), within a Lenin-Marxist frame. In contrast to these contemporaneous works that received poor reviews while striving to embody the ideals of socialist realism, *The Bright Stream* succeeded by embracing a classic romantic comedy theme within a socialist realist setting.

*The Bright Stream* attempted a new angle to appease the censors while also having greater freedom to create a ballet and not just a series of aerobics. Shostakovich collaborated with Lopukhov, who attempted to usher in a new style of dance that would replace that of the former Imperial Ballet, and Adrian Piotrovsky, the librettist and dramaturge for numerous Soviet productions, including *Romeo and Juliet*. The music reflected Shostakovich's desire to add a populist element to the work, by using snatches of folk melody and familiar dance numbers throughout the score. The three sought to preserve the basis of the art of ballet as a "means of expressing emotions in their utmost intensity, as a language of lyricism and passion,"[23] while

[23] Ilichova, 208.

avoiding the difficulty of expressing ideological notions in movement and placing it in a regime-approved setting. Thus, the ballet is moved from industrial centers and set in a *kolkhoz*, collective farm, in southern Russia. The farm scenery gives the ballet a livelier and more spacious realm to dwell in, as well as the chance to incorporate traditional choreography into a contemporary setting.

*The Bright Stream* was an instant success. At the time, audiences understood the reality of the *kolkhoz* even if they could not voice their opinions. Starting in 1928, the Soviet government began a forced collectivization campaign that forcibly resettled populations in rural areas and typically set unrealistic work quotas. Workers were unpaid and faced penalties if quotas were not met. By setting such a rambunctious and festive ballet in what the public knew to be anything but, the producers attempted to bring art and joy to the socialist realist reality. The ballet premiered in Leningrad, where it had a spectacular run of sold-out shows and was initially hailed as the first major success of Soviet ballet.

The production was then transferred to Moscow where an editorial appeared in *Pravda* after the first show, claiming that the ballet was formalistic and trivial. This was even more inflammatory given that during the 1930's collective farms were supposedly undertaking a project of such high importance. Yet, *Pravda*'s condemnation of *The Bright Stream* is often seen as purely an indirect victim of Stalin's hostility towards Shostakovich over *Lady Macbeth of the Mtensk District* (1934), which was concurrently staged. Unlike with Shostakovich's previous two ballets, this one had grim consequences; Shostakovich never wrote another ballet score, Lopukhov lost his job, and Piotrovsky was sent to the Gulag where he was later executed. Furthermore, the 1936 *Pravda* editorial ushered in a new era for composition. From 1917 until Shostakovich's condemnation, the avant-garde had created artistic propaganda that was very

much experimental in nature. Even after the declaration in 1932 that all art adhere to socialist realism, there was never any concrete criteria set. The *Pravda* editorial decreed that official art be traditional and predictable and follow three rules: the work must have a "socialist" theme that is approved by the Party; the plot must be "positive," meaning it contains a happy ending or at least a positive tone; and the music must be "realistic," that is, "without dissonance or other degenerate modernist elements."[24] Consequently, *The Bright Stream* marked the end of an era of experimental and satirical ballets and the beginnings of the genre that would come to dominate Soviet ballet for the next two decades: drama-ballet.

## CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In chapter one, I discuss *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* (*Бахчисарайский фонтан,* 1934) and its implications as a drama-ballet based on Pushkin's eponymous poem. The importance of the libretto comes to the forefront with this ballet. For the West and for Imperial Russia, and even the experimental Soviet ballets of the 1920s, the libretto was no more than a source of inspiration for the choreographer who could interpret it in any manner. With socialist realism, the libretto became the dominating force of the ballet. Choreography had to serve the libretto in order for the ballet to be fully understood by the audience, which resulted in a focus less on virtuosity and acrobatic feats, and more on fusing movement and meaning. Classical nineteenth century ballets convey a narrative by having acts of pure dance with no plot to develop interspliced by acts where the dancers use pantomime to express the actions of the characters. By placing the libretto at the top of the creative hierarchy, Soviet ballets required a source text that

[24] Kevin V. Mulcahy, "Official Culture and Cultural Repression: The Case of Dmitri Shostakovich," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 18, no. 3 (October 1, 1984): 72, https://doi.org/10.2307/3332676.

was ideologically acceptable for the Party and accessible for mass audiences. By using Russian national literature, the Soviet Union sought to reach its citizens not only in Leningrad and Moscow, but throughout all the Soviet republics. These ballets, based on works by Pushkin, Gogol, and Lermontov, were all intended for a domestic audience and were not included in later tours abroad. Not all were successful, but *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* is unique in that it is one of the few ballets of socialist realism to endure in the Soviet and post-Soviet repertoires. *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* was the first ballet to take up the trend of using Russian literature for socialist realism.[25] In an effort to make the ballet more expressive and, more importantly, more verbal, drama-ballet relied on many tools from dramatic theater. Dancers were introduced to the Stanislavsky method of character development and were asked to study Pushkin's poem and materials on the period.[26] The emphasis shifted away from the technical feats of a dancer to the psychological development of an artist. Vladimir Paperny offers one possible explanation for this shift from the experimental ballets to drama-ballet: "In Culture Two, a particular hierarchy of the arts, based on their verbal possibilities, gradually emerged. Literature securely occupied the topmost rank in this hierarchy."[27] Rather than an art for art's sake, art had to serve the word. By elevating the source text and the libretto, ballets now had to convey both the words of the writer and the ideology of the Party. Furthermore, the texts selected for the librettos could no longer be

[25] Mary Swift comments that for the revival of the production in 1951 a brochure was issued that seemed to justify the existence of the production by assuring the spectator that the production "assisted the formational of realism on the Soviet ballet scene." In *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.*, 98.
[26] Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin*, 54.
[27] Vladimir Paperny, *Architecture in the Age of Stalin: Culture Two*, English ed., Cambridge Studies in New Art History and Criticism (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 176.

overlooked or disregarded as simply the source of inspiration. The literature from which these ballets were adapted now held utmost importance.

Pushkin underwent a transformation within Soviet scholarship from artist of the aristocracy to romanticized outcast and messianic nationalist. The attention on Pushkin was shaped by two key dates: the 125th anniversary of his birth in 1924 and the centennial of his death in 1937. Much of the criticism in the 1920s, particularly that of Pavel Sakulin and Vladimir Friche, focused on a class analysis that argued that Pushkin had capitulated before the tsar and become a servile poet. The Revolution had opened Russia's doors to Europe and the world through its universal socialist mission, thus diminishing a need for Pushkin. In the 1930s, coinciding with the decree on socialist realism, the international view shifted inwards and Pushkin was elevated as a national messianic figure.[28] "The Fountain of Bakhchisarai" was the first work of Pushkin to be adapted for socialist realism in ballet and even though it was Pushkin, the librettist had to make changes to the plot to align it with the accepted ideology.

In chapter two, I discuss *Romeo and Juliet* (1940) and its implications as a drama-ballet based on Shakespeare. The conception of *Romeo and Juliet* dates to 1934, when the ballet librettist Sergei Radlov approached Prokofiev about the possibility of creating a drama-ballet for the Bolshoi Theater with a "Komsomol-like" morality tale of the young and progressive fighting feudal traditions. Since Stalin preferred happy endings, they originally had Romeo and Juliet survive their double suicide and reunite amid a celebratory finale. However, the authorities deemed the music too difficult and the happy ending too much of a deviation from Shakespeare's text so they canceled the Bolshoi Theater's planned production. The ballet was then transferred

[28] Evgeny Dobrenko, "Pushkin in Soviet and Post-Soviet Culture," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pushkin*, ed. Andrew Kahn, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 205.

to the Kirov where Lavrovsky took over the choreography, maintaining the story's original plot, and the production was an immediate success. Lavrovsky's choreography was highly melodramatic, and painted a cartoonish portrayal of the young, progressive lovers against the clownishly rigid forces of feudal traditions. However cartoonish the contrast between the two sides was, the choreography combined natural everyday gestures with classical ballet. Rather than depend on pantomime to express a character's emotions, ballet steps often dissolved into actions. For example, when Romeo wants to show that he is fully submitting himself to his love to Juliet during the balcony scene, he lands all his jumps with his head thrown back and arms wide open, blending the movement with the narrative.[29] In previous ballets, emotional gestures that move the plot forward were typically added between steps, creating a disjointed sequence of dance and then narrative.

*Romeo and Juliet* was one of socialist realism's greatest accomplishments because it took a world literary classic, one by Shakespeare nonetheless, and reinterpreted it in terms of class struggle. Russians were asserting their right to be included in the world of high literary culture, and, thus, to be given free rein to reinterpret to their own societal needs. The reinterpretation of a text was controlled though through the translation. Ivan Kashkin, a leading Soviet translator during the Stalinist era, declared that Soviet translators should emphasize only things that could be interpreted through a Marxist-Leninist frame. He also stressed that translation could be a device to emphasize "elements in foreign literary works that might suggest class struggle, possible admiration for Communism, or any incidents and realia lending support to Communist

[29] Homans, *Apollo's Angels,* 359.

Party teachings or current Soviet practices. Conversely, whatever did not fit this description was to be minimized, or in extreme cases, blotted out completely."[30]

In adapting Shakespeare's text to ballet, critics hailed it not only for its innovations but also for its ideological growth. The ballet appealed to both the Soviet authorities and the Soviet citizens because rather than just ballet as a form of entertainment and escapism, the audience saw ballet as what the future could hold.[31] All the efforts that had gone into creating a Russian style of ballet was visible and it maintained a remarkably long run, later inspiring other ballet companies in the world to mount their own production of *Romeo and Juliet*.

In chapter three, I move the discussion of drama-ballet to the periphery of the Soviet Union to the Republic of Georgia. Focusing on the works of Vakhtang Chabukiani, I examine how Georgian ballet originated within the genre of drama-ballet. However, what differentiates this first national ballet from those of other republics were the unique privileges that Georgians had as Soviets. Chabukiani created *Mzechabuki* (1936) from an entirely Georgian creative team and was able to manipulate the ideological demands of socialist realism to fit a Georgian national theme over a Soviet theme. By analyzing Chabukiana's works, drama-ballet emerges as a template for ballet, one that can be used to stage nationalism through a textually derived ballet. Furthermore, I trace how Chabukiani followed the development of drama-ballet, shifting from librettos drawn from national texts to ones by Shakespeare, opening their reception to the world beyond the Soviet Union.

[30] Friedberg, Maurice. *Literary Translation in Russia: A Cultural History*. 1 edition. University Park: Penn State University Press, 2008, 33.
[31] McDaniel, Cadra Peterson. *American–Soviet Cultural Diplomacy: The Bolshoi Ballet's American Premiere*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2014, 65.

In examining the development of drama-ballet, I have relied on a textual analysis of the underlying text and the adapted libretto, as well as differences that arise in translation either for artistic reasons or censoring. For the ballets, which can be notoriously difficult to study due to their inherent ephemeral nature, I have collected materials on the original productions of the ballets – photographs, program booklets, scores, etc. – from the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI) in Moscow, the archive housed within the Georgian National Opera and Ballet Theater of Tbilisi, the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia, Chabukiani House Museum in Tbilisi, and the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* and *Romeo and Juliet* were both filmed in the early 1950s, launching a new era of ballet films that captured much of the original choreography, often with many dancers from the original cast. While the films differ from the original productions in certain regards, they offer an invaluable resource in viewing certain innovations of drama-ballet, from the choreography to acting techniques.

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## Chapter I

## *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*: The Romanticism of Pushkin on the Soviet Stage

The 1934 production of *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai,* based on Pushkin's eponymous poem ("Бахчисарайский фонтан," 1823), was one of the first ballets to use the new genre of drama-ballet that was created as a direct response to socialist realism. In 1932, the Soviet Party implemented socialist realism, an artistic style and propagandistic ideology that promoted a truthful portrayal of life in art. The decree effectively ended the experimental styles that had flourished in ballet in the 1920s and led to a return of nineteenth century artistic frameworks not only for the technical aspects of ballet but also for the music, set designs, and literary sources for the librettos. Stalinist culture of the 1930s emphasized a focus on the verbal and a desire to infuse meaning into movement, which endows *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* with a very calculated ideological message. More significantly, the ballet marked the initial reliance on a work by a Russian national author to serve as the basis for a ballet in this new genre of drama-ballet.

There has been remarkably little written about *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* despite its impact in ballet and longevity in the repertoires of Soviet theaters, not only in Moscow and Leningrad but also in theaters of the Soviet republics and farther afield to places such as Cairo and Helsinki. Christina Ezrahi, echoing Natalia Roslavleva, includes the ballet in her book on Soviet politics and ballet as "the real birth of drambalet," yet neither one go beyond the cursory

facts of the ballet.[32] The ballet is often discussed for the contributions of the director Sergei Radlov, who was known for directing many Shakespeare productions in the 1920s and 1930s before turning to ballets, including *Romeo and Juliet* (1940). Yet, as with much scholarship on Soviet ballet, *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* is noted for its status as the origins of drama-ballet without delving into the innovative features of the new genre. This chapter approaches the ballet not only as a study of the ballet itself but as an interdisciplinary analysis including a study of the libretto and the ballet's place within wider Soviet culture at the time. Therefore, scholarship on Pushkin's "Southern Tales", particularly from Katya Hokanson, Stephanie Sandler and Erik McDonald, have provided fruitful discussions of the aspects of Orientalism, geopolitics and gender within Pushkin's original work.[33] In terms of placing the ballet within concurrent trends of Soviet culture which is essential in understanding the importance of logocentric choreography in drama-ballet, scholarship by Katerina Clark, Evgeny Dobrenko, and Karen Petrone have well complemented aspects on literature and Pushkin in the 1930s without directly touching upon *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* as a ballet production.[34]

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[32] Christina Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia*, Pitt Series in Russian and East European Studies (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 54. See also Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet* (E.P. Dutton & Co: New York, 1966).

[33]See these notable works: Katya Elizabeth Hokanson, "Empire of the Imagination: Orientalism and the Construction of Russian National Identity in Pushkin, Marlinskii, Lermontov, and Tolstoi" (1994); Stephanie Sandler, *Distant Pleasures: Alexander Pushkin and the Writing of Exile* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1989); Erik McDonald, "Symmetry and Asymmetry in the Narrator-Heroine Interaction of the Fountain of Bakhchisarai," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 47, no. 3 (2003): 423–40, https://doi.org/10.2307/3219980.

[34] Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011); Evgeny Dobrenko, "Pushkin in Soviet and Post-Soviet Culture," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pushkin*, ed. Andrew Kahn, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 202–20; Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades : Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2000).

The key innovations in *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* are its use of the Stanislavsky method for turning dancers into dance-actors and the newly codified Vaganova method that altered the technical training for the dancers. While the Stanislavsky and Vaganova methods share some essential qualities, primarily the focus on uniting the psychological motivations with the unity of the body, the two were not dependent on each other. However, drama-ballet utilized both methods alongside the rising importance of the libretto that allowed a text, the underlying source material for the libretto, to be more easily conveyed through the choreography. The final question that arises is the new interpretation of Romanticism in the Soviet era, particularly on the issue of individualism. For Romantics in Pushkin's era, individualism was held in high regard for artists while the collective reigned supreme in the Soviet era. *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, in reinterpreting a key text of Romanticism, utilizes both the Stanislavsky and Vaganova methods to turn inwards and demonstrate qualities of individualism, yet the nation-wide dissemination of Pushkin leading up to the 1937 Pushkin Centennial onto the audience ultimately does not equate to a push for individualism for individuals. Instead, a larger message about Russia's place within Europe as the inheritor of Crimea emerges, minimalizing the characters of the ballet. Therefore, this chapter is structured to address these innovations by first analyzing the ballet production, then Pushkin's original poem, and finally placing both in the context of Romanticism revived in Soviet ballet.

## THE BALLET

*The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* premiered at the Leningrad State Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet on September 28, 1934 and later premiered in Moscow at the Bolshoi Theatre

on June 6, 1936.[35] The key figures behind the creation of ballet were Boris Asafiev, the composer; Nikolai Volkov, the librettist; Rostislav Zakharov, the choreographer; and Sergei Radlov, the director. The ballet unfolds over four acts and takes place in Poland and Bakhchisarai during the eighteenth century.

In the first act, people are celebrating the birthday of Maria outside the walls of her father's castle. Maria and her fiancé, Vatslav, are dancing oblivious to those around them and to the stealthily creeping Tatar forces of the Crimean Khan Girei. The Tatar horde storms in and Girei kills Vatslav. Girei is struck by Maria's beauty and takes her back to his harem. In the second act, Girei and his army return to Bakhchisarai where Zarema, the star of the harem, greets Girei with dancing but is rejected by his indifference. Four men carry Maria in, perched in a palanquin while playing the harp. Maria is aloof and distracted by her grief for Vatslav. Zarema and the other harem women attempt to divert Girei with their dancing but he is distracted and shuns Zarema's affection. In the third act, Girei enters Maria's bedchamber and attempts to win her love, with attempts that grow increasingly physical. He realizes that he cannot win her love, so he leaves the room. Maria then falls asleep, dreaming of Vatslav. While she sleeps, Zarema sneaks into her room and entreats Maria to return Girei to her. Maria does not answer so Zarema threatens her with a dagger. Girei enters but is unable to stop Zarema who manages to stab Maria in the back. In the fourth act, Girei hears of the victories of his army but is indifferent to the news. Zarema is brought before him and tries to express her love for him. Girei cannot look at

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[35] There were previous attempts to create a ballet based on Pushkin's poem. In 1838, Filippo Taglioni intended to create a ballet based on the poem but nothing came of it. Later in 1854, Yelena Andreyanova's touring company performed a a two-act version in Voronezh, and in 1892, Tomasz Nijinsky staged a ballet in Kiev based on the poem called *A Victim of Jealousy*. According to the Russian ballet historian, Natalia Roslavleva, both productions, however, missed the main theme of the poem. In *Era of the Russian Ballet*., 227.

her and Zarema is led to a tower where she is pushed to her death. Girei dismisses his court and proceeds to the fountain of tears which he erected in Maria's memory. The fountain projects an image of Maria, but Girei cannot reach her as it is merely a projection created by his own imagination.

While Volkov, the librettist, altered and removed certain details from Pushkin's poem to make the libretto more suitable for a ballet production, it is important to convey the importance of librettos and their source texts for ballets after the 1932 decree. For the West and for Imperial Russia, and even the experimental Soviet ballets of the 1920s, the libretto was no more than a source of inspiration for the choreographer who could interpret it in any manner. With socialist realism, the libretto became the dominating force of the ballet. In part, this was due to the unclear specifications of socialist realism for ballet. By adhering to the libretto of a well-known text, there was less concern about creating a plot that could be poorly misconstrued, such as what happened with *The Golden Age* (1930) and *Bolt* (1931). Choreography had to serve the libretto in order for the ballet to be fully understood by the audience, which resulted in a focus less on virtuosity and acrobatic feats, and more on fusing movement and meaning. Speaking about Zakharov's choreography, Hélène Bellew writes, "there is much sensitivity and imagination and although it is often obscured almost completely by scenery, costume and other story-telling devices, not one of has them sought compensation by utilizing excessive turns or other acrobatic tricks."[36] Classical late nineteenth century ballets convey a narrative by having acts of pure dance with no plot to develop interspliced by acts where the dancers use pantomime to express the actions of the characters. This rigid structure, developed from the romantic ballet, consists of

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[36] Hélène Bellew, *Ballet in Moscow Today* (Greenwich, Conn: New York Graphic Society, 1956), 9.

a narrative sequence culminating in a mad scene, vision scene, resolution, and finally a divertissement.[37] The importance of the choreography further diminished with the popular nineteenth century ballet genre of the *ballet-féerie* in which the visual effects were of utmost importance, undermining the ballet's dramatic potential.[38] By placing the libretto at the top of the creative hierarchy, above choreography and visual effects, Soviet ballets no longer adhered to this formulaic structure, instead they followed the libretto. In discussing his theory on Culture Two, Vladimir Paperny further supports this shift observed in drama-ballet, wherein "a particular hierarchy of the arts, based on their verbal possibilities, gradually emerged. Literature securely occupied the topmost rank in this hierarchy."[39] Rather than an art for art's sake, art had to serve the word. By elevating the source text and the libretto, ballets now had to convey both the words of the writer and the ideology of the Party. Furthermore, the texts selected for the librettos could no longer be overlooked or disregarded as simply the source of inspiration. The literature from which these ballets were adapted now held utmost importance, and the process in which the text was transformed for the stage put the text on par with the choreography. However, they required a source text and libretto that was ideologically acceptable for the Party and accessible for mass audiences.

This shift signified the emergence of the genre of *dramaticheskii balet*, or drama-ballet, which became the only genre permitted after the decree for socialist realism and the antiformalism campaign. Ironically, almost every aspect of ballet reverted back to the nineteenth century: Tchaikovsky became the model for musicians, Repin became the inspiration for set

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[37] Tim Scholl, *From Petipa to Balanchine: Classical Revival and the Modernisation of Ballet* (London: Routledge, 1994), 30.
[38] Scholl, 33.
[39] Paperny, *Architecture in the Age of Stalin*, 176.

designers, and Agrippina Vaganova, who was named artistic director of the Leningrad State Theatre of Opera and Ballet in 1932, reverted back to the classical ballet technique of prerevolutionary Russia after the experimental choreography that was prevalent in the 1920s.[40] The classical ballet structure that Petipa had popularized so successfully in Russia in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was rejected as formalism and deemed mindless, empty entertainment.[41] The emergence of drama-ballet led to a debate about the fundamental essence of ballet: is classical dance expressive or purely ornamental? Can verbal meaning be derived from nonverbal, nonrepresentative art?[42]

For the sake of using art to educate the masses, ballet needed to convey meaning and thus librettists began using Russian national literature. The experimental ballets of the 1920s were internationally oriented and sought to establish the Soviet Union on the world stage. By using Russian national literature, the Soviet Union turned inwards, seeking to reach its citizens not only in Leningrad and Moscow, but throughout all the Soviet republics. These ballets, based on works by authors such as Pushkin, Gogol, and Lermontov, were all intended for a domestic audience and were not included in later tours abroad. Not all were successful, but *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* is unique in that it is one of the few ballets of socialist realism to endure in the Soviet and post-Soviet repertoires. *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* started the trend of using Russian literature for socialist realism.[43] This choice also coincided with preparations for the centennial of Pushkin's death and the twentieth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1937.

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[40] Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R*, 94.
[41] Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin*, 48.
[42] Ezrahi, 50.
[43] Mary Swift comments that for the revival of the production in 1951 a brochure was issued that seemed to justify the existence of the production by assuring the spectator that the production "assisted the formational of realism on the Soviet ballet scene." In *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R.*, 98.

Furthermore, as Katerina Clark notes, during the 1930s literature played a central role in "fulfilling culture's sacral function" within the Soviet system and in that postcapitalist decade, literature as cultural capital became a legitimizing asset.[44] Pierre Bourdieu elaborates,

> Literature was elevated to enjoy a special status in the thirties because it represented the most eloquent and elaborated version of the written word…It lasts in time as spoken speech does not, claiming a permanence, a kind of autonomy from the material word, that imitates eternity and appears free from the vicissitudes and metamorphoses of history. The emphasis on letters also has to do with permanence, rationalization, and consolidation.[45]

Here lies an important evolution for ballet, an art form long remarked for its ephemerality and fleeting nature. Literature not only was a highly valued aspect of the culture, but it grounded ballet in a permanence that was far removed from the abstract and experimental pure dance productions of the 1920s. By using a libretto based on literature, ballet developed a tangible foundation, one that both infused every movement of the choreography and guided the viewer who was expected to have familiarity with the source text.

In an effort to make the ballet more expressive and, more importantly, more verbal, drama-ballet relied on many tools from dramatic theater. Dancers were introduced to the Stanislavsky method of character development and were asked to study Pushkin's poem and materials on the period.[46] The emphasis shifted away from the technical feats of a dancer to the psychological development of an artist. Radlov, the director of *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*,

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[44] Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011), 82.
[45] Cited in Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome*, 82.
[46] Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin*, 54.

had previously been a theater director and professor at the Leningrad Theater Institute before assuming the role of artistic director of the Kirov Opera and Ballet Theatre. Radlov's theater background, along with the choreographer Zakharov's own training at the Leningrad Theater Institute, predisposed the two to look towards the dramatic theater. Zakharov discussing the choreographic process notes,

> In my practice as director-choreographer, I resorted to the Stanislavski Method for the first time in producing *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*. A difficult problem arose before the entire group that was preparing the ballet. We had to re-tell in the language of dance the content of Pushkin's immortal poem. We did not even deem it possible to do this through the customary conventional *enchainements* of classical ballet.[47] Therefore, the question arose of seeking new means of expression, capable of bringing to the heart of the spectators the images of Pushkin's heroes in their completeness. We were faced by the task of creating living human characters with their thoughts, feelings and passions. And here the method of Stanislavski came to help us.[48]

Rehearsals for the ballet were no longer focused solely on the choreography. Instead, over the course of a year Zakharov met with the dancers who performed the four main protagonists – Galina Ulanova as Maria, Olga Iordan as Zarema, Tatiana Vecheslova as the second cast Zarema, and Konstantin Sergeyev as Valslav – and they read Pushkin's poem and extensively discussed the biographies of each character.[49] With the use of the Stanislavsky Method, new

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[47] In ballet, *enchainements* are a series of ballet movements linked together that create phrases. In choreographing a ballet these phrases can be repeated and varied throughout, creating a movement theme within the ballet.
[48] Cited in Natalia Roslavleva, "Stanislavski and the Ballet," ed. Selma Jeanne Cohen, *Dance Perspectives* 23 (1965), 29.
[49] Roslavleva, 29.

forms entered the classical dance structure. Rather than using a *pas de deux* or *variations* within the plot, the dance monologue and the dialogue emerged.[50] For classical ballet this was a major alteration to structure of a ballet production. A *pas de deux* was typically comprised of the male and female leads dancing first together then separately in solos, or *variations*, before returning for a final dance together with large virtuosic jumps and turns. This unchanging structure was used in nearly every pre-revolutionary classical ballet. The dance monologue and dialogue, thus turned what would have been a *variation*, or solo, or *pas de deux*, into a plot driven dance rather than pure dance. In *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, Maria's dramatic scene where she reflects nostalgically on her past and Zarema's passionate dance of jealousy is all expressed as an evolving monologue. Similarly, when Zarema demands Maria to return Girei's love to her ending in Maria's death, the scene follows the structure of the dialogue. Each monologue and dialogue, rather than presenting a static moment in the plot of the ballet, instead shows a development of the characters. As in dramatic theater, the plot is in constant transformation and time is never suspended.

Vaganova, as the artistic director of the Leningrad Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet and as the academy's primary ballet pedagogue, contributed significantly to the return of a classical ballet technique that formed many of the Soviet ballet stars and the choreography underlying the genre of drama-ballet. Vaganova was an 1897 graduate of the Mariinsky Theatre's Imperial Ballet School. Although her career as a dancer was never highly successful, she absorbed much of the methods of those around her, whether from observing the classes of Italian ballet master Enrico Cecchetti or studying the technique of Olga Preobrajenska, who had trained directly under Marius Petipa and Anna Johansson. Vaganova was able to acquire these

[50] Roslavleva, 31.

aspects of different classical schools, the Cecchetti Method, the French school, and the Bournonville Method, blend them with her own experiences, and after the Revolution she began teaching. The most important feature of her training style, which became known as the Vaganova Method and was published in 1934 for ballet academies across the Soviet Union, was that "everything was subordinated to the main goal of bringing the human body into a state of complete and harmonious coordination of all parts."[51] No longer were students taught to move solely the arms, neck, or legs. Now all movement was considered holistically, a *port de bras* was not simply a change of arm position, but rather emanated from the back and altered the position of the neck and head as well. When comparing this method against, say the Bournonville Method, the differences are particularly visible in the arms. Dancers trained in the Bournonville Method often do quick steps and jumps with their arms remaining perfectly still in a low position. In the Vaganova Method, keep one's arms static while the legs are moving breaks the unity of the body. On a technical side, it derives the dancer of added strength that comes from engaging the arms and there therefore the back, as well. On an aesthetic side, it reduces the body to solely the lower half. For the untrained eye, such a detail could go unnoticed, yet considering that ballet was striving to include a more expansive depth of inner life, such totality of the body allowed for greater expression and paved the way towards logocentric choreography.

While Vaganova and her Method reached prominence with the emergence of drama-ballet, she kept a close eye on the experimental developments in ballet in the 1920s and the socialist realist ballets of the first half of the 1930s, adapting certain aspects and rejecting others. She argued that experimental movements, such as the theatricalized acrobatics and gymnastics that became prevalent in the choreography of many works in the 1920s, could still be used albeit

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[51] Natalia Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc, 1966), 200.

as long as they were rooted in the classical ballet idiom.[52] Likewise, she was in favor of preserving the classical ballets of the nineteenth century, arguing that they could always be reworked to reflect contemporary life. Yet, her primary concern centered on unity within a ballet. Responding to the initial success of the ballet *The Bright Stream* (1935), the third ballet composed by Shostakovich and the second in collaboration with the choreographer Fyodor Lopukhov that attempted to follow the rigid mandates of socialist realism, she wrote,

> Classical dancing is changing its forms and means of expression before our eyes, depending on the subject, its dramatic purpose, the period shown, etc. Is there not a colossal difference between classical dancing in *The Sleeping Beauty* and the dialogue between Maria and Zarema in *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*? In order to create a good contemporary Soviet ballet one needs another approach to classical dance. But the second error of the authors of *The Bright Stream* consists precisely in the fact that their kind of classical dance is indifferent to action, periods, subject, or anything else. Any of these *divertissements* may be shown in *The Bright Stream* or another ballet. An attempt to create a Soviet ballet with *such* classical dance is to discredit both the theme and classical dance as a whole.[53]

At this pivotal moment when ballet was shifting from a model that attempted to appease every mandate of socialist realism resulting in a haphazardly gathered collection of themes, characters, music, and *divertissements* to the libretto-based drama-ballet, the argument for a sense of totality even within a setting from a different historical time was the prime objective. Vaganova, much

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[52] Roslavleva, 201.
[53] Agrippina Vaganova, "No Ballet Falsitudes (9 March 1936, Krasnaya Gazeta)," in *Vaganova* (Iskusstvo, 1958), 89–90.

as she argued that even nineteenth century classic ballets such as *Swan Lake* could remain relevant for audiences, pushed for a return of the past.

Before discussing the original poem and its relation to the ballet, it should also be noted that in the mid-1930s, Soviet culture was moving away from the Enlightenment models of the first half of the 1930s in favor of a forms that emphasized Russian nationalism, whether through the promotion of Russian authors or folk culture, particularly folk dance. While the production of *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* first premiered in Leningrad in 1934, it was successful enough to be further developed and transferred to the Bolshoi in Moscow, at the time the more preeminent ballet theater. The Romantic motifs that underlie *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* reveal trends that emerge more widespread in the second half of the decade. Katerina Clark argues that these trends were more than superficial and identifies four varieties of Romanticism that were prevalent: the turn to the inner, the adventure romance, the imperial sublime, and the lyric.[54] Already in discussing the use of the Stanislavsky Method, the focus on the inner self is evident. Even at the ballet's conception in 1934, it was noted that it was "created as a result of the increased demand for greater attention to the inner, spiritual world of Man in all branches of art" and furthermore, that at the time "the search for means of penetration into the depths of human psychology, for dramatization of the ballet spectacle, took a particularly determined form."[55] Thus, even prior to an official end of the more blatant attempts of socialist realism in ballet, such as with Shostakovich's three ballets, there was already a cultural shift happening within ballet towards Romanticism.

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[54] Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome,* 220, 200.
[55] Roslavleva, "Stanislavski and the Ballet," 29.

THE POEM

In Pushkin's "The Fountain of Bakhchisarai," the setting of Crimea plays a dominant role as a character within the poem and historically as a territory acquired by the Russian Empire in 1783. The poem is situated in two different time frames: one is during the time of the Tatar khanate, which controlled Crimea from 1427 to the late fifteenth century; the other is after it has become part of the Russian Empire, when Bakhchisarai is full of the ruins of former rulers, including the Ottomans. Russia was able to acquire Crimea from the Ottomans in 1783 without firing a single shot, which testified to Russia's power and the symbolism of such a destined and natural extension of the empire.[56] In 1787, Catherine the Great visited Bakhchisarai as part of a triumphal tour to celebrate Russia's victory over the Ottoman Empire and consequent expansion south. During the Russo-Turkish War of 1787-1792, General A. V. Suvorov used the former Tatar Khan palace in Bakhchisarai as his military headquarters, cementing the palace's significance as a symbol of Russian nationalism and Crimean Tatar identity. Reaching further back into history, Crimea also supplied Russia with additional symbolic capital with its heritage in Christian Byzantium and classical Hellas, thereby endowing Russia with an antique inheritance and the right to stand amongst the civilized European nations.[57]

By the time Pushkin visited Crimea in 1820, the palace had long become a tourist destination, attracting writers such as Ivan Matveevich Muravyov-Apostol who wrote *Puteshestvie po Tavride*, a travelogue on the flora, peoples, and archeology of Crimea, excerpts of which Pushkin placed after his poem. As Katya Hokanson notes, the main effect of appending

[56] A. L. Zorin, *By Fables Alone: Literature and State Ideology in Late-Eighteenth--Early-Nineteenth-Century Russia*, Ars Rossica (Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2014), 93.
[57] Zorin, 95.

Muravyov-Apostol's writing is to enforce the point that Bakhchisarai contains the ruined remains of a culture, all of which now belong to the Russian Empire.[58]

Yet what role does this southern Crimea play for Russia? In Edward Said's influential text on Orientalism, he focuses on the Anglo, French and American experience of Orientalism, but his methodology provides a framework for evaluating Russia's relationship with Crimea. There are three qualifications he outlines to analyze the relation that arises between nations in regards to Orientalism: first, the Orient is not just an idea but also a place in reality; second, the Orient is Orientalized not because it is discovered to be "Oriental" in the eyes of a nineteenth century European, but because it can be made Oriental; third, Orientalism serves more as a discourse on the European power than it does on the Orient.[59] The European and Oriental are viewed as dichotomies: the Oriental is irrational, sensual, depraved, childlike, other, while the European is rational, virtuous, mature, normal. Furthermore, only the Orient is under study, being judged, depicted and illustrated. The Oriental is, thus, contained and represented by dominating frameworks.[60]

In the context of "The Fountain of Bakhchisarai," Russia passes the first qualification as Crimea is indeed a real place. However, it does not quite pass the second qualification of Orientalism, that the Orient is submitted to being made Oriental, because Pushkin emphasizes that Crimea is part of the Russian Empire and, by including an epigraph by the poet Saadi, places Russia as inheritor to Arabic literary tradition: "Many, just like myself, have visited this fountain; / But some are already gone, others travel farther still."[61] With Saadi's epigraph,

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[58] Hokanson, "Empire of the Imagination," 107.
[59] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 6.
[60] Said, 40.
[61] [Многие, так же как и я, посещали сей фонтан / но иных уже нет, другие странствуют далече.] The footnotes of the original poem are from: А. С. Пушкин, "Бахчисарайский

Pushkin bridges a gap between time and cultures, rather than casting the Orient as other. The fountain of Saadi's poetry endures and in writing a poem where the narrator-poet visits the fountain and reflects, Pushkin builds upon Saadi's work. Pushkin elevates Saadi to a poet worthy of emanating, as opposed to placing him within the standard European and Oriental dichotomy. Yet, Pushkin does so as a Russian poet, in the Russian language, about a land that is now under Russian control.[62] Pushkin does not Orientalize Crimea, instead he recognizes traditions of the past and promotes continuity between past and present.

The language of dichotomy that characterizes the division between the Orientalizer and the Orient is reserved for the two female protagonists, Maria and Zarema, rather than for contrasting Russia with Crimea. Stephanie Sandler, who analyzes the role of gender in the poem, notes that Pushkin's most significant innovation in the poem is the creation of two women rather than just one, which is what was originally in the legend of Bakhchisarai that Pushkin heard. Through this innovation, Pushkin invites the reader to compare the two women.[63] Pushkin introduces Maria as the source of Zarema's sorrow, connecting the two women from the onset through a love triangle with Girei,

> But, indifferent and cruel,
>
> Girei despised your charms
>
> And the cold hours of night
>
> Spends gloomy, lonely

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Фонтан," Русская виртуальная библиотека, 1823 1821, https://ilibrary.ru/text/444/index.html. The translation of Pushkin's "The Fountain of Bakhchisarai" is that by Katya Hokanson, included in Appendix B of "Empire of the Imagination: Orientalism and the Construction of Russian National Identity in Pushkin, Marlinskii, Lermontov, and Tolstoi" (1994), 190-206.

[62] Hokanson, "Empire of the Imagination," 135.

[63] Sandler, *Distant Pleasures*, 175.

Since the time that the Polish princess

Was imprisoned in his harem.[64]

Maria and Zarema are equalized by their position in the palace harem and their relationship to Girei. However, Maria is characterized by her softness, domesticity, innocence and classical heritage, as demonstrated by her association with the harp.

Everything in her captivated: the quiet manner,

The harmonious and lively movements,

And the languorous blue eyes.

The sweet gifts of nature

She adorned with art;

She enlivened domestic feasts

With her enchanting harp;[65]

Zarema, who is not a Tatar but also a captured prisoner of the harem, is introduced in the terms of the Orient: fiery, sensual and expressive.

He has betrayed her!..But who with you,

Georgian maiden, is equal in beauty?

About your lily brow

You have twice twined your braid;

Your captivating eyes

Are brighter than day, darker than night.

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[64] [Но, равнодушный и жестокий, / Гирей презрел твои красы / И ночи хладные часы / Проводит мрачный, одинокий / С тех пор, как польская княжна / В его гарем заключена.]
[65] [Всё в ней пленяло: тихий нрав, / Движенья стройные, живые / И очи томно-голубые. / Природы милые дары / Она искусством украшала; / Она домашние пиры / Волшебной арфой оживляла;]

Whose voice expresses more forcefully

The transports of fiery desires?

Whose passionate kiss is livelier

Than your stinging kisses?[66]

Initially, the contrast between Maria and Zarema seems stark: languorous blue eyes/captivating eyes (очи томно-голубые/пленительные очи), enchanting/fiery (волшебной/язвительных) the quiet manner/passionate kiss (тихий нрав/страстный поцелуй). Yet, as Sandler argues, Maria and Zarema can be treated as a kind of simile in the plot.[67] Despite their different backgrounds, the women are ultimately prisoners and they both meet their deaths on the same night. Maria and Zarema are merely flowers in Girei's greenhouse, like all the other "Arabian flowers" of the harem. Zarema, with her "lily brow" (лилейного чела), has "bloomed" in the harem (В тени гарема расцветала). Maria, on the other hand, "bloomed" in her native land (Она цвела в стране родной) and has become a wilting flower transplanted to the desert,

With what happiness Maria

Would leave this sad world!

The precious moments of life

Passed by long ago, they are long gone!

What can she do in the desert of the world?[68]

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[66] [Он изменил!.. Но кто с тобою, / Грузинка, равен красотою? / Вокруг лилейного чела / Ты косу дважды обвила; / Твои пленительные очи / Яснее дня, чернее ночи; / Чей голос выразит сильней / Порывы пламенных желаний? / Чей страстный поцелуй живей / Твоих язвительных лобзаний?]

[67] Sandler, *Distant Pleasures*, 173.

[68] [С какою б радостью Мария / Оставила печальный свет! / Мгновенья жизни дорогие / Давно прошли, давно их нет! / Что делать ей в пустыне мира?]

As flowers, Maria and Zarema are prized for their beauty, but their internal lives are unfulfilled. Maria has religion to sustain her through her suffering while Zarema has passion: "But I am born for passion, / But you, like I, cannot love."[69] In their inability to love, the two share another similarity. That Zarema's immense feelings for Girei are out of passion, with her fiery kisses, rather than out of love show that despite her former position as star of the harem, she is not free.

The final image of the women is described by the narrator as a shade (тень). Yet, the narrator is unsure if he saw the ghost of Maria or Zarema,

> Whose shade, oh friends, did I see?
>
> Tell me: whose tender image
>
> Then followed me,
>
> Irresistible, inescapable?
>
> Was it the pure soul of Maria
>
> That appeared before me, or did Zarema
>
> Rush about, breathing with jealousy,
>
> Amidst the empty harem?[70]

Even in death, the two women are merely depicted in the opposing terms of the gentle, pure European and the savage Oriental. Erik McDonald argues that there is a balance in the poem between the two women as the narrator sympathizes with Zarema and Girei with Maria. He notes that the plot of the poem pushes Maria into the more sympathetic position, while the structure of

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[69] [Но я для страсти рождена,  / Но ты любить, как я, не можешь;]

[70] [Чью тень, о други, видел я? / Скажите мне: чей образ нежный / Тогда преследовал меня, / Неотразимый, неизбежный? / Марии ль чистая душа / Являлась мне, или Зарема / Носилась, ревностью дыша, / Средь опустелого гарема?]

the poem promotes Zarema as the woman to favor.[71] However, by creating a final image of the women that reverts to the European/Oriental stereotypes, the narrator reveals a lack of true sympathy or love for either. Ultimately, the women are flourishes that adorn and decorate the narrator's recollections and his true love.

It is the Crimean landscape that the narrator waxes most poetically about, rather than the tragic legend of Maria and Zarema. The beauty and charms of the landscape do not fade and it is out of this relationship that the story of Maria and Zarema arise.[72] The narrator chides himself at the end for being a "languorous prisoner" (узник томный) of his own longing, before giving a final description of the Crimean landscape, of his Tauride. In this description, it is notable that there are no overly Orientalizing details. Rather, as Simon Karlinsky points out, Pushkin's language falls under the literary tradition of describing Crimea in the nature poetics of the Mediterranean-Italian landscape.[73] By drawing Crimea closer to the Mediterranean rather than the Oriental, the narrator's relationship to the land cannot be regarded as Orientalizing. Crimea once had a Tatar khanate, legends of which are simply inconsequential divertissements for the narrator. The only detail that belies the Tatar history is the name of the mountain that the narrator ends the poem with, Aiu-dag. However, a name is merely a name and as Pushkin shows by using the Greek name of Tauride, or in Russian the feminine *Tavrida*, rather than the Tatar name of Crimea, such a thing can be replaced. In specifically using Tauride, Pushkin Europeanizes Crimea, pulling Russia closer to its desired goal of being a part of Europe itself.

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[71] McDonald, "Symmetry and Asymmetry in the Narrator-Heroine Interaction of the Fountain of Bakhchisarai," 431–32.
[72] Hokanson, "Empire of the Imagination," 151.
[73] Simon Karlinsky, "Two Pushkin Studies," in *Freedom from Violence and Lies*, ed. Robert P. Hughes, Thomas A. Koster, and Richard Taruskin, Essays on Russian Poetry and Music (Academic Studies Press, 2013), 30, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1zxsk34.4.

Critics in the nineteenth century largely praised “The Fountain of Bakhchisarai” and the three other poems that constitute “The Southern Tales.” Gogol lauds Pushkin’s pure poetry and describes these early works glowingly,

> This is why perhaps his works contain that extra richness and fervor when he is writing about the south. He subconsciously poured all his strength into them, and this is why his works imbued with the spirit of the Caucasus, the untrammeled life of the Circassians and the Crimean nights had such a marvelous, magical power: even those people who lacked the taste and sufficient spiritual qualities to be able to understand them, were astonished by them.[74]

While Gogol is not directly commenting on “The Fountain of Bakhchisarai,” it is still significant that what he emphasizes is the enchanting power of the land, rather than of the people of those places. V.G. Belinsky writes that Pushkin’s early works, including “The Southern Tales,” ushered in a new era of poetry for Russia and, although considering them immature and lacking in the experience of life, he still maintains that the poems “are just as charmingly beautiful today as they were when they first appeared.”[75] Y.P. Annenkov likewise notes that “The Fountain of Bakhchisarai” was immediately praised by critics for its “unprecedented harmony of language,” but that some found the work wanting in narrative action.[76]

After the Russian Revolution, Pushkin underwent a transformation within Soviet scholarship from artist of the aristocracy to romanticized outcast and messianic nationalist. The

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[74] Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol, “A Few Words on Pushkin (1834),” in *Russian Views of Pushkin*, ed. D. J. Richards and Roger Cockrell (Oxford: W. A. Meeuws, 1976), 2.
[75] Vissarion Grigoryevich Belinsky, “The Works of Alexander Pushkin (1844),” in *Russian Views of Pushkin*, ed. D. J. Richards and Roger Cockrell (Oxford: W. A. Meeuws, 1976), 11–12.
[76] Yury Pavlovich Annenkov, “Pushkin. Materials for His Biography (1855),” in *Russian Views of Pushkin*, ed. D. J. Richards and Roger Cockrell (Oxford: W. A. Meeuws, 1976), 31.

attention on Pushkin was shaped by two key dates: the 125th anniversary of his birth in 1924 and the centennial of his death in 1937. Much of the criticism in the 1920s, particularly that of Pavel Sakulin and Vladimir Friche, focused on a class analysis that argued that Pushkin had capitulated before the tsar and become a servile poet. The Revolution had opened Russia's doors to Europe and the world through its universal socialist mission, thus diminishing a need for Pushkin. In the 1930s however, coinciding with the decree on socialist realism, the international view shifted inwards and Pushkin was elevated as a national messianic figure.[77] In part this is also due to the opening of the tsarist government's secret archives after the Revolution. Details regarding the surveillance of Pushkin by the police reinforced the image of the poet as victim.[78] In preparation for the Pushkin Centennial, the All-Union Pushkin Committee coordinated the celebration of the life and works of Pushkin across the entire Soviet Union, which mandated the inclusion of Pushkin in school's literature curriculum and in the repertoire's of theater companies, in addition to the publication of over 13 million copies of books by and about Pushkin in Russian and other languages of the Soviet Union.[79] The image of Pushkin transformed from aristocratic artist to that of a fervent revolutionary. Glossing over the fact that Pushkin occupied an official position of the court and was financially dependent on the tsar in the last decade of his life, scholars instead highlighted his connections to the Decembrist movement, the radical poems of his youth, and his years of exile. His death was likewise reimagined; no longer was his death attributed to a

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[77] Dobrenko, "Pushkin in Soviet and Post-Soviet Culture," 205.
[78] Paul Debreczeny, "'Zhitie Aleksandra Bolinskogo': Pushkin's Elevation to Sainthood in Soviet Culture," in *Late Soviet Culture: From Perestroika to Novostroika*, ed. Thomas Lahusen and Gene Kuperman (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 63.
[79] Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades : Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2000), 113.

duel stemming from the passion for his wife, but rather he became viewed as a victim of the autocratic regime of Nicholas I.[80]

The Soviet Union in the 1930s needed Pushkin to function as national poet in order to project its own greatness and reinforce a Soviet national identity. As Karen Petrone argues, the Pushkin Centennial promoted a type of Soviet patriotism that contrasted the Soviet Union with the rest of the world by defining "being Soviet as possessing a patriotic love for the Soviet Union and being willing to die for it" while "access to the advanced culture of Pushkin was one of the proofs that the Soviet Union was worth dying for…to love Pushkin, therefore, was to be a patriot ready to die in order to protect advanced Soviet's culture."[81] On Pushkin's role as a national writer, D. S. Mirsky writes,

> …Pushkin is much more cosmopolitan and European than Gogol or Tolstoy, and yet he remains a narrowly national poet – in the sense of being a classic only among his fellow-countrymen, whereas Gogol and Tolstoy have a place in the common literary treasure-house of all mankind. Pushkin acted as a sort of focus: he absorbed into himself the enormous artistic experience of the entire previous development of bourgeois humanity and reproduced it for the new Russian bourgeois culture.[82]

As Pushkin was seen as the national poet, rather than one of world literature, his works were deemed highly suitable for adaptations of other forms of art. However, there is a divide between speaking on what is permissible in regard to government decrees and what is accepted by the people within a culture. One of the failures of socialist realism, which is also seen in the ballets

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[80] Petrone, 115.
[81] Petrone, 127.
[82] D. S. Mirsky, "The Problem of Pushkin (1934)," in *Russian Views of Pushkin*, ed. D. J. Richards and Roger Cockrell (Oxford: W. A. Meeuws, 1976), 167.

of the early 1930s, is that the conditions of the genre were all mandated from above and thus the results were patchworked together to appease the required criteria. As Paul Debreczeny argues, such Soviet rituals emanating from above "lacked the deep myths that could have given it meaning" and therefore "the less the official mythology was able to allay the nation's anxieties, the greater the need for a genuine one. Under these circumstances it was natural that the Pushkin myth should arise once more."[83] The transformed figure of Pushkin as a martyr under the tsarist regime and, more importantly, as a Soviet poet, became a more successful means of uniting Soviet people under one myth. Furthermore, it provided a new means for socialist realism to evolve and distance itself from the ideologically cumbersome realizations of the past.

## THE ROMANTICIZED

Set in Crimea, "The Fountain of Bakhchisarai" highlights the shifting geographical imperatives as there was at the time a reorientation of the Soviet Union towards its borders and particularly to the south. Paperny in his text on Soviet architecture during "Culture Two," notes that,

> In the Moscow climate, the summer is hot (and short), and the winter is cold (and long). Culture Two appears to forget this. It is as if it is creeping several dozens of degrees south, from a latitude of 60 degrees to, at the very least, the latitude of the Mediterranean.[84]

Paperny discusses how buildings in the 1930s were constructed as though in temperate areas with open-air terraces, while the "General Plan for the Reconstruction of Moscow" included

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[83] Debreczeny, "'Zhitie Aleksandra Bolinskogo': Pushkin's Elevation to Sainthood in Soviet Culture", 58-59.
[84] Paperny, *Architecture in the Age of Stalin*, 129.

enriching the city with water through the construction of canals and beautifying these areas with European-styled framed embankments. A paradox arises in that there is both an "orientalization of the culture" and a striving to appear European.[85] Paperny argues that these actions are not contradictions, rather,

> in order to join the family of European capitals, it is necessary to revive the city, allegedly dessicated…and only water can save it. The path to the eradication of the Asian stamp would seem to be a purely Asiatic solution.[86]

The Soviet Union had turned inwards in the 1930s and was actively searching within its borders, particularly in its southern sphere, as it grappled with the disparate aspects of its identity.

This trend is contemporaneously reflected in other areas Soviet culture, most prominently in film in the genre of the Stalinist musical. In the finale of Grigory Aleksandrov's film *Circus* (Цирк, 1935), "Song of the Motherland" elevates the love story between the two protagonists from a romantic, intimate exchange to the national register. The song follows the models of the Volga folk songs and the revolutionary hymn to combine the broad expanse of the country with individual freedom[87]:

> From Moscow to the very borderlands,
> From the southern mountains to the northern seas,
> Man passes as the master,
> Though his boundless Motherland[88]

[85] Paperny, 134–36.
[86] Paperny, 137.
[87] Rimgaila Salys, *The Musical Comedy Films of Grigorii Aleksandrov: Laughing Matters* (Bristol, UNITED KINGDOM: Intellect Books Ltd, 2009), 147.
[88] [От Москвы до самых до окраин, / С южных гор до северных морей / Человек проходит, как хозяин, / Необъятной Родины своей.]

Much as there was a need for the myth of Pushkin to arouse genuine sentiments in uniting the Soviet people, songs such as "Song for the Motherland" stirred the emotions of the audience and helped weaken any intellectual opposition they may have held in regard to the ideology within the films. Furthermore, as Richard Taylor shows, the scores of such songs combined catchy tunes with ideologically loaded texts, so that when they left the cinema humming the tune, they "carried with it the message of reel reality into the real reality outside," inducing audiences to feel part of the world depicted on screen.[89] Whether through musical films or ballets based on a poet whose work is mass distributed for maximum impact, the sweeping notion of the Soviet Union as a broad nation with cherished and awe-inspiring lands within its borders took hold.

There is likewise a transition in subject matter from the epic to the lyric within *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*. As in the poem, the focus is ultimately on the "emotionally saturated portraiture of the motherland," rather than the characters.[90] The dancers, by utilizing the Stanislavsky Method, sought to depict the inner depths of their characters, yet while such a connection with the characters from the poem were used to dramatize the plot and the choreography, ultimately Maria and Zarema both perish and all that remains on stage is the image of Maria trapped within the fountain in the wild beauty of Crimea. In the lyric, the "we" transforms from the prior collective proletarian to the view of the Soviet people as a common body.[91] The broad lands of the Soviet Union become synonymous with this "we." The Crimea

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[89] Richard Taylor, "The Stalinist Musical: Socialist Realism and Revolutionary Romanticism," in *A Companion to Russian Cinema*, ed. Birgit Beumers (Hoboken, UNITED STATES: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2016), 171.
[90] Hans Günther, "'Broad Is My Motherland'": The Mother Archetype and Space in the Soviet Mass Song," in *Landscape of Stalinism: The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space*, ed. Evgeny Dobrenko and Eric Naiman (Seattle, UNITED STATES: University of Washington Press, 2003), 82.
[91] Günther, 82.

depicted on stage is that of a historical Tatar khanate yet is very much a part of these broad Soviet lands, prioritized for its place on the periphery, in addition to being mythologized through the reimaging of the tale through Pushkin. Furthermore, after the 1917 Revolution, Crimea became a sovereign state. However, during the Russian civil war it was a strategic stronghold held by the White Army and by 1921 it became a part of the Soviet Union as the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. The selection of "The Fountain of Bakhchisarai" thus projects national prestige both through the rehabilitated poet-messiah and geographically in highlighting its heritage in Crimea as inheritor of classical and oriental heritages on the southern borderland.

To create a ballet in the genre of socialist realism, the librettist had to make changes to the plot to align it with the accepted ideology and within those requisites Maria's character is the most altered. In the poem, she has never loved and Pushkin emphasizes that "she still did not know love" (Она любви еще не знала), whereas in the ballet she is introduced as happily dancing a mazurka with her fiancé, Vatslav. The name Vatslav can be interpreted from Old Church Slavonic as meaning "greater (*vete)*" " glory (*slava*)," and it is telling that her silence and grief in the harem is attributed to this greater glory that Girei murdered. Any aspect of religion is removed, including the image of the Virgin Mary that adorns her bedchamber in the poem. In place of religion, Maria clutches her harp for solace in nearly every scene, a reminder of her former life and a symbol of her beatific innocence. Most importantly, in the final act of the ballet, only Maria appears as a vision before Girei.[92] In the poem, Pushkin creates symmetry in the opposition of Maria and Zarema, who are both ultimately prisoners of the harem, but in

[92] Later productions, including the versions currently in the repertoire of the Mariinsky and Bolshoi, have both Maria and Zarema appear as visions in the final act.

embedding a more relevant meaning, allegiances are shifted in the ballet to Maria who suffers from the violence inflicted on her native land, Poland, from the grief of lost love and glory, and her death at the hands of a woman intoxicated by passion. The political subtext was so closely monitored that before the outbreak of the Second World War, Maria's native land was changed from Poland to Western Ukraine.[93]

For dancers, the role of Maria was highly coveted and the scene of her death as she is stabbed in the back by Zarema became an enduring image in the public realm. For Galina Ulanova, the role of Maria was her breakthrough performance and established her as a star of the Mariinsky. The depth of feeling within her portrayal of Maria was immediately lauded and, as one ballet historian notes, "Ulanova *was* Maria because she understood all the *nuances* in the psychology of her character. Through this understanding she gave the subtlest of changes to the choreography."[94] More importantly, in considering the prevailing idea in the 1930s of the Soviet Union as a broad nation, there is an emphasis on Ulanova's Slavic qualities,

> The image of Maria's emerging feelings flashed, at first timidly, and then dissolved into Ulanova's retorts. Everything in her image was captivating – her vigorous runs and timid pauses; a gesture of her outstretched and then immediately withdrawn hand; her arabesque, with its strikingly clear lines, dissolved with a pushing-off movement of her shoulders; and her enigmatic looks and vague smiles. The modesty of her plasticity seemed to reflect the natural modesty of her soul. The more restrained the Polish

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[93] Swift, *The Art of the Dance in the U.S.S.R*, 98.
[94] Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet,* 232.

> princess's "speech," the more distinct was Ulanova's grace. Her Northern Slavic grace penetrated the soul with its quiet mysteriousness.[95]

It is telling that the role of Maria, not Zarema, captured the public. Whereas in Pushkin's poem the two women are not presented as binaries and Maria is no less exoticized than Zarema, the female characters in the ballet are in clear opposition to one another, which affected not just the how the roles were portrayed but also how the dancers were received for their performances. Ulanova became a highly decorated and model Soviet citizen, receiving multiple times throughout her life the Stalin Prize, First Class, the Order of Lenin, Order of Red Banner of Labor, among other awards. This role of Slavic princess, mourning the loss of her "greater glory," refusing to reciprocate the passions of a khan, and hailing from the western border of the Soviet Union, falls victim to the jealousy of the fiery Zarema. Maria's drawn-out last breath after she is stabbed in the back, never losing her composure, and her lingering on as a specter within the "fountain of tears" in Bakhchisarai serve as a reminder of such enduring dedication to this coveted idea of Slavic identity.

Zarema loses much of the sympathy in her portrayal, however her character is still explained within the bounds of ideology. Alla Shelest, who was known for dancing the role of Zarema in the 1940s and 1950s, described Zarema as a defender of the people against Girei's self-absorption.[96] A pamphlet, published at the time of the premiere of *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, focused on Pushkin and the idea of Pushkin as a proto-socialist. Within the pamphlet, Zarema's jealousy is described as exemplifying the "tragedy of the harem, where

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[95] Vera Krasovskaya, *Vaganova: A Dance Journey from Petersburg to Leningrad*, trans. Vera M. Siegel, 1st edition (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 185.
[96] Carolyn Pouncy, "Stumbling toward Socialist Realism: Ballet In Leningrad, 1927 - 1937," *Russian History* 32, no. 2 (2005): 187.

women – without rights to control her thoughts, feelings and desires, living under lock and key – is bound within the circle of love and eroticism."[97] Here the socialist call for women to be liberated emerges. Love and sexuality are tools of subjugation. Zarema, despite killing Maria, cannot be blamed for she did so under the binds of Girei, not as a free woman.

As previously mentioned, *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* was intended for a domestic, rather than international audience, seemingly promoting both Pushkin as a Soviet poet ahead of the Pushkin Centennial and uniting the nation by invoking the wide geographical expanse between its borders. In the first decade after the ballet's premiere in 1934 in Leningrad and subsequent transfer to Moscow in 1936, it joined the repertoires of ballet companies across the Soviet Union, in Samara, Nizhny Novgorod, Yekaterinburg, Kiev, Kharkov, Minsk, Tbilisi, Perm, and Almaty. However, much as Maria emerges as the Slavic soul and star of *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, these dual intents reflect pre-revolutionary imperialist tendencies. As Karen Petrone argues, the embrace of Pushkin and, by extension, the high Russian culture associated with such literature demonstrates a model of "Sovietification" not much different than nineteenth century Russification. The assertion that Pushkin was "native" to the non-Russian peoples suggests not just a transformation from savage to cultured, but that non-Russians had become native "Soviets."[98] Likewise the high valuation of the role of Maria, a captive stoic Slav within the confines of a Tartar harem, amidst a push to assert the image of the broad Motherland, including the areas that were historically non-Russian, enforces this imperialistic intent. Pushkin, thus, as a Russian poet who, as Orest Somov writes, "embraced the entire space of his native land, and…appears to us on the cold shores of the Baltic and then suddenly spreads a tent under

[97] Quotation cited from V. A. Manuilov, N. D. Volkov, and V. Bogdanov-Berezovskii, *Bakhchisaraiskii fontan,* (Leningrad: GATOB, 1934) in Pouncy, 186.
[98] Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades : Celebrations in the Time of Stalin,* 129.

the scorching sky of the Caucasus or frolics in the flowering valleys of Kiev,"[99] expanded the imagined land of Russia in the nineteenth century and again as the proclaimed Soviet poet of the 1930s.

Within the production of *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, themes of romanticism are abundantly evident. The use of Pushkin's eponymous poem, coinciding with the Pushkin Centennial, highlights a return of Russian identity, even if it is labelled Soviet. The desire to see Russia represented on stage echoes Pushkin's own thoughts on nationality in literature when he wrote, "there is a way of thinking and feeling, there is a darkness and customs, beliefs and habits that belong exclusively to some people."[100] This focus on the national identity extends to the nation itself, returning to a fascination with the land, through an envisioning of its broad lands and the sublime that lies on the peripheries. Crimea is envisioned as a place full of passion, far from the landscapes encountered in the everyday. Furthermore, the sublime was also useful in providing the ideological tropes for articulating power relations at a time when the Soviet Union felt threated by rising fascism on the west and Japanese expansionism on the east.[101]As already noted, the origins of Maria were taken into consideration and changed from Poland to Ukraine in order to retain suitable sympathies between the audience and the character. In dramatizing ballet, the Stanislavsky Method allowed for an organic unfolding of the characters, a chance for the dancers to explore the capabilities of themselves as not just dancers but actor-dancers both on and off stage. That characters within the ballet were now seen in development, no scene

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[99] О. М. Сомов, "О романтической поэзии (Статья II)," 1823, https://studfile.net/preview/7089380/.
[100] А. С. Пушкин, "О Народности в Литературе (1825)," in *Собрание Сочинений в 10 Томах*, vol. Том 6 (Москва: ГИХЛ, 1959), https://rvb.ru/pushkin/01text/07criticism/02misc/0996.htm.
[101] Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome,* 277.

suspended as a static moment of pure dance, aligned with the Romantics' own ambition of individual self-exploration. Writing on the differences between classicism and romanticism, Stendhal noted,

> Such charming instants do not occur when there is a change of scene; nor at the precise moment when the poet requires the spectator to skip over twelve or fifteen days; nor when the poet is obliged to give a long speech to one of his characters for the sole purpose of informing the spectator of a previous fact about which he must know; nor, again, when there are three or four lines which are admirable and remarkable as poetry. These delicious and very rare instants of *complete illusion* are encountered only in the warmth of a lively scene when there is a rapid exchange of lines among the actors.[102]

Drama-ballet's novel new use of dance monologues and dialogues in place of the classical nineteenth century structural forms, such as the *pas de deux* and variations, attempts to achieve the "complete illusion." Lastly, and most importantly for drama-ballet, was unity and the process of attaining unity. In Romanticism, artists sought to achieve a sense of unity in the work and in doing so were also immensely interested in the creative process that led to such unity. Similarly, the approach to creating the Soviet ballet adaption of *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* introduced a novel focus on the characters and text of the poem in tandem with the more traditional choreographic rehearsals.

However much Romanticism pervaded the genre of drama-ballet, tension remained between the original ideals of the nineteenth century movement and its transposition to the Soviet stage. Boris Asafiev, the ballet's composer, begins and ends the score with Alexander

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[102] Stendhal, *Racine and Shakespeare*, trans. Guy Daniels (London: Oneworld Classics, 2011), 24.

Gurilyov's (1803-1858) "To the Fountain of Bakhchisarai Palace," yet maintained that "this is no restoration of romanticism, but an attempt to hear the epoch through Pushkin's poem and to convey the emotions that moved the imagination of the poet."[103] Despite Asafiev's assertion against the return of Romanticism, the exclusive use of historical settings in drama-ballet reflects the shift during the romantic era towards the dramatization of historical subjects as a means of conveying a national subject while creating a distinctive national drama. *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* is based on an initial layer of history, transmitted orally, written as a reconceived fragmentary glimpse be Pushkin, before metaphorizing into a dramatized myth capable of creating continuity between the past and present. Such reinterpretations allow for a commentary on the present and a prophesy for the future, heeding Anatoly Lunacharsky's 1933 remarks on socialist realism that "a Communist who cannot dream is a bad Communist. The Communist dream is not a flight from the earthly but a flight into the future."[104] While the focus in the 1930s was predominantly on a bright, utopian future, the turn in ballet to dramatic adaptations of Russian nineteenth century literature, set in historically and geographically distant lands, allowed a more deeply entrenched cultural legacy take hold, originating with Pushkin.

The larger question of Soviet Romanticism centers on the role of the individual within society and to what extent individuality was promoted in *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*. As Oleg Kharkhodin extensively details, the meaning and function of the collective changed drastically from the 1920s to the 1930s, originating with Stalin's "New Tasks" speech in June 1931 where he emphasized the need for individualization of responsibility and condemned "unbridled

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[103]As quoted in Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 229.
[104] From A.V. Lunacharsky, "Synopsis of a Report on the Tasks of Dramaturgy (Extract)", *Sobranie sochinenii v 8 tomakh. Tom 8* (Moscow, 1967), 615-616 as reproduced in Ian Christie and Richard Taylor, *The Film Factory: Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939* (Routledge, 2012), 327.

collectivism."[105] This ideological shift from class and collectivity to the individual followed the romantic discourse of inwardness, yet while such self-reflection was commended, particularly if it led to outstanding feats of artistry, industry or exploration, the emphasis fell to the external role played by the state and Stalin in cultivating such individualism.[106] What was attributed to an artist's imagination was now coopted as a success by the state. In an interview in 1936, Stalin, speaking on personal freedom, states, "Freedom of the individual in the Soviet state consists in the real opportunity for each working man to reveal all his physical and spiritual powers in order to achieve his own material or cultural well-being and in order to strengthen socialist society."[107] Individualism is promoted to the degree that it serves the greater society, but never beyond that. Whereas in nineteenth century Romanticism there also existed such a tension in the unity between an individual and the whole, in the 1930s this tension stemmed from the origins of an individual's inspiration and creativity. Thus, the two heroes that result from *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* are Maria, and by extension Ulanova as the model Soviet citizen who rises in her artistry to captivate the public, and the broad lands of the Soviet Union through which this ballet was disseminated and sought to rally together as a paradoxical collective of individuals.

The return of Romanticism in the 1930s, when examined through the lens of *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, can be labeled as "Soviet Romanticism" but it still exists entirely separate from Russian Romanticism of Pushkin's era. Starting with the source of these two forms of Romanticism, Russian Romanticism was distinctly opposed to an overarching doctrine,

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[105] Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices*, Reprint 2019, Studies on the History of Society and Culture 32 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 85.
[106] Anatoly Pinsky, "The Origins of Post-Stalin Individuality: Aleksandr Tvardovskii and the Evolution of 1930s Soviet Romanticism," *The Russian Review* 76 (July 2017): 463.
[107] Interview published in Ia. N. Umansky, *Lichnost' v sotsialisticheskom obshchestve* (Moscow, 1947), 10-11 as cited by Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*, 197.

instead it valued experimentation with form and content, drawing inspiration from the ideals of Romanticism itself, such as individualism, emotion, and nature. Soviet Romanticism, on the other hand, stands in stark contrast, ultimately following the framework of a Marxist-Leninist ideological framework. Given the importance of inspiration for Romantics of the nineteenth century, this is glaring fundamental difference. It is also important to convey the value of experimenting with form and content. In Pushkin's poem, the layers of time and voices employed were singular in creating a Romantic work. In adapting the poem for the ballet, the rigidity to which the ballet must adhere to the text is at odds with experimentation. Ironically, by holding the text above all else, Soviet Romanticism sought to avoid any possibility of being labeled as too avant-garde or, worse, formalist, ultimately removing its essential Romantic qualities.

Given that the events within *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* are from a historical past, the Soviet Union can be seen as the inheritor of the myth, the vanquisher of the savage Tatars, and the liberators of Europe, all through the prism of their own national poet. In adapting Pushkin's poem for ballet, drama-ballet sought the romantic ideal of unity as a means of captivating the audience and asserting Soviet power in the world to itself and its own people. First by reimaging Pushkin as a Soviet poet to be celebrated by all the diverse groups of Soviet peoples, second by fusing the theatrical acting methods with classical ballet, and third by using the nation's past, both literary and historical. From Pushkin's pen, lines come to life through drama-ballet, and the Soviet audience falls under the sway of the two heroines, Tauride and Maria. After the success of *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, other nineteenth century literary works were adapted into ballets, including two other poems from Pushkin's Southern Poems, *Gypsies* (Цыганы, 1937) and Prisoner of the Caucasus (Кавказский пленник, 1938), as well as Gogol's "Taras Bulba" (Тарас

Бульба, 1940), *Bela* (Бэла, 1941) adapted from Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*, to name a few. These ballets were never intended to be performed internationally and were not considered appropriate ballets for visiting foreign dignitaries, for which a new production, such as Vaganova's *Swan Lake* was typically performed. By the end of the 1930s, these initial drama-ballet productions based on nineteenth century Russian works paved the way for a more outwards facing era when classics from the world literary canon were adapted for the stage. These ballets, including *Romeo and Juliet*, the first to garner immense international acclaim, became fixtures for tours abroad and for showcasing the developments of classical ballet over the decade to the world.

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## Chapter II

## *Romeo and Juliet* Heads West:

## Soviet Ballet, World Literature, and the Shift from Periphery to Center

Standing on a dimly-lit balcony jutting above a verdant courtyard, a young Juliet yearns to join Romeo below as he leaps through the air, lands on his knee, throws his head back and thrusts his chest out with arms stretched wide. This moment in *Romeo and Juliet*, the Soviet ballet production from 1940, is comprehensible both to balletomanes and those unfamiliar with the world of pliés and pointe shoes. Romeo's passion for Juliet and the story of their authority-defying love spans cultures and eras. Even if one has not read Shakespeare's original text, the tale of "star-crossd lovers" is ubiquitous, permeating the worlds of literature, cinema, and dance. In Russian culture, Shakespeare likewise left an indelible impression beginning in the nineteenth century. In a speech on the 300th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth in 1864, Turgenev declared that Shakespeare was an integral part of Russian culture, having "entered our flesh and blood," and by the end of the century Russia was producing the most translations of Shakespeare in the world.[108] The October Revolution brought another wave of interest and a decade of new adaptations reflecting the contemporaneous views. By the 1930s, Shakespeare was placed on a pedestal next to Pushkin; Shakespeare as the Soviet playwright and Pushkin as the Soviet poet. This Shakespearization commenced officially with Gorky's article in 1932 about dramaturgy, where he designated Shakespeare as the ideal for playwrights of socialist realism: "a teacher, a

[108] "вошел в нашу плоть и кровь," as quoted in Михаил Михайлович Морозов, "Шекспир На Советской Сцене," in *Избранные Статьи и Переводы* (Москва: ГИХЛ, 1954), http://az.lib.ru/m/morozow_m_m/text_0040.shtml.

leader, a builder of the new world must be the main character in contemporary drama. And we must learn how to portray this new character with adequate force and clarity from…Shakespeare."[109][110] Throughout the 1930s, Shakespeare's plays were staged across the Soviet Union, thus a ballet adaption of *Romeo and Juliet* was not a surprising move. However, as I argue in this chapter, the Soviet ballet adaption re-imagined Shakespeare's play with an emphasis on the requisite ideology, and due to the concurrent Soviet trend of world literature (*mirovaya literatura*)*,* which reflected a desire to transform Moscow from the periphery to the center of world culture, this production provided a vehicle to showcase Soviet prestige on a global stage through an intertwining of Shakespeare's text and the first truly Russian ballet style. A classic within the Soviet Union, on the first tours abroad, and through the groundbreaking film version of the ballet, *Romeo and Juliet* went beyond the traditional boundaries of classical ballet, fulfilling Wagner's theory of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* that was exported to the audiences and ballet companies of the West.

Existing scholarship on *Romeo and Juliet* is cursory and lacks a critical analysis of the ballet's use of Shakespeare's text and the innovative qualities that produced a definingly Soviet production packaged for the West. Extensive scholarship is devoted to the popularity and official championing of Shakespeare in the 1930s, but this is limited to a focus on translations and theater productions within the Soviet Union. Notably, Arkady Ostrovsky has written on the role of Shakespeare in the development of socialist realism and only fleetingly mentions the ballet

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[109] Shakespearization, or Shakespearianism, is the phenomena by which a devoted public interest develops around the works of William Shakespeare or by which Shakespeare's works impact the development of literature, music, visual arts, theater, and cinema. While it exists in world literature, generally, it is particularly prominent in Russian literature and culture.
[110] Arkady Ostrovsky, "Shakespeare as a Founding Father of Socialist Realism: The Soviet Affair with Shakespeare," in *Shakespeare in the World of Communism and Socialism*, ed. Irena Makaryk and Joseph G Price (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 57.

production of *Romeo and Juliet* as an example of an adaptation originally intended as an "optimistic tragedy."[111] Mikhail Morozov, the Soviet Shakespeare scholar, notes the changes in the highlighted themes of *Romeo and Juliet*, particularly between Soviet productions and Western – British and American – productions. In dance scholarship, the genre of *Romeo and Juliet*, drama-ballet, has received very little attention. Soviet dance historians Elizabeth Souritz and Natalia Roslavleva provide a focus on the experimental choreography of the 1920s and a broader overview of Russian/Soviet dance history, respectively. Vera Krasovskaya writes in more depth of ballet in the 1930s as one of her main subjects is Agrippina Vaganova, the ballerina, artistic director, and ballet pedagogue who is a central figure in the development of the iconic style within *Romeo and Juliet*, yet like Roslavleva, her writings are more informative rather than analytical. Scholarship in the West tends to focus on the political – such as Christina Ezrahi's *Swans of the Kremlin*, which focuses on the collision of art and politics – or as is more the case, mentions drama-ballet as a deviation in ballet history that merely bent to the demands of the times rather than a genre that within its parameters developed a distinct style of ballet that could be recognized as Soviet.[112]

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[111] This term "optimistic tragedy," coined in Adrian Piotrovsky's review of Sergei Radlov's theatrical production of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1934, sought to counter the ongoing debate at the time in journals of whether Shakespeare was a optimist or a pessimist. Radlov, and Piotrovsky in his review, found Shakespeare to be a realist with elements of both optimism and pessism in his works.

[112] See Ostrovsky in *Shakespeare in the World of Communism and Socialism*, ed. Irena Makaryk and Joseph G Price (2013) and Morozov in *Izbrannie stati i perevodi* (1954) regarding Shakespeare in Soviet culture. For more on Soviet ballet see Elizabeth Souritz, *Soviet Choreographers in the 1920s* (1990), Natalia Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet* (1966), Vera Krasovskaya, *Russian Ballet Theatre of the Second Half of the XIXth Century* (1963) and *Vaganova: A Dance Journey from Petersburg to Leningrad* (2005), and Christina Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia* (2012).

This chapter explores the significance of a ballet adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, placing the ballet within coexisting trends of other fields of Soviet culture. Most prominently is the shift towards world literature during the 1930s, as exemplified by the embrace of Shakespeare, but also as a culmination of a much longer lasting desire of Russian culture. A question dominating nineteenth century debates was how to modernize Russia, and by extension Russian literature, without corrupting fundamental values and beliefs. For the Romantics, such as Pushkin who looked to the Bard when writing *Boris Godunov*, Shakespeare became a model for the notion of free drama, the linguistic break from the constraints of strict rhyme with the use of the vernacular and blank verse, and the use of historical characters. Shakespeare's works, as with most other texts, foreign or not, were censored through translation because of a fear of foreign influence, a fear that returned during Stalinist times. However, censored or not, Western writers were widely embraced. Dostoevsky, who earlier worried that the influence of such Western writers would impinge on the essential Russian qualities in Russian literature, wrote in 1876:

> I maintain, indeed I insist, that every [Western] European poet, thinker and lover of humanity will – except in his homeland – be best understood and most eagerly accepted in Russia. Always in Russia – more than anywhere else in the world. Shakespeare, Byron, Walter Scott, and Dickens are closer to Russians, and Russians understand them better than, say, the Germans [do].[113]

Both Dostoevsky and Turgenev, to provide only a few cursory examples, claimed Shakespeare for Russia. It was not only that Shakespeare was loved by Russians, but that through their innate comprehension of his texts, Shakespeare was felt to belong more to Russians than to anyone else.

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[113] Quoted in Maurice Friedberg, *Literary Translation in Russia: A Cultural History*, 1 edition (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2008), 13.

Through such statements, Russians were asserting their right to be included in this world of high literary culture, and, thus, to be given free rein to reinterpret to their own societal needs.

Soviet ballet, in Russia's quest to be included in world culture and move from the periphery to the center, became a vehicle that could transcend the problem of translation and perform the Soviet mastery of Shakespeare. Such a culminating production exhibited, first within the Soviet Union and then internationally, the extent to which Soviet ballet had innovated upon Western culture, both in ballet technique, which originated in Italy and France, and its own interpretation of Shakespeare. Along with this shift to world literature that socialist realism pushed, this chapter also covers, through drama-ballet, the metaphorical steps leading to the first Russian style of ballet, which stemmed from the Vaganova Method. I write metaphorical intentionally, as I will avoid a technical assessment of this ballet style. While I cover the cultural context and specific characteristics of the choreography, I will not cover the all the specifications of the choreography. Given ballet's ephemeral nature and that the ballet premiered before the advances of film, we have no record of the choreography from the initial production. While there is a film version from 1954 that preserves many of the key dance scenes, it was adapted specifically for film, as will be discussed later on. For the argument within this chapter, the innovations of the genre of drama-ballet are of greater importance, rather than a breakdown of the entire choreography. The focus is the emergence of this new style of ballet in conjunction with the use of literature, as well as the view of the overall view of the production, in particular its success as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, aiding it in its transcendence beyond national boundaries. Thus, this chapter involves examination of three layers of innovations: the first occurs on stage in the innovations of the movements of ballet, the second expands out to include the innovations of the production – the sequencing, scenery, and the musical score – and the third moves further

afield to the ballet's global impact. Together, these innovations achieve a long-desired ambition, placing Soviet culture on the global stage as a model to be replicated.

## OVERVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS LEADING TO *ROMEO AND JULIET*

Ballet has a long history in Russia, having been imported from the West during the reign of Catherine the Great. The nineteenth century was known as the Petipa era, named for Marius Petipa (1818-1910), a French ballet master and choreographer at the Imperial Mariinsky Theatre[114] responsible for a number of the most well-known classical ballets, including *Don Quixote* (1869), *La Bayadere* (1877), *The Sleeping Beauty* (1894), and a revival of *Swan Lake* (1895) in collaboration with Lev Ivanov that became the definitive version. The primary academy for ballet, the Imperial Ballet School, which was directly linked to the company, provided dancers with the most prominent ballet masters from France and Italy, Marius Petipa and Enrico Cecchetti (1850-1928), respectively. The two styles of ballet that each taught were very different; the French school draws extensively from its aristocratic past and emphasizes precision, elegance and sobriety, but is also criticized for its flaccid poses and limited technical capabilities, while the Italian school underscores the importance of anatomy and repetition of movements for poise and strength in technical feats, often at the expense of artistic expressiveness. A third school was also present, the Bournonville method, created by the Danish

[114] The Imperial Mariinsky Theatre in current day Saint Petersburg has undergone numerous name changes. In 1920 it was changed to the State Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet (GATOB). In 1924, it was renamed the Leningrad State Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet. In 1935, following the assassination of Sergei Kirov, it was renamed the Kirov State Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet, and in 1992 renamed the State Academic Mariinsky Theater, or more commonly, simply the Mariinsky.

ballet master August Bournonville (1805-1879), which was heavily influenced by the French school but emphasizes a natural harmony of the body and lack of visible effort.

Russia's school, now known as the Vaganova method, was not codified until the early 1930s when Agrippina Vaganova (1879-1951), a former dancer, then artistic director between 1931-1937 of the Leningrad State Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet, and then ballet master at the Leningrad Conservatory, organized, improved, and systemized it. Her method was based on techniques she had learned from her own ballet training and incorporated from the French, Italian, and Danish schools. She grappled with the same question that has plagued Russia throughout history: to import a style from the West or to innovate? Vaganova sought to preserve the most distinctive Russian qualities that had developed since the start of the twentieth century: the simultaneous use of strength and softness in movements; the crispness of technique (derived from the Italian method); the spirituality of poses as embodied by the Russian dancer and choreographer, Michel Fokine.[115] The rigid training system endowed dancers with a level of athleticism, expressiveness and soulfulness that stood apart from the other schools of ballet. Many viewed her method as a return to the nineteenth century, but by defining a clear Russian school of technique it created a system that could serve as a foundation for future developments. Another goal of her pedagogical system was to create a unified technique while also promoting the individuality of each dancer. On one hand this defied the Soviet goal of deemphasizing the individual, but it was also a reaction to the Imperial system of the *emploi* where a dancer was typecast in a certain role for the entirety of their career.[116] The individuality and versatility that

[115] Agrippina Vaganova, *Fundamentals of the Classic Dance*, 1960 reprint edition (Kamin dance publishers, 1960), viii.
[116] The role of the individual changed greatly in the first decades after the October Revolution. In the 1920s, there was an emphasis on developing the collectivist individual. However, in the "New Tasks" speech by Stalin in 1931, he argued against "depersonalization" (*obezlichka*) and

Soviet dancers later conveyed was a key characteristic that differentiated them from their international counterparts.

Outside of the daily studio training, ballet faced a more significant hurdle within Soviet culture. After the October Revolution, ballet continued to be viewed as a source of entertainment for the privileged. The first step then was an overall change in the very purpose of art. The Revolution attempted to reshape man's nature, to create a "new Soviet man." For Lenin, the brain was merely a mechanical device that would respond to external stimuli, therefore art had to contain social and educational messages that would reshape the Soviet man's conception of the world.[117] Some of the classic tsarist-era ballets were kept in the repertory, such as Petipa's *Swan Lake*, but the plots were reworked in accordance with Marxist principles. Each Soviet ballet had to harmonize with the ideals, themes and human content that the Revolution promoted, while also moving beyond mere entertainment to social consciousness.

During the first decade after the Revolution, there was a pervasive anxiety about the need to create a national identity in all forms of art. However, ballet needed, first and foremost, talent. Many dancers fled after the Revolution, and those that did stay had to endure difficult conditions in the early 1920s that were not conducive to such intense training, such as lack of heat, food and proper footwear. Also, with the declaration of Moscow as the new capital on May 21, 1921, GATOB was no longer the prime focus of the government. Instead, the Bolshoi Theater in

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called for personal responsibility. Yet, there was always a difficult balance for individuals in a socialist society, where there was meant to be high achieving individuals, but not to the point that the individuals outweighed the collective. By 1938, Stalin changed course yet again, arguing against creating a "cult of individuals" (*kult lichnostei*). For more see Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices*, Reprint 2019, Studies on the History of Society and Culture 32 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

[117] Cadra Peterson McDaniel, *American–Soviet Cultural Diplomacy: The Bolshoi Ballet's American Premiere* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2014), xviii.

Moscow had to balance the requirements and expectations of the government. With this greater artistic freedom in Leningrad and smaller class sizes, Vaganova was able to refine her approach and creation of a Russian pedagogy during the 1920s. Most of the prominent dancers that emerged between the end of 1920s through the early 1950s were trained by Vaganova herself in this new, distinctly Russian style, and, thus, exemplified this post-Revolution foundation in their ballet technique.

While the ballets of the 1920s were striking for their experimental nature in terms of choreography, themes, and music, debates regarding the future and direction of ballet began to appear in the journals of *Rabochi i teatr* (The Worker and the Theater) and *Zhizn' iskusstva* (The Life of Art) in 1928. The central argument concerned whether ballet should follow a Wagnerian synthesis of word, singing, music, gesture, and dance, or if pure dance, one unconnected to content or themes and stemming from its classical Imperial heritage, could exist.[118] These debates spilled over into the 1930s but were extinguished with a decree. In 1934, at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers, the Party declared socialist realism the only style officially acceptable for Soviet art. Socialist realism embraced the idea of art having a purpose rather than art for art's sake. The main objective of socialist realism was to "depict reality in its revolutionary development," focusing content on the transformation of the Soviet state into the ideal Communist society.[119] This pronouncement shook the ballet world because while conveying socialist realism in literature or visual art was somewhat straightforward, the implications for ballet were unclear. *The Bright Stream* (*Светлый ручей*, 1935), for example,

[118] For a more detailed view on these debates see Chapter 3, "Achieving Symphonism" in Tim Scholl, *Sleeping Beauty, a Legend in Progress* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).
[119] Andrei Zhdanov, "From Speech at the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers 1934," in *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, ed. Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goldman, and Olga Taxidou, 1 edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 525.

attempted to adhere to the principles of socialist realism by constructing a very straightforward plot that follows a lighthearted celebration of life on a Cossack collective farm. *The Bright Stream* premiered in Leningrad to favorable reviews and had a long run of sold-out performances. However, when it was performed at the Bolshoi Theater with Stalin in attendance the reception quickly turned hostile. *Pravda*, the leading mouthpiece of the Soviet party, published an article which attacked the ballet for making a mockery of the Soviet people by portraying them in a satirical tone with a vaudeville sensibility.[120] Choreographers and composers quickly scrambled to revise their productions to suit socialist realism and, by extension, Stalin's unpredictable tastes.

The mandate of socialist realism did not entirely change the course of ballet as 1934 also saw the premiere of the highly successful production of *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* based on Pushkin's poem, part of the initial trend within drama-ballet that began using Russian literature as the basis for new ballet librettos. While the previous chapter focuses on *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, the ballet includes a few key innovations that likewise influenced *Romeo and Juliet*. First is the use of literature, which provided ballet with a solid foundation and guided the viewer who was expected to have familiarity with the source text. Second, drama-ballet utilized tools from dramatic theater, particularly the Stanislavsky method and close studies of the text by the dancers. Lastly, Vaganova and her newly codified training style, the eponymous Vaganova Method, sought a holistic emphasis of movement where each position was not simply about moving an arm or a head, but rather affected the whole body in an attempt to capture a more expansive depth of inner life for greater expression.

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[120] Jennifer Homans, *Apollo's Angels: A History of Ballet* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2011), 356.

Ballets take years to produce, requiring an approved libretto, a composer to arrange a score, months of a choreographer working with dancers in rehearsals, not to mention preparations for sets, costumes, and publicity. It has been argued that the use of literature in Soviet ballet was simply a safe, conservative route and that after Kirov's assassination in 1934 and the start of Stalin's purges, the "authors of the past provided a safer source of inspiration for writers, composers, and choreographers."[121] *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, however, was an organic development into the demands of socialist realism as compared to ballets such as *The Bright Stream* that originated after the mandate for socialist realism in 1934 and attempted to appease every requirement. After the arguments at the end of the 1920s regarding form versus content, ballets based on well-known literature provided a means for Soviet ballet to depict the revolutionary present within a historical context that audiences were familiar with. In discussing socialist realism and appropriation of history, Boris Groys argues that,

> …socialist realism, which regards historical time as ended and therefore occupies no particular place in it, looks upon history as the arena of struggle between active, demiurgic, creative, progressive art aspiring to build a new world in the interests of the oppressed classes and passive, contemplative art that does not believe in or desire change but accepts things as they are or dreams in the past. Socialist realism canonizes the former and dispatches the latter to a second, mystical death in the hell of historical oblivion. According to Stalinist aesthetics, everything is new in the new posthistorical reality – even the classics are new, and these it has indeed reworked beyond recognition. There is thus no reason to strive for formal innovation, since novelty is automatically

[121] Deirdre McMahon, "'Corridor to the Muses': Myth and Realism in Leningrad's Ballet," *Ballet Review* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 59.

guaranteed by the total novelty of superhistorical content and significance.[122]

Indeed, the historical past is used as fertile grounds for reimagining a more progressive society, particularly within *Romeo and Juliet*, as will be discussed later, and there a few instances of reimagined classics, such as *Swan Lake,* that dismantle and force together an ideologically modified version. However, in regards to Soviet ballet, Groys' argument falters. *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, for example, includes a few alterations to Pushkin's text, but is largely left intact. The innovations lie within the approach to ballet, with the historical grounding of 18th century Crimea providing a vehicle for the dramatical and more emotion-laden choreography. In this light, socialist realism, as Petre Petrov notes, "was not a program for something to be attained later and gradually; rather, it was the baptism of something that was already there and that had been for some time."[123] This "baptism," coinciding with the production of *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, first explored the use of Russian literature in ballet for audiences within the Soviet Union and led to the development of ballets on foreign works for foreign audiences. The past was reimagined, but remarkably, and counter to Groys, it was completely recognizable to viewers leading to unparalleled success on the global stage. Since the goal of socialist realism in ballet was to maximize the familiarity of the content of the ballet with audiences in order to transmit a state-approved ideology, well-known literary works removed the first hurdle of comprehension. Ballets deviated slightly from the source text in order to emphasize certain aspects, and in this way the historical settings were realigned with the state's authorized version of the nation's past.

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[122] Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*, trans. Charles Rougle (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 49.
[123] Petre M. Petrov, *Automatic for the Masses: The Death of the Author and the Birth of Socialist Realism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 174.

## CREATING *ROMEO AND JULIET*

The conception of *Romeo and Juliet* dates to 1934, when Sergei Radlov (1892-1958) approached Prokofiev about the possibility of creating a ballet for the Bolshoi with a "Komsomol-like" morality tale of the young and progressive fighting feudal traditions. Radlov was a well-known avant-garde theater director in Leningrad in the 1920s and 1930s, who began concentrating on staging Shakespeare's tragedies. In 1932, Radlov directed his first ballet, *The Flames of Paris*, working with the choreographer Vasily Vainonen and the composer Boris Asafiev, followed by *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* in 1934, again collaborating with Asafiev, as well as the choreographer Rostislav Zakharov. On April 28, 1934, Radlov's Studio Theater in Leningrad premiered *Romeo and Juliet*, which would serve as the inspiration for the ballet production. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Radlov sought to highlight the parallels between Shakespeare's text and contemporary Soviet society, of which he noted:

> *Romeo and Juliet* is not a play about love, not a poem about love, and not a portrayal of two overly lofty and delicate souls without a place on our crude and vile planet. *Romeo and Juliet* is a play about the struggle for love, about the struggle for the right to love by young, strong, and progressive people fighting with feudal traditions and feudal opinions about marriage and family. The entire play is alive and imbued with the unifying breath of struggle and passion, making it, perhaps the most Komsomol of all of Shakespeare's plays.[124]

Radlov had staged productions of Shakespeare in the 1920s, which experimented with simultaneous staging in an attempt to capture a sense of continuous flow and modernize Shakespeare in the spirit of class struggle of the 1920s. By the early 1930s, Radlov shifted from

[124] Sergei Radlov, "Iunost' Teatra," *Teatr i Dramaturgiia* 27 (June 1936): 23.

these experimental styles and proclaimed himself a faithful realist.[125] Such a transition aligned with official Shakespearization, which became state policy for Soviet culture beginning in 1932 with Gorky's article on dramaturgy where he declared Shakespeare the model for socialist realism.[126]

As already noted though, Shakespeare was already prominent within Soviet culture and on the dramatic stage before 1932, however the specific term of Shakespearization marks a turning point in the value of the interpretation of Shakespeare. The Soviet Shakespeare scholar Mikhail Morozov criticizes the "formalistic" productions of the 1920s,

> Just as fruitless were those formalistic Shakespearean performances that were remnants of pre-revolutionary aestheticism. Typical in this regard was the production of "Romeo and Juliet" on the stage of the Chamber Theater in 1921…The performance did not contain the most important thing: the opposition of two heroes - bearers of a great and sincere feeling to the world around them of limited, self-satisfied, people at enmity with each other, hating each other. This very world was shown in the performance in places as an ornamental background, in other places as a grotesque buffoonery. Romeo and Juliet died not from a collision with the outside world, but from blind chance. The mournful finale spoke of the all-conquering power of fate. The great tragedy of Shakespeare has lost its true meaning, has lost its active theme, calling for struggle. The images of the performance were dissolved in beautiful combinations of lines and colors. Spring in Italy, fragrant with flowers, was what the talented music of Anatoly Aleksandrov, which

[125] Ostrovsky, "Shakespeare as a Founding Father of Socialist Realism: The Soviet Affair with Shakespeare.", 68.
[126] Ostrovsky, 57.

accompanied the performance, spoke about this and only this.[127]

Crucial to Shakespearization in *Romeo and Juliet* is the focus on the power of the central characters and the need to show that they have control of their own fates. Yet, even beyond the plot, there was also a new approach to the process of creating a production. No longer were translations of the play the ultimate source for the production, instead there was a need to create interlinear texts, striving for maximum semantic accuracy, for deep disclosure of subtexts, as directors and actors study the text of the original in all its semantic details and nuances.[128] In 1934, to ensure that any Shakespeare production would align with socialist realism, the All-Russian Theater Society created a special Shakespeare cabinet in 1934 to consult with directors and actors. Between 1934 and 1939, when Shakespearization was in full swing, annual conferences on Shakespeare were held and his birthday was celebrated on the scale of a national holiday.[129]

The Studio Theater premiere of *Romeo and Juliet* in Leningrad was a resounding success and the play immediately went on tour in Moscow. The critics hailed the positivist interpretation of Shakespeare. Adrian Piotrovsky, who would later co-write the ballet libretto of *Romeo and Juliet* with Radlov, wrote a review of the Studio Theater production in May 1934. Piotrovsky emphasized the power and vitality of the youth, writing "this is about two entirely different lands with the thick blood and strong will of young people endeavoring to struggle against the dying old-fashioned feudal ethics for the right to happiness and love."[130] In his review, Piotrovsky also

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[127] Морозов, "Шекспир На Советской Сцене."
[128] Морозов.
[129] Ostrovsky, "Shakespeare as a Founding Father of Socialist Realism: The Soviet Affair with Shakespeare," 58.
[130] Adrian Piotrovsky, "Optimisticheskii Shekspir: 'Romeo i Dzhul'Etta,'" *Sovetskoe Isskustvo*, May 23, 1934, 2.

coined the term "optimistic tragedy," which was a response to the debates at the time as to whether Shakespeare was an optimist or a pessimist. Radlov found the question misleading, aligning with the calls for Shakespearization, that Shakespeare was in fact a realist and thus used both optimism and pessimism in all his works.[131] Critics also praised the new translation of *Romeo and Juliet* by Anna Radlova, Radlov's wife, although held the ideology as the priority when commenting that "the merit of *Romeo and Juliet* lies not only in the new excellent translation, but also in its absolutely correct interpretation."[132]

By December 1934, Prokofiev had also seen the Studio Theater production of *Romeo and Juliet* and had agreed with Radlov to work together on a ballet. The first outline of the ballet was drafted in January 1935, which includes Prokofiev's summary of the play into the bare essentials: traits for each character, the expression of their emotions, and an outline of the plot.[133] For the score, Prokofiev altered Shakespeare's structure from five acts with twenty-four scenes to a structure closer to Petipa's model of four acts with nine scenes. However, as opposed to the Petipa model, Prokofiev chose to forego the divertissements with their national and character dances that typically bookended acts, and he also gave equal narrative weight to Romeo and Juliet. Such divertissements, in the Petipa model, provide variations, or short dances for small groups of dancers. These are opportunities for more virtuosic movements, for scenes of pure dance, but exist outside of the ballet's narrative.

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[131] Ostrovsky, "Shakespeare as a Founding Father of Socialist Realism: The Soviet Affair with Shakespeare," 52.
[132] "Otkliki," *Sovetskoe Isskustvo* 24 (1934): 1.
[133] Deborah Annette Wilson, "Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet: History of a Compromise (Unpublished Dissertation)" (The Ohio State University, 2003), 73. See Wilson's dissertation for a thorough analysis of Prokofiev's score, including archival research that documents Prokofiev's process in composing and altering the score.

In April 1935, the Bolshoi director V. Mutnikh asked Piotrovsky to begin working with Radlov on the libretto. Rostislav Zakharov, who choreographed *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, was invited to choreography. Since Stalin preferred happy endings, and also leaning into the optimism of the pro-youth enthusiasm, Radlov and Piotrovsky originally conceived a happy ending.[134] Just as Romeo stabs himself, Friar Laurence stops him and Juliet awakens. Friar Laurence then hides the two behind a rosebush, summons the families to gather and presents the couple unharmed. The ballet then ended with a lively celebratory ending, complete with a divertissement performed by Syrian girls and Moors to "diminish the tragic tension."[135] The ballet was set to premiere in 1936 at the Bolshoi, but the production was abruptly cancelled. There is no surviving documentation as to why the production was cancelled, however Prokofiev in his 1941 autobiography contributes the cancellation to the music being deemed undanceable and to Radlov's decision to give the tragedy a happy ending.[136] However, 1936 also marked the beginning of the anti-Formalist campaign, which decried modernist works seen as neither accessible to the common man nor of the Russian tradition, most notably seen with the denunciation of Dmitri Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*.[137] Prokofiev tried to find a new theater to stage *Romeo and Juliet* and was only able to secure a production in 1938 at the Brno State Theater in Czechoslovakia. The ballet closed after only eight performances due to the Nazi invasion in early 1939, but was entirely reworked from Radlov's

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[134] Changing an ending to a classic been done with much success the year prior. The 1933 production of *Swan Lake*, choreographed by Vaganova, had an alternate ending where instead of Odette and Siegfried succumbing to their tragic ending where they are united in victory of love over evil in the afterlife, they somehow survive and conquer evil through love in their own lives.
[135] Natalia Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc, 1966), 249.
[136] Wilson, "Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet: History of a Compromise (Unpublished Dissertation)," 137.
[137] Katerina Clark, *Moscow, the Fourth Rome* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011), 211.

version. Ivo Vana Psota, the artistic director of the Brno Ballet choreographed and directed the ballet, as well as performed the role of Romeo, while Prokofiev's score was presented in an abridged form. While the Brno Ballet's production is officially the premiere of Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*, the ballet did not include any of the distinctive elements of drama-ballet developed in Moscow.

Prokofiev in the spring of 1938 finally received notice of a production of *Romeo and Juliet* at the Kirov in Leningrad to premiere on January 11, 1940. Whereas the collaboration on the original version had mainly been between Radlov, Piotrovsky and Prokofiev, in Leningrad the ballet was handed over to the choreographer Leonid Lavrovsky, who had an entirely different aesthetic approach compared to Prokofiev.[138] Lavrovsky requested additional variations, one for Romeo and one for Juliet, which Prokofiev saw as unnecessary and disruptive to the narrative flow he had sought to create within the score. Many of Lavrovsky's changes ultimately recast the structure closer to the Petipa model, in which there is a pas de deux between the two leads, followed by a variation by the male full of large jumps, and then a variation by the female ending with a series of turns.[139] Lavrovsky did not exactly follow this sequence, but by adding solo variations for Romeo and Juliet he created a structure that both continued the narrative and exhibited variations that showcased dance.

Lavrovsky's choreography was highly melodramatic, and painted a cartoonish portrayal of the young, progressive lovers against the clownishly rigid forces of feudal traditions. However cartoonish the contrast between the two sides was, the choreography combined natural everyday

[138] Piotrovsky was arrested and executed in 1937 during Stalin's purges for his libretto of *The Bright Stream* (*Светлый ручей*, 1935), which was attacked by *Pravda* for its "formulism," another possibility as to why the production of *Romeo and Juliet* was cancelled.
[139] Wilson, 177.

gestures with classical ballet. Rather than depend on pantomime to express a character's emotions, ballet steps often dissolved into actions. In previous ballets, emotional gestures that move the plot forward were typically added between steps, creating a disjointed sequence of dance and then narrative. Here the choreography excelled in its musicality, as Roslavleva notes,

> perhaps there is more mime than dance in the texture of the ballet, though there are now plenty of danced items, but is it possible to trace the borderline between mime and dance in this ballet, to say where dance ends and mime begins in the betrothal scene, to give one example? The pantomime in Lavrovksy's ballet is completely integrated with the music and mirrors its rhythms and content. Everything is subordinate to the music.[140]

The relationship between the choreography and the music was essential to the success of the ballet. Yet, ironically it was the music that was initially deemed so undanceable. Galina Ulanova, who premiered the role of Juliet, wrote,

> the music seemed to us incomprehensible and almost impossible to dance to. But the more we listened to it, the more we worked, experimented and searched, the more clearly emerged the images that music created. And gradually as we came to understand the music, we no longer found it difficult to dance to; it became clear both choreographically and psychologically.[141]

Overall, the ballet was praised for its interpretation of Shakespeare and was seen as an immense success for Soviet ballet.

Stalin, who was always alert to new ballet productions and the performances of his favorite dancers, fully supported the 1940 Kirov Theater production of *Romeo and Juliet* starring

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[140] Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 252.
[141] Sergei Prokofiev, *Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences* (Moscow: Foreign languages Publishing House, 1956), 244.

Galina Ulanova and Konstantin Sergeeyev in the title roles, which premiered January 11, 1940 in Leningrad. The production was transferred to the Bolshoi Theater in May 1940.[142] In 1944, despite being in the midst of the Great Patriotic War, Stalin sent personal orders for Ulanova to be transferred to the Bolshoi Theater where she was immediately bestowed the title of *prima ballerina assoluta*, the highest rank possible in ballet.[143] In 1946, the Bolshoi added the Kirov's production of *Romeo and Juliet* to their repertory where Ulanova once again performed the principal role of Juliet.

## SHAKESPEARE FROM TEXT TO STAGE

Pre- and post-revolutionary Russia wavered on the role of foreign literature. During the nineteenth century, there was the question of how to modernize Russia without corrupting fundamental values and beliefs. There was strong censorship on translated works because of the fear of foreign influence, a fear that returned during Stalinist times. The reinterpretation of a text was controlled though through the translation, and despite censorship Russians were asserting their right to be included in this world of high literary culture, and, thus, to be given free rein to reinterpret to their own societal needs. Ivan Kashkin, a leading Soviet translator during the

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[142] In 1935, Alexie Stakhanov greatly increased his productive input and immediately became the leader of an "army" of Stakhanovites who performed similar feats around the country. This focus on increased production also existed in the ballet world between the Bolshoi and the Kirov. These "socialist competitions" would have one company attempt to stage more ballets than the other while maintaining the lowest budget. Furthermore, both companies signed a contract in 1942 for the 25th anniversary of the Revolution to create two new Soviet productions, to give one thousand concerts, and to form five brigades for service at the military front and industrial centers, while lowering production expenditures by ten percent. (Swift, 102, 125.)
[143] The title of *prima ballerina assoluta* was created in the latter half of the nineteenth century and first bestowed upon the Italian ballerina Pierina Legnani by Marius Petipa at the Mariinsky Theater. Ulanova was the first Soviet ballerina to receive the title, which was bestowed by the Soviet government rather than a ballet company.

Stalinist era, declared that Soviet translators should emphasize only things that could be interpreted through a Marxist-Leninist frame. He also stressed that translation could be a device to emphasize "elements in foreign literary works that might suggest class struggle, possible admiration for Communism, or any incidents and realia lending support to Communist Party teachings or current Soviet practices. Conversely, whatever did not fit this description was to be minimized, or in extreme cases, blotted out completely."[144]

Literary translation, as Lauren Leighton has pointed out, can be divided into two categories during this period: academic translation and propagandistic translation, both of which were supported by Gorky's World Literature project.[145] There was a translation boom after the October Revolution that continued to expand after World War II, when the translations of literary works between the various languages within the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were seen "in a patriotic light as contributing to the mutual understanding and friendship between Soviet peoples."[146] Since there were travel restrictions on visiting non-socialist countries, foreign literature acquired a particularly special significance, as it granted Soviet citizens a window to another world. While these foreign works were censored, it was not as drastic as the censorship for Soviet works which were required to be ideologically correct. Writers who were not allowed to publish their own works, such as Anna Akhmatova and Boris Pasternak, often resorted to translating foreign works. In translating Shakespeare, translators grappled with a number of the same issues that face all translators: to translate it faithfully to the original or translate it for the intended reader. Pasternak, for example, translated a number of Shakespeare's works including

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[144] Friedberg, 33.
[145] Lauren G. Leighton, *Two Worlds, One Art: Literary Translation in Russia and America* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991), 6.
[146] Brian James Baer, "Literary Translation and the Construction of a Soviet Intelligentsia," *The Massachusetts Review* 47, no. 3 (2006): 541.

*Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, Anthony and Cleopatra, Othello, and King Lear*. Compared to previous translations, particularly those of Anna Radlova, Pasternak sought to bring Shakespeare's language closer to modern Russian, rendering them more colloquial.[147] Radlova's translation, which was completed in 1934, six years earlier than Pasternak's, falls into Leighton's latter category of propagandistic translations as it sought a more literal translation that fit the required ideology.

As a ballet, *Romeo and Juliet* was one of socialist realism's greatest accomplishments because it took a world literary classic, one by Shakespeare nonetheless, and reinterpreted it in terms of class struggle. In adapting Shakespeare's text to ballet, critics hailed it not only for its innovations but also for its ideological growth. The ballet appealed to both the Soviet authorities and the Soviet citizens because rather than just ballet as a form of entertainment and escapism, the audience saw ballet as what the future could hold.[148] All the efforts that had gone into creating a Russian style of ballet, in preserving this pre-Revolutionary art form, was now seen in all its glory, and Ulanova embodied the potential of a citizen's disciple and self-sacrifice. On her role as Juliet, Ulanova said,

> In Juliet, I saw the will of extraordinary strength, the ability and willingness to fight and die for my happiness. Hence the new, sharpened drama of the scene with the father - the refusal to become Paris's wife - and the determination, despair and courage that I was eager to express in the dance. The tragedy, written four hundred years ago, was to sound like a modern theme in ballet, and should have been perceived as a new ballet. In this

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[147] George Gibian, "Shakespeare in Soviet Russia," *The Russian Review* 11, no. 1 (1952), 32.
[148] McDaniel, *American–Soviet Cultural Diplomacy,* 65.

new Juliet, I wanted, I felt an urgent need to show a person close to us in spirit, to some extent our contemporary.[149]

Ulanova recognized the importance of how Juliet was portrayed as well as the underlying message she was to emphasize in modernizing Shakespeare's text.

As mentioned earlier, Radlov and Piotrovksy wrote the libretto based on the translation of *Romeo and Juliet* by Anna Radlova. Prokofiev who sketched his own ideas of the ballet alone before working with Radlov and Piotrovsky used the original version in English, as evidenced by his notes that used the literal transliteration from English into Russian of characters names, such as "Ledi Kapulet" instead of "Gospozha Kapulet" from Radlova's translation.[150] In either case, the ballet required translation from text to movement, a process Rodney Stenning Edgecombe terms "ekphrasis in reverse, as they turn words into unspooling friezes of imagery."[151] Such a desire to turn words to movement, literature to ballet, dates back to Jean-Georges Noverre (1727 – 1810), a French dancer and ballet master considered the creator of ballet d'action, which called for an unfolding of drama and an expression of relationships between the characters in a ballet. His ideas for ballet d'action, widely considered the precursor to the development of 19th century narrative ballets, situated the choreographer as the central creative force behind a ballet. Noverre

[149] "В Джульетте я увидела волю необыкновенной силы, способность и готовность бороться и умереть за своё счастье. Отсюда новый, обострённый драматизм сцены с отцом - отказ стать женой Париса - и та решимость, отчаяние и мужество, которые я стремилась выразить в танце. Трагедия, написанная четыреста лет назад, должна была прозвучать современной темой в балете, должна была восприниматься как новый балет. В этой новой Джульетте я хотела, я чувствовала настоятельную потребность показать человека, близкого нам по духу, в какой-то мере нашу современницу." in Галина Уланова, "Школа Балерины (School of a Ballerina)," *Новый Мир*, no. 3 (1954): 219.
[150] Wilson, "Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet: History of a Compromise (Unpublished Dissertation)," 74.
[151] Rodney Stenning Edgecombe, "Trans-Formal Translation: Plays into Ballets, with Special Reference to Kenneth MacMillan's 'Romeo and Juliet,'" *The Yearbook of English Studies* 36, no. 1 (2006): 67.

became a central figure within Soviet drama-ballet, with his *Lettres sur la danse* (1783) published in a new Russian translation in preparation for the 200th anniversary of the founding of the Leningrad Choreographic Academy, formerly the Imperial St. Petersburg Theatrical Academy.[152] Ultimately, Noverre sought a complete reform of ballet that he felt had been reduced to a show of technical virtuosity, and to replace it with dramatic dancing.

Translating Shakespeare for the stage required an emphasis on externalized emotions and alterations to the structure of the narrative in order to make such emotions more prominent. The ballet adhered to Shakespeare's complex plot and style, but it used the music and choreography to further develop the characters. In the text, Romeo is introduced at the end of act one, scene one, sulking and answering Benvolio with "Ay me! Sad hours seem long" (*Romeo and Juliet* I.1.166) as he contemplates Rosaline's rejection of his love. In the ballet, Romeo is instead introduced at the beginning of act one, pensive and aloof rather than sad as townsfolk attempt to greet him. Rosaline is omitted from the ballet, which both allows the focus to remain on the burgeoning relationship between Romeo and Juliet and eliminates a more complicated backstory that would be difficult to convey through dance. As the street awakens more people begin to gather until a quarrel breaks out between Tybalt and Benvolio, which spreads amongst all the people gathered in the streets until the Prince arrives, displaying his authority by parading around the stage with a military band. Scene two introduces Juliet as the Capulets prepare for the ball. In the text and translation Juliet is submissive to her mother, agreeing to meet Paris, her parents' chosen suitor for her, "I'll look to like, if looking liking move / But no more deep will I endart mine eye / Than your consent gives strength to make it fly" (*Romeo* I.3.103-105), the same

[152] Joan Lawson, "A Short History of Soviet Ballet 1917-1943," *Dance Index* II, no. 6, 7 (July 1943): 78.

sentiment reflected in Radlova's translation: "Взгляну, и как понравится – глазам / Дам волю, но их опущу тотчас, / Как только получу приказ от вас."[153] In the ballet, however, Juliet's transformation from youth to adulthood is emphasized. When Juliet is first seen she is playing tricks on her Nurse and running about refusing to get dressed for the ball. Once the Nurse gets her dressed, she stops in front of the mirror and grows pensive as she studies her reflection.

At the ball, Juliet dances ceremoniously and indifferently with Paris, followed by the addition of Juliet's variation. When she begins dancing, she is visibly embarrassed but grows ever more animated until she seems to realize her surroundings and runs out embarrassed again. Romeo watches Juliet dance, and while his friends Mercutio and Benvolio clown around, Romeo is absorbed. Next, everyone at the ball dances a madrigal as Romeo and Juliet notice each other and begin to flirtatiously talk together. In the original text, they flirt and kiss each other twice before Juliet comments that it seems that Romeo has kissed before: "You kiss by th' book" (*Romeo* I.5.122). Radlova, in one of the few deviations of the translation from the original, makes Juliet more sexually daring, saying she likes to even the score between the two of them before kissing him: "Нет, точный счет мне люб." In Radlova's translation Juliet exerts more control in the relationship. While this era of Soviet culture often featured bold women, such as the American performer turned Soviet model citizen Marion Dixon in *Circus* (1936) or Anka the patriotic machine gunner in *Chapayev* (1934), it was rare for such boldness to be combined with any degree of sexuality. Yet, Juliet's desire to even the score is less about the romantic relationship with Romeo than it is about her refusal to be passive as she comes into her own as woman in society. Act one concludes with one of the most memorable scenes of the ballet,

[153] Анна Радлова, *Вильям Шекспир. Ромео и Джульетта* (Ленинград: Государственное издательство "Художественная литература," 1939).

Romeo's variation followed by a pas de deux between Romeo and Juliet, the two dances which Lavrovsky forced Prokofiev to add.

Act two opens on a street scene, where a type of folk holiday is taking place. Romeo wanders about deep in thought, until Nurse hastily arrives to deliver Juliet's ring to Romeo. In the text, Juliet sends the ring after Romeo kills Tybalt, but here it has more symbolic force of Juliet's role in this union. Romeo immediately becomes agitated and runs off to Friar Laurence's. Juliet is dressed chastely in white as Friar Laurence performs the rite of marriage. The act ends as a carnival pair go by on a procession in front of the falling curtain, bridging this scene to the next which returns to the festive plaza. Tybalt challenges Romeo to a fight, which he does not accept, and instead fights Mercutio, whom he kills. To take vengeance for Mercutio, Romeo and Tybalt savagely fight, ending with Tybalt's death.

Act three opens in Juliet's bedroom. In both texts, this scene is laden with sexual anticipation for Romeo's arrival. In the original,

> Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds,
> Towards Phoebus' lodging: such a wagoner
> As Phaethon would whip you to the west,
> And bring in cloudy night immediately.
> Spread thy close curtain, love-performing night,
> That runaway's eyes may wink and Romeo
> Leap to these arms, untalk'd of and unseen.
> Lovers can see to do their amorous rites
> By their own beauties; or, if love be blind,
> It best agrees with night. Come, civil night,

Thou sober-suited matron, all in black,

And learn me how to lose a winning match,

Play'd for a pair of stainless maidenhoods:

Hood my unmann'd blood, bating in my cheeks,

With thy black mantle; till strange love, grown bold,

Think true love acted simple modesty.

Come, night; come, Romeo; come, thou day in night;

For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night

Whiter than new snow on a raven's back. (*Rom.* III.2.1-20)

Radlova captures the same anticipation of the night,

Быстрей скачите, огненные кони,

К жилищу Феба. Ведь такой возница,

Как Фаэтон, погнал бы вас на запад,

И сразу бы вас в ночи мрак домчал.

Пособница любви, ты, ночь, раскинь

Над нами полог, чтоб Ромео мог

Обнять меня неслышно и незримо. -

Любовникам любовный их обряд

Осветит их краса. Слепа любовь.

Ей ночь милее. - Ночь, приди, матрона,

Ты, скромница под черным покрывалом,

И научи, как выиграть игру,

В которую две чистоты играют.

Кровь дикую, прилившую к щекам,

Покрой, пока из дикой станет смелой,

Поймет, что в истинной любви все - скромность.

Приди же, ночь! Ромео - день в ночи!

На крыльях ночи ты белее снега,

Что на спине у ворона лежит.

In the ballet, the sensuality had to be toned down. Due to socialist realism, female representation shifted from non-traditional roles to motherly figures. They were both mothers of domestic home life as well mothers of the nation and in such depictions sensuality or promiscuity had to be removed. The libretto itself at this part even noted, "in order to avoid a tricky position, the author strove to make the music pure and bright."[154] Romeo leaves and the Nurse warns Juliet that her parents are coming with Paris. Her parents announce that Paris is her fiancé, which Juliet responds to with tears and refusal. In the text, Paris only meets with Lord Capulet to discuss their betrothal. In the ballet, Juliet directly communicates to Paris her displeasure at their arranged marriage. The rest of act three focuses on Juliet and her transformation from playful girl to serious woman. In scene two she goes to Friar Laurence, where he gives her the sleeping potion. As he hands it to her, she becomes calm, "even delighted," and then leaves "with the appearance of a tragic figure."[155] In scene three, Juliet has her last dance, which shows a complete contrast from her first appearance of playing tricks on Nurse. Instead, she first dances with Paris stiffly

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[154] I am indebted to Wilson, whose dissertation on Prokofiev included a compiled text of the libretto for *Romeo and Juliet*, including the changes and additions to the ballet by Lavrovsky, based on documents from the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI), fond 1929, op. 1, no. 66, 1. 7-10: Wilson, "Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet: History of a Compromise (Unpublished Dissertation)," 181.
[155] Wilson, 181.

until her underlying despair breaks through. After sending everyone away, she dances around her room with the bottle of sleeping potion until she grows gradually weaker and falls upon her bed.

Act four opens with the funeral procession of Juliet's body. Romeo grieves and stabs himself. Within the tomb, Juliet wakes up and sees Romeo's lifeless body next to her. She stabs herself and dies embracing Romeo. In the text, Paris is also present in the tomb. Romeo stabs and kills him and the play ends with all three lifeless bodies on the ground. The ballet keeps Romeo and Juliet as the focus of the plot, their love and subsequent demise the central narrative.

The ballet manages to portray the Revolutionary class struggle while adhering to Shakespeare's text. Romeo and Juliet's love serves as a cultural ideal for what love should and could be; two young lovers who reject their parents' rigid traditions in order to pursue a higher ideal. That there is a tragic ending only proves that such important ideals are worth the self-sacrifice. In the text, before Romeo has met Juliet he declares that his love for Rosaline, who does not return his affection, is like a religion, and that turning from such love is tantamount to heresy:

> When the devout religion of mine eye
>
> Maintains such falsehood, then turn tears to fires;
>
> And these who, often drowned, could never die,
>
> Transparent heretics, be burnt for liars!
>
> One fairer than my love? The all-seeing sun
>
> Ne'er saw her match since first the world begun. (*Rom.* I.2.88-93)

In England during the latter half of the sixteenth century, hundreds of alleged heretics were burned at the stake for not adopting the state religion. Thus, it is significant that Romeo establishes love as religion and considers his love for Rosaline as true, for when he encounters

Juliet and falls in love with her at first sight, it is established that while their love may serve a larger purpose in the class struggle, there will be no happy conclusion to their relationship. He is consciously breaking his own formerly held beliefs, and, thus, he is merely exchanging one pain for an even worse one, all for a higher cause.[156] Even Juliet, when her nurse tells her that Romeo has killed Tybalt, her own kinsman, she is initially distraught but then realizes that her allegiance belongs with her love, Romeo. In order to commit to such an upheaval of the social order, such strongly held beliefs, such as religion and even familial ties, must be overturned, a theme that resonates strongly with the post-Revolutionary Soviet ideology.

In translating Shakespeare for the stage, the crowd also emerges as a pivotal force. In the fight scene in the first act, it is not just the Capulets and Montagues that fight, but every person in the plaza. On stage, this creates a rich scene of choreographed fighting, but ideologically it implicates the greater society. The feud between the two aristocratic families is not a closed affair and the masses are drawn in. Furthermore, in the final scene in the tomb, Shakespeare and Radlova end the play with Romeo and Juliet surrounded by the Prince, their parents and Friar Laurence. In the ballet, it is a small crowd of unnamed characters, who timidly approach their bodies. By incorporating the unnamed characters, the ballet demonstrates the importance of the proletarian, aligning the ballet with socialist realism's call to depict the masses in this revolutionary overhaul of the progressive youth over the traditional generation.

While the textual interpretation of Romeo is that of a young, romantic, Prokofiev's musical theme for Romeo portrays him as more of a warrior. With the music, Romeo can be seen as more of a socialist hero because his love for Juliet is the catalyst for weakening the feudal

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[156] William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Dympna Callaghan, 1ST edition (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003), 6.

world's rigid rules.[157] Juliet's refusal of Paris shows her determination for escaping the confines of this antiquated society. Much more so than Romeo, Juliet can be seen as the more heroic individual prepared for self-sacrifice in the face of familial pressure and societal norms. When Juliet is in her room, agonizing over how she can avoid her parents' plan to marry her to Paris, the music suddenly becomes triumphant and she turns calm and determined as she decides to visit Friar Lawrence to seek a drastic solution. Her decision to visit Friar Lawrence ultimately leads to the couple's tragic ending, but also to victory for a new social order. Furthermore, both the allure of *Romeo and Juliet* as a tragic-romantic story and as an interpretation for class struggle is the speed at which everything happens. With only a single passionate one-night stand, fidelity and marriage and a new social order ensues. For both the romantics and the socially conscious, the ballet shows that these changes are quickly attainable with the right sacrifice.

In regard to music, Prokofiev helped the plot reflect the intended Marxist-Leninist elements by creating distinct musical portraits of the main characters, as well as musical themes that clearly distinguished between good and evil. Such distinctive musical themes helped increase the accessibility of the ballet to the audience and ensure an ideologically correct response to the characters. Previous ballets, most notably *The Golden Age* (1930), encountered issues with audiences supporting the intended negative character. In the 1930-31 season, *The Golden Age* initially received a warm reception but when audiences began to favor the character of the Diva who danced a pas de deux with a character named the Fascist in a foxtrot and tango styled dance, the reviews became scathing and the production was pulled from the stage.

In the choreography for *Romeo and Juliet*, the young, good characters perform graceful dances, while the traditional, evil characters perform very rigid and stylized dances, often in the

[157] McDaniel, *American–Soviet Cultural Diplomacy*, 72.

style of Renaissance court dances. When the Capulets dance their formal ball scene, Juliet sits on the side and looks disinterested, showing youth's disregard for the elder generations traditions. When dancing with her friends, she embodies the lighthearted, graceful style, as compared to when she reluctantly dances stiffly and detachedly with Paris, her parent's intended suitor for her. This constant struggle between new world order of choice and ideals is starkly contrasted in the choreography against the parents and their unyielding conception of the world.

In spreading the ideology embedded with *Romeo and Juliet*, repetition is key. While adaptations of Shakespeare were commonplace in the USSR throughout the 1930s, *Romeo and Juliet* had 35 theatrical productions in 1938 and another 78 by 1941, second only to *Othello* with 100 productions in 1938 and another 143 productions staged in the USSR.[158] The ballet showed both the youth's determination to change society at all costs and hope for a better, more progressive future, and even more importantly, these two heroes were extremely prevalent across Soviet society. Petrov argues that for socialist realism there is a

> distinction between the ideology found *in* texts of socialist realism and the ideology *of* socialist realism as an institutionalized practice. The latter is about staging the functioning of ideology itself, in its positive aspect as culture; it is about demonstrating that culture – that is, socialist realism itself – is the necessary form of (artistic) appearance assumed by an objective and symbolically effective social process… [The texts] are ideological because they participate in a regime of symbolic behavior that authenticates the essence of ideology. These are representations that are

[158] Ostrovsky, "Shakespeare as a Founding Father of Socialist Realism: The Soviet Affair with Shakespeare," 61.

> produced and received – at least in official contexts – as tokens…of the fact that their authors are truly subjects, creatures of socialism, which means that representations are given to them by the immanent symbolic logic of Soviet life…Ideological Stalinism shared with intellectual modernism the conviction that individual subjectivity is shaped by forces – heredity, race, environment, unconscious drives, economic conditions – beyond subjectivity's jurisdiction. But only for Stalinism was it a matter of political exigency to stage over and over again rituals affirming that this was the case.[159]

Shakespeare was held on pedestal next to Pushkin and Gorky, but *Romeo and Juliet* moved beyond text, to become a repeatable message to reach the masses. Moreover, the figure of Juliet was not limited to the stage, instead she crossed into daily life in the figure of Ulanova.

ULANOVA AS JULIET ON AND OFF STAGE

Ulanova requires special attention in her relationship to *Romeo and Juliet*, not just for her artistic expression as Juliet on the stage from its premiere in 1940 until her retirement, but also for the image she projected in Soviet culture. Ulanova's first major role as a ballerina was as Maria in *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* (1934), a ballet based on Pushkin's eponymous poem and the first successful *dram-balet*. The role launched her career as a lead dancer as well as the perfect socialist heroine. Compared to other dancers, she always seemed to exist out of time, was chaste and modern, stylistically unadorned and emotionally direct. Her style conveyed a blend of romantic pathos and pedestrian simplicity, simple but spiritual. Her movements were plain and seamlessly flowed into classical steps.[160] As one of Vaganova's first students, she had a firm

[159] Petrov, *Automatic for the Masses,* 193.
[160] Homans, *Apollo's Angels,* 352.

classical foundation that allowed her individual style to show through. She also helped steer classical Russian ballet away from the experimental, acrobatic modernism of the 1920s and the Petipa-style bravura that dominated pre-Revolutionary ballet.[161] Her training reflected Vaganova's pedagogy of Western influences, Russian soul, and, uniquely, an embracing of the Stanislavsky technique to reveal the inner lives of characters.

Rather than innovating, her style simply elucidated existing aspects of classical ballet, and directly influenced the development of drama-ballet as she lent a soulful approach to the confines of socialist realism. As Juliet, Ulanova reached a new pinnacle of classical ballet. Vladimir Potapov wrote,

> Ulanova has discovered in Juliet a theme of deep universal appeal and a kindred spirit. In a somewhat understated, elegiac manner Ulanova reveals the tragedy of young love, at the same time showing the beauty of its daring and courage …In Ulanova's art we find a union of the traditions of the Italian painters and modern Russian art – a blending of the classical and the individual…Ulanova's lyricism is deeply national, truly Russian. It is a lyricism that displays miracles of fortitude and courage, the lyricism of a heart that suffers heroically. Her art is an art that reaches out for a definite goal. It is attuned to the times and being the art of a genuinely modern artist is directed towards the future.[162]

For the balletomanes and the public alike, Ulanova captured the national spirit in her dancing. Despite Ulanova's quite un-balletic appearance, she was noted for having a square, rigid torso, and inelegant line, her lyricism and femininity made her an ideal interpreter of the "new, pure-

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[161] Homans, 353.
[162] Vladimir Potapov, "Galina Ulanova," in *The Soviet Ballet*, ed. Juri Slonimsky, No Statement of Printing edition (Philosophical Library, 1947), 83–85.

minded heroines introduced during the 1930s."[163] In this regard, Ulanova showed that not even physical shortcomings were a hindrance to ballet, and especially ballet in service of the country.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, the audience sees Juliet go through the full cycle of life, from infancy and adolescence, as she is coddled by her nurse and grows aware of her budding sexuality, through nearly two weddings, and two funerals. As a heroine in love she does not simply submit to Romeo or go through the games of a male-dominated courtship. Instead their relationship involves banter, a sense of equality, and emphasizes Juliet's quick maturation after their secret wedding ceremony. While Prokofiev may have created a strong, masculine musical theme for Romeo, he is still a romantic full of empty poetic rhetoric and is less mature when it comes to taking initiative and finding a solution to their problem.[164] He may have a heroic manner, but Juliet is the one who acts when it comes to pushing their ideal love to the next level.

Ulanova performed in *Romeo and Juliet* from its premiere in Leningrad in 1940, through her whole career until her retirement at age 50 in 1960. People knew her not only as a dancer but as a model Soviet citizen. Off stage she dressed modestly in suits of muted colors, and handled herself in a very straight-forward manner. Her image appeared in magazines, postcards, and, later, film and television, across the Soviet Union. She wrote books and articles on the virtues of the Soviet system and its benefits to ballet and art in general. She was twice named the Hero of Socialist Labor by the Soviet Union, and received numerous state awards, including the highly exclusive artistic national title, People's Artist of the USSR, the Stalin Prize (in 1941, 1946, 1947 and 1950)[165], the Lenin Prize, among many others. Official Soviet literature described her as the

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[163] Nancy Reynolds and Malcolm McCormick, *No Fixed Points: Dance in the Twentieth Century*, 1st edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 258.
[164] Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, 13.
[165] Ulanova was awarded the Stalin Prize, First Class four times: 1941 for outstanding achievement in ballet; 1946 for her performance in the title role of *Cinderella*; 1947 for her

ideal worker, thus elevating ballet from an art to a form of physical labor in service of the state. Her discipline and self-sacrifice was highlighted as essential to her success as a dancer and citizen.[166] Stalin showed great interest in Ulanova, even having her transferred from the Kirov to the Bolshoi in 1944 during World War II. That Stalin was involved in such seemingly minor details of the ballet world during the war shows how important Ulanova's image was. Upon her arrival at the Bolshoi, she was immediately given the title role of *Cinderella* as the new *prima ballerina assoluta*. *Cinderella* was a thinly veiled parable of the virtuous but downtrodden Cinderella emerging victorious over the evil stepmother, a direct allusion to the war. The ballet was produced with quasi-military displays of strength and glamour, to show that like the Red Army, ballet would emerge triumphant.[167] Ulanova and Prokofiev, who composed the music, both earned the Stalin Prize, first class, for their contributions.

At the same time of Ulanova's growing popularity, pre-revolutionary cultural ideals of maternity returned. The image of "Mother Russia" was used across mediums to rouse individual and collective sacrifice. As opposed to the more neutral, or androgynous, female image of the 1920s, the 1930s and especially the years during World War II saw a resurgence of the image of the female as fertile and markedly feminine, for example with the character of Marion Dixon in *Circus* who becomes not only a mother of her child but a mother of Soviet society. With the increase in nationalism, the mother image was interwoven with images of land and nation, and represented the simultaneous expression of strength and fragility to inspire citizens to bravely

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performance in the title role of *Romeo and Juliet*; 1950 for her performance as Tao-Hoa in *The Red Poppy*.

[166] Homans, *Apollo's Angels*, 352.

[167] Homans, 362.

defend the homeland.[168] As a ballerina forever playing the role of the adolescent Juliet in love, while also showing a public image of fortitude and loyalty, Ulanova exhibited these dual qualities of strength and fragility. She herself noted,

> I start to work, and a new world opens before me. Often in the operatic and dramatic interpretations of Desdemona, Juliet and Ophelia, the images of the women are read as charming in their feeling and ... weak. Their names have even become synonymous with love, submission, tenderness. But in their character – there is the protesting power and inexhaustible, indestructible female conviction to their right to happiness. How many different colors! Shakespeare does not have weak heroes: in the soul of each it is as if a volcano is dreaming; their mind, passion, energy are truly titanic.[169]

The public saw that self-sacrifice for the homeland was possible no matter what profession you were involved in, even ballet. Due to this, Ulanova was always the first choice to portray Juliet until her retirement despite other talented ballerinas in the company. When the Bolshoi made a film version of *Romeo and Juliet* in 1954 and then brought the production to New York in 1959 for their first American tour, Ulanova, despite her age, was to be the emblem of Soviet power. As Arlene Croce, a prominent American dance critic, noted, "if you look at pictures of Ulanova in

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[168] Catherine Baker, *Gender in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe and the USSR*, 1st ed. 2017 edition (London New York: Palgrave, 2016), 86.

[169] "Я начинаю работать, и передо мной открывается новый мир. Нередко в оперных и драматических трактовках Дездемона, Джульетта, Офелия прочитываются как образы женщин, прелестных в своем чувстве и...слабых. Их имена стали даже синонимами любви, покорности, нежности. А ведь в их характере - и протестующая властность и неисчерпаемая, несокрушимая женская убежденность в своем праве на счастье. Сколько разных красок! У Шекспира нет слабых героев: в душе каждого будто дремлет вулкан; их ум, страсть, энергия поистине титаничны." In: Galina Ulanova, "Моя Джульетта (My Juliet)," *Ogoniok*, April 19, 1964, 28.

her prime, you see a commanding beauty, but by the fifties she'd become a vestal virgin, a pure and simple soul – the soul, in fact, of the people."[170]

*ROMEO AND JULIET* AS *GESAMTKUNSTWERK*

Richard Wagner's concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, originally articulated in 1849 in "Art and Revolution" and "The Artwork of the Future," laid the foundation for the epic operatic genre during his time and, later, for the developments in drama-ballet. The criteria were as follows: a multi-medial union of different arts in relation to a unified vision of the world and society; an implicit and explicit theory of the ideal union of the arts; a closed worldview, combining a social-utopian, historical-philosophical, metaphysical image of the whole with a radical critique of the existing society and culture; and, a projection of a utopia which employs the power of art to articulate its premises and as an aesthetic means of social transformation.[171] In Russia, the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* was prevalent during the Silver Age and reemerged again in the Stalinist era. The goals of the concept overlapped with Noverre's vision for *ballet d'action*, which, as discussed earlier, returned to fashion with drama-ballet. For Wagner, *Gesamtkunstwerk* in music was the embodiment of constant motion, the development of feelings, and the merging of different leitmotifs into a single stream, which he called the "endless melody" – *unendliche Melodie*.[172] In drama-ballet, the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* guided three key innovations of the genre: the use of theatrical acting methods, the intertwined development of the score with the ballet's narrative, and the utilization of film techniques.

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[170] Arlene Croce, *Going to The Dance*, First Edition edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 212.
[171] Evgeny Dobrenko, "Prigov and the 'Gesamtkunstwerk,'" *The Russian Review* 75, no. 2 (2016): 209.
[172] Dobrenko, 211.

The Stanislavsky Method entered the ballet world in the 1930s, changing dancer's relationships to their roles and the process of preparing a new production, a trend that began most prominently with *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* (1934). The previous chapter already discusses in detail the innovative new use of dramatic acting methods, namely the Stanislavsky Method, but it is important to note that this transformation from dancers to dancer-actors was pivotal in the success of *Romeo and Juliet*. For a Soviet dancer, education now relied on two important factors, the technical foundations or "virtuoso technique…that helps the dancer convey to the audience the entire gamut of thoughts and feelings of the character with whom he has to identify himself" and the preparation of a well-trained dancer "for living his future roles…achieved through internal development – lessons in actor's craft."[173] Rehearsals for *Romeo and Juliet* required not only studio time for learning the choreography, but also in-depth analysis of the text and characters. For dancers such as Ulanova, this training provided them an opportunity to prove "that the most complicated, deep, and psychologically subtle emotions may be conveyed through the medium of classical dance."[174]

Prokofiev utilized two particular devices in the ballet's score that coordinated the scenes, narrative development, and music in a unified manner. The first device is leitmotif, which is a technique Wagner developed to create narrative structure in his opera. A leitmotif involves the assigning of musical themes to characters and dramatic ideas, melodies which are then altered rhythmically and harmonically to reflect changing dynamics and emotional states within the narrative.[175] Prokofiev created distinct leitmotifs for each main character, with a division

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[173] Natalia Roslavleva, "Stanislavski and the Ballet," ed. Selma Jeanne Cohen, *Dance Perspectives* 23 (1965): 42.
[174] Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 235.
[175] Karen Bennett, "Star-Cross'd Lovers: Shakespeare and Prokofiev's 'pas de Deux' in 'Romeo and Juliet,'" *The Cambridge Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (2003): 314.

between characters that mature and those that remain the same. As Karen Bennett has shown, Romeo's theme develops throughout the score to reflect his maturing character, while other characters, such as Mercutio, appear with altered leitmotifs to suggest changes of mood, and minor characters, such as Friar Laurence and Nurse, accompany static leitmotifs. Only Juliet has three distinct leitmotifs to represent different aspects of her personality: a very quick melody on high pitched instruments to show her youthfulness; a slower melody that undulates in a gentle motion for her more measured, womanly side; and a more complex melody that layers different instruments for a rich musical tapestry,

> As if the young girl's previously simple childish world is now being stirred by some unnamed longings. Many of these voices begin deep down, as if emerging from some profound, unexplored region of her subconscious, and swell up in a legato surge, petering out in the upper regions. The effect is of waves of emotion, gradually appearing in a calm sea, and rolling up the beach to break gently on the shore. As yet they are little more than ripples; yet we can feel in them the potential to become massive, violent breakers if the climate were to change. It is the sheer range of pitch that creates this effect…An additional romantic effect is provided by tremolo violins at [measure] 56, which emulate the excited shivering of sublimated sexuality.[176]

Juliet is presented musically as a character that contains these distinctive qualities – youthfulness, femininity, and sensuality – all at once. She does not mature and change as Romeo does, but rather her strength is in her ability to exhibit these qualities at different moments. Romeo is introduced in the first act as an aloof, somewhat comic character, reflected in the

[176] Bennett, 317.

rhythmically bizarre time changes. It is not until he meets Juliet that the rhythm of his leitmotif develops in a more legato passage and becomes rhythmically consistent.

In addition to the Wagnerian leitmotifs, Prokofiev also uses the musical equivalent of the film concept of montage to create what Wilson terms "blocks of time." These "blocks of time" are the foundation of the ballet's score and consist of short "cells" of musical material pieced together to form individual music numbers. Together these blocks are the "manifestation of Prokofiev's concern with the coordination of music, stage action and narrative unfolding, incorporating dramatic as well as musical information."[177] As opposed to leitmotifs, "blocks of time" serve as the backbone of the overall musical structure and control not only the representation of narrative development but also the passage of time within the narrative. At that same time that Prokofiev was working on the score of *Romeo and Juliet*, he was also working with the filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein on *Alexander Nevsky* (1938). Eisenstein was well-known for his use of montage, the technique of juxtaposing images in order to express a new idea. Therefore, it is no coincidence that Prokofiev transformed this technique for film into his musical scores.

Film techniques are apparent in the music as well as in the narrative sequencing of the ballet. Typically, in a ballet the curtain comes down between acts in order for stage scenery to change. In *Romeo and Juliet*, rather than let the action become static during these act changes, Lavrovsky included linking episodes that occurred in front of the curtains, allowing the narrative to continue uninterrupted. For example, after act two, scene two when Friar Laurence performs the rite of marriage on Romeo and Juliet, a carnival pair begins to proceed by as the curtain falls,

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[177] Wilson, "Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet: History of a Compromise (Unpublished Dissertation)," 122.

seamlessly connecting the serious, intimate scene with the following which includes a large folk dance in the town square. The allusion to film was not accidental, but intentional. Lavrovsky sought to eliminate any form of divertissements, as were popular in classical 19th century narrative ballets, and use, as he specifically noted, "a form of film technique to achieve a continuous flow of action."[178] This focus on narrative flow is also apparent in the choreography and became emblematic of Soviet ballet. Ulanova, speaking on her role as Juliet, emphasized the necessity for an artist to attain the *cantilena* quality in dancing, when movements form a continuous flow from one to the other.[179] This new approach in the ballet reflected techniques prevalent in the dramatic theater, but ultimately also brought drama-ballet closer to a more idealized vehicle for *Gesamtkunstwerk*, film itself.

## FROM STAGE TO FILM

Transferring ballet from the stage to film requires a new approach to the use of space and the viewpoint of the audience. On the stage, ballet is intended to be viewed as a whole from the audience's position only. Therefore, all movements are choreographed with this one intended angle. With a camera, there is spatial freedom, but to overemphasize the camera detracts from the kinesthetic qualities of the dance. In person we get the sense of the three-dimensionality of the dance, whereas film cannot show the full frame. Each time the camera pans in on a dancer, we lose the scenery. While a live audience member may not be able to completely view every aspect of a ballet at once, there is still an element of control for the viewer. With film, the camera is the authoritative lens that controls what is seen and when. What happens beyond the selected frame

[178] Lavrovsky as quoted in Camille Cole Howard, *The Staging of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet as a Ballet* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), 54.
[179] Roslavleva, *Era of the Russian Ballet*, 235.

is selectively culled away, offering only the curated view of the performance. As Edwin Denby, a New York dance critic noted, "when a stage dance has been photographed from various distances and angles and the film assembled, the effect of the dance is about like the effect of playing a symphony for the radio but shifting the microphone arbitrarily from one instrument to another all the time."[180] There is also the possibility of repeating a scene to achieve perfection. With a live performance, part of the allure is that what you have just seen will only live on in your own memory. With film, dancers repeat scenes until this perfection is achieved, eliminating the spontaneity of the performance. The benefit of course is the continued legacy of a performance and/or a performer; to have the power to control one version of a performance to be played ad infinitum.

Film began to be used in Russia as early as 1900 to preserve some of the ephemerality of ballet. The Bolshoi ballet master and choreographer, Alexander Gorsky, used black-and-white photography as a teaching tool and preservation method for *Don Quixote* (1900), *Swan Lake* (1901), *La Bayadère* (1904), and *Raymonda* (1905). In the 1910s for the Russian ballerina Vera Karallim he choreographed and filmed works, the most famous and last of which is *The Dying Swan* (1917) which used close camera angles to preserve her delicate footwork.[181] In Hollywood, there were films that used ballet as its subject as early as *The Ballet Girl* in 1916, but ballet was typically a part of the plot rather than the method of narration. By the end of World War II, ballet had become increasingly popular in England and the United States, leading to films such as Robert Helpmann's *The Red Shoes* (1948), which became one of the most popular British films of all time and was also widely viewed in the United States. *The Red Shoes* stars Moira Shearer,

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[180] Edwin Denby, "The Dance in Film," in *Dance Writings and Poetry*, ed. Mr Robert Cornfield (New Haven u.a.: Yale University Press, 1998), 135.
[181] Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *The Encyclopedia of World Ballet* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 123.

a professional dancer who transitioned to acting, who stars in a ballet, the theme of which is duplicated in the plot of the film outside of the staged ballet. The film thus contains two stories, the ballet within the film, and the duplicated plot that runs through the whole film.

With the rise in popularity of ballet not only on stage, but now on film, the Soviet authorities began releasing ballet films. The popularity of *The Red Shoes* showed that ballet could be taken seriously on an international level, and also lent recognition to British ballet. However, *The Red Shoes* was still a film about ballet rather than a ballet film. The choreography was criticized as too trivial, as “there are not many scenes in which choreography is the most important element – very little ‘choreography’ is performed by the corps – and there are several places where there is dancing but not much real choreography…Much of the ballet is, in fact, memorable only in terms of film gimmicks – slow motion, process shots, any special screen effect.”[182] While *The Red Shoes* may have boosted ballet’s popularity internationally, the film still relied on more conventional narrative rather than ballet itself.

One of the first ballet films the Soviet authorities released, *Soloist of the Ballet* (*Солистка балета*, 1947) was similar to *The Red Shoes* in that it followed a conventional film narrative with a ballet embedded into the plot. A film version of *Swan Lake* starring Ulanova was released in 1953, but it was a condensed version of the ballet shot on stage. In 1954, *Stars of the Russian Ballet* was released which contained excerpts from *Swan Lake*, *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, and *Flames of Paris*; once again it was shot on stage and starred Ulanova as Odette in *Swan Lake* and Maria in *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*. *Romeo and Juliet* was also released in 1954, however what differentiates it from the previous ballet films is that it was filmed both onstage and in elaborate outdoor sets, designed to resemble a lavish medieval Italian

[182] Adrienne L. McLean, “‘The Red Shoes’ Revisited,” *Dance Chronicle* 11, no. 1 (1988): 53.

village, a first for a ballet film. The camerawork mimics more conventional film shots, with the camera following the characters rather than remaining a static viewpoint, as had been the norm for ballet films. Also, rather than creating a condensed version of the ballet, *Romeo and Juliet* is a full feature-length film, which emphasizes its importance. The director, Lev Arnshtam, had no experience with ballet, but he was awarded the Stalin Prize, First Degree for his previous film, *Zoya* (*Зоя*, 1944), about a Moscow schoolgirl named Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya who volunteered for a partisan unit at the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, crossed into the German-occupied town of Petrischevo, and was able to destroy horse stables and buildings before being captured and executed by the Germans in 1941. It can be no coincidence then that Arnshtam, who had great success increasing patriotic sentiment through film, was chosen to direct *Romeo and Juliet*.

FROM PERIPHERY TO CENTER

Not until the nineteenth century with the advent of Russian Romanticism did the role of literature between nations come to the forefront. After Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812 led to greater contact with Europe there was a widespread goal to create a truly national literature.[183] The Romantic concern with *narodnost'*, experimented through form, style, language, themes, folk aspects, and historical sources, was in constant tension with the struggle between imitation and inspiration. Pushkin's historical drama *Boris Godunov*, completed in 1825, was directly influenced by Shakespeare and yet in a novel manner juxtaposed the discourses of Counter-Reformation Poland and Medieval Muscovy. The West continued to exert an influence for the Romantics and particularly at the turn of the twentieth century when the Symbolists began freely

[183] Lauren G. Leighton, "Narodnost' as a Concept of Russian Romanticism," in *Russian Romanticism: Two Essays*, vol. 291, Slavistic Printings and Reprintings Series (De Gruyter, 1975), 47.

borrowing from western models. However, the focus for much of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century was on nurturing this explicitly Russian literature. The 1917 revolution was a turning point in the outward facing quest of World Literature (*мировая литература*). After the revolution, Gorky set up the World Literature Publishing House in Moscow in 1918. The concept was a crossover between Goethe's *Weltliteratur* and the Marxian commodity of universal literature, with Gorky's goal "to acquaint the Russian democratic reader with the literature of the West, and especially with the works that represent the people of Western Europe, their history, their life, their spirit."[184]

By the 1930s the World Literature Publishing House, following Stalin's push for a "Friendship of the Peoples" that encouraged the production and dissemination of the culture of the various Soviet republics, changed course with a focus on promoting literatures of the Soviet republic rather than world literature. Such a shift both emphasized the importance of fostering mass appeal amongst a domestic audience and paralleled the use of Russian literature as the foundation of early drama-ballet productions. As Katerina Clark has shown, in the 1930s the Soviets also sought to establish themselves as the center of world literature, with "the idea of presiding over a world-class literature, of establishing a new 'Greenwich meridian,'" as opposed to the literary worlds of Paris, Berlin or London which had effectively held the center for centuries.[185] While Clark ultimately questions the success of this Soviet project to create a world literature, what is evident is the desire to move Moscow from the periphery of world literature to the center. Considering the role of Shakespeare throughout Russian literary history, from the

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[184] As quoted in: Maria Khomitsky, "World Literature, Soviet Style: A Forgotten Episode in the History of the Idea," *Ab Imperio* 2013, no. 3 (2013): 129.
[185] Katerina Clark, "The Soviet Project of the 1930s to Found a 'World Literature' and British Literary Internationalism," *Modern Language Quarterly (Seattle)* 80, no. 4 (2019): 404.

influence in *Boris Godunov*, to Dostoevsky's possessive statements over the interpretation, to becoming the model of socialist realism, Shakespeare became the vehicle in which Soviet culture transcended the problem of Russian language outside of its borders and exhibited a masterly interpretation of the bard.

In the concept of world literature, a number of issues appear ranging from the dominance of the original language to the relationship between the originator of the literature and the receiver. Russian language was not as well-known beyond the country's borders as English, French or German were. Does language contain inherent beliefs intimately tied to the national spirit? Or as David Damrosch posits, "should the study of world literature seek to discover unities across the world's traditions, or are such cosmopolitan unities little more than projections of great-power values upon politically and economically subordinated cultures?"[186] In his formulation of the concept of *Weltliteratur* in 1827, Goethe stressed that,

> while we thus value what is foreign, we must not bind ourselves to some particular thing, and regard it is as value…but if we really want a pattern, we must always return to the ancient Greeks, in whose works the beauty of mankind is constantly represented. All the rest we must look at only historically; appropriating to ourselves what is good, so far as it goes.[187]

Goethe advocated for world literature to always improve, to go beyond the role of a historian and show the beauty of mankind, but always within the comprehension of one's own nation. He commends Shakespeare, noting that "Shakespeare goes further, and makes his Romans

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[186] David Damrosch and David Damrosch, *World Literature in Theory* (Hoboken, UNITED KINGDOM: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2014), 5.
[187] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Conversations with Eckermann on Weltliteratur (1827)," in *World Literature in Theory*, ed. David Damrosch (Hoboken, UNITED KINGDOM: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2014), 19-20.

Englishmen; and there too he is right; for otherwise his nation would not have understood him."[188] It should also be noted that Goethe was developing his theories on world literature at a time when many nations were developing their own national literatures, thus the implicit power dynamics between nations and their literature was present from the beginning.

The Soviet project of world literature intersected with the goals of drama-ballet as it sought to focus on an international audience. For the former, the Comintern organized a set of Moscow-based journals where contemporary literature from other countries was published, along with semi-affiliated national journals in other countries in order to achieve the sense of Moscow as the periphery.[189] For the latter, it involved using foreign classics as the basis for new ballets, thereby focusing less on creating a new literary center, than in exporting Soviet ideology within these already established adaptations. The literary theorist, Franco Moretti, has divided the analysis of world literature into two metaphors: the tree and the wave. The tree follows the trajectory from unity to diversity as opposed to the wave which engulfs diversity with its uniformity, with Hollywood films as a prime example of a wave where it sweeps through countries and dominates over local films.[190] Furthermore, Moretti identifies the movement of world literature to flow from the center – the west – to the periphery and never the reverse.[191] In the early drama-ballet productions based on Russian literature, such as *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai*, the ballet became popular to audiences throughout the Soviet Union because there was an established knowledge of Pushkin's poem, partially ensured through publishing Pushkin's

[188] von Goethe, 20.
[189] Clark, "The Soviet Project of the 1930s to Found a 'World Literature' and British Literary Internationalism.," 407.
[190] Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature (2000) and More Conjectures (2003)," in *World Literature in Theory*, ed. David Damrosch (Hoboken, UNITED KINGDOM: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2014), 165.
[191] Moretti, 173.

works and in events leading up to the Pushkin Centennial, all of which I discuss in more detail in the previous chapter. Yet, the ballet remained incomprehensible to foreign audiences. With *Romeo and Juliet*, a play that was already widely known and followed a universally accepted theme of love, Soviet ballet succeeded in becoming the center of the ballet world, by creating a ballet that swept the west like a wave. It was novel in that it used Shakespeare, but most importantly it used the critical components of dramatic acting techniques, a groundbreaking score, and film techniques to display the power of Soviet culture.

Once *Romeo and Juliet* premiered in 1940, it remained within the repertoire of the Kirov and Bolshoi for decades, led to the previously mentioned 1954 ballet-film, and was also chosen to be included in the Bolshoi's first international tours in London in 1956 and New York in 1959. The tour to London was the first chance for a western audience to see Russian ballet since before the revolution and ultimately the performances left a powerful impression on audiences, critics, and English dancers alike. At the Royal Opera House in London, 55,000 people attended the Bolshoi performances and 9.5 million viewers tuned into the BBC's broadcast of Ulanova dancing, leaving London in the midst of a "Bolshoi fever" for the next month.[192] The dance critic, Peter Williams, commented that "never have I seen movement so articulate in its statement; even the most literary of ideas (such as Juliet finding that Romeo has drunk poison) are conveyed explicitly in dramatic dance and gesture."[193] Mary Clarke was struck by the seamless qualities of the ballet, noting that "Lavrovsky and Prokofiev attach as much importance to the linking episodes played in front of the drop curtain as they do to the set pieces and the big

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[192] Christina Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin: Ballet and Power in Soviet Russia*, Pitt Series in Russian and East European Studies (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 154.
[193] Peter Williams, Clive Barnes, and David Hunt, "Romeo and Juliet," *Dance and Dancers* 7, no. 11 (November 1956): 9.

pas de deux."[194] Clarke further elaborated, specifying that "the whole point of a Soviet production is that you cannot detach a sequence. Viewed as a part of the whole beautiful, wonderful, complete realization of Shakespeare's play then, in my opinion, the Lavrovsky choreography is not only masterly but right," and as for the dancers themselves, she notes, "this is as the Russians intend. They do not make vehicles for dancers; they make ballets."[195] Lavrovsky also recorded his thoughts regarding the first performance in London,

> And even when the curtain went down there was absolute silence in the auditorium. 'So they didn't receive the performance well? This means it's a flop?' Several agonizing seconds passed. The agitation was such that the hands of the stage workers were shaking. I looked at them and saw completely white faces. Then, when these several seconds had passed and an explosion of applause resounded, everyone began to smile at each other. The whole auditorium that was packed to the full with 2,400 people begins to applaud and scream at the same time[196]

The dancers of the Sadler Wells company had a chance to watch the Bolshoi rehearse *Romeo and Juliet* the night before the first performance, and the ballerina Antoinette Sibley was in awe of Ulanova, remarking that "this little old lady in the stalls go up, short greyish hair and wrapped in layers of wool…then she took off her woolies and in front of our very eyes, no makeup, no costume, no help from theatrical aids whatsoever, she became fourteen years old. I've never seen any magic like that in my entire life." It was apparent that *Romeo and Juliet* introduced a new concept of ballet, the intertwining of drama and dance, and presented, of all ways, successfully in an adaptation from Shakespeare, a cultural treasure of England.

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[194] Mary Clarke, "The Four Ballets," *Dancing Times* 48, no. 554 (November 1956): 69.
[195] Clarke, 70.
[196] As quoted in: Ezrahi, *Swans of the Kremlin*, 154.

Three years later in 1959, the Bolshoi toured for the first time to the United States and performed at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. Again, the critics praised the new choreographic style of drama-ballet. The dance critic of the *New York Times*, John Martin, was particularly effusive about Lavrovsky, having already been aware of Ulanova and Prokofiev's own talents, the choreographer's innovativeness was a welcome surprise. Once again, the seamless quality of the ballet's narrative flow, the use of choreography for expressing emotional states rather than virtuosity, and the dramatical nature of the ballet were highly praised. Martin noted that, "Lavrovsky has superb dramatic instinct. He knows when and how to use complete stillness…He has no fear whatever of extravagance, but he never violates truth."[197] Just as in London, the Bolshoi performances at the Met were highly successful with all performances sold out. While a few Soviet dancers, never an entire company, had toured in the United States prior to 1959 – most notably in 1934, the dancer Vakhtang Chabukiani who impressed American audiences with his powerful athleticism and clean technique – the spectacle of Lavrovsky's carefully constructed production, fusing together music, drama, dance, was seen as so unlike any western ballet production.

The impact of *Romeo and Juliet* did not stop at these international tours, but instead, like a wave, inspired a slew of choreographers to create their own version. Frederick Ashton created a three-act version in 1955 for the Danish Royal Ballet, using Prokofiev's score but following the style of the neoclassical revival, and thus the ballet "has more in common with Petipa than Lavrovsky."[198] Kenneth MacMillan, a British choreographer at the Royal Ballet, created a full-length, three-act version in 1965, using Prokofiev's score. John Cranko choreographed a version

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[197] JOHN MARTIN, "THE DANCE: LAVROVSKY: A Salute to the Creator of the 'Romeo and Juliet' Ballet for the Bolshoi Company," *New York Times*, 1959, 10.
[198] Williams, Barnes, and Hunt, "Romeo and Juliet," 9."

using Prokofiev's score for the Stuttgart Ballet in 1962. MacMillan's version, which is now one of the most widely performed, was directly influenced by viewing Lavrovsky's and uses a great deal of psychological character development. Outside of classical ballet, Jerome Robbins proposed a musical version of *Romeo and Juliet* to be called *East Side Story*. Lavrovsky's version had reached the west and spawned a number of imitations, yet the power of his version remained. In 1992 the Bolshoi performed *Romeo and Juliet* on another tour to the US. Anna Kisselgoff wrote, "common wisdom had it that Lavrovsky's remarkable fusion of mime and dancing would look old-fashioned, that this Socialist Realist epic with decadent aristocrats pitted against 'the people' could no longer be taken seriously…here was dramatic realism made marvelously bold." Furthermore, she added that "Lavrovsky's stroke of genius consisted of his never losing sight of the love story while placing in it an interpretative social context. We might not agree with that context, but he gave the death of Romeo and Juliet a dimension that most Western versions omit. He reconciled the clans at the end and thus remained true to Shakespeare."[199]

What is remarkable is that critics in both London and New York praised *Romeo and Juliet* for its commitment to the truth, while the Soviet authorities consider the ballet a triumph for exposing and coercing international audiences to applaud its own Leninist-Marxist ideology. After her last performance in London, Ulanova recorded the following in her diary,

> Saturday, October 27, 1956 – This evening I danced Juliet for the last time in this London season. I feel quite incapable of describing the extraordinary wave of general sympathy, the enthusiasm of the audience, the kindness and attention of thousands of plain people,

[199] Anna Kisselgoff, "Kirov Ballet Revives Lavrovsky's `Romeo and Juliet'," *The Sun*, July 12, 1992, 8.

> the touching farewell they gave us. If I live to be a hundred, I shall always remember the happiness I felt from knowing that my work has brought joy to people, that it is something necessary to them, that it is understandable to all, even to people of different languages, different outlooks on life. They understand me and my mute art. And what a joy it is to serve that art, the strong true art of my country, which everybody in the world understands! What a happiness it is to find a common tongue with strangers and to know that this tongue is the work of a Soviet artist.[200]

Ulanova's statements should always be read remembering that level of attention she received from the Soviet authorities, but nonetheless her enthusiasm emphasizes the connection with the audience and sharing her artistry as a Soviet artist above all else. Through ballet, *Romeo and Juliet* as a Soviet production achieved something that could never have happened in theater. Ulanova's "mute art" could skirt the underlying words and ideological battles that led to the ballet's creation, and simply be understood around the world.

Ulanova's artistry, as well as the choreographic innovations of the drama-ballet genre, are the result of the Vaganova Method. Despite its reputation as a conservative pivot after the more experimental styles in the decade prior, the Vaganova Method is the essential foundation of Russia's first truly national style of ballet, that was capable of imparting such emotional resonance. Once western audiences had a chance to experience the full Soviet ballet experience with a full company and an entire full-length production, Soviet ballet reached new heights of cultural power and prestige. Ballet had achieved what literature could not, as it transcended the difficulties of translation and language. From the periphery, the Soviets used Shakespeare and

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[200] Galina Ulanova, "Notes from My London Diary," *Ballet Today* 10, no. 7 (September 1957): 24.

projected it back out, becoming a holder and interpreter of Shakespeare in a universal medium. With the imitations that followed, Soviet ballet became the producer of international dance culture.

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# Chapter III

## Creating a National Ballet, Georgian Style

### SOUTH TO TBILISI

On December 26, 1936, *Mzechabuki* premiered at the Tbilisi Opera and Ballet State Theatre marking the birth of Georgian national ballet. *Mzechabuki*, adhering to Soviet revolutionary ideology through the lens of Georgian folklore, was the first ballet exclusively made by Georgians for a Georgian audience. Vakhtang Chabukiani (1910-1992), a ballet star at the Kirov Ballet in Leningrad, danced the lead role and choreographed the ballet. Andria Balanchivadze (1905-1992), the brother of the founder of New York City Ballet, George Balanchine, composed the music weaving folk melodies with a classical structure. Giorgi Leonidze (1899-1966), a prominent member of the *Tsisperqantselebi*, or Blue Horns Poets, a symbolist group with strongly developed nationalistic tendences, wrote the libretto based on an eighteenth-century peasant revolt. The artist Soliko Virsaladze (1908-1989) designed the sets and costumes. While the nationality policy at the time was pushing for a celebration of national cultures, *Mzechabuki* marked a significant moment when creative control was granted entirely to artists of the nation represented.

This chapter focuses on the concurrent developments of drama-ballet, a Soviet genre of ballet that arose in the 1930s, in the Georgian SSR, and more broadly demonstrates how drama-ballet became a template for non-Russian ballet companies to create national ballets. The preceding chapters analyze the use of literature in drama-ballet productions based on Russian works, *Fountain of Bakhchisarai* in 1934, and then foreign canonical works, *Romeo and Juliet* in 1940, staged within the center of Russian culture at the Kirov in Leningrad and the Bolshoi in

Moscow. By examining the ballets of Chabukiani this chapter reorients the center to the periphery, demonstrating how Soviet Georgian ballet followed within the genre of drama-ballet to seamlessly interweave narrative and choreography catered for maximum comprehension by the audience. While the libretto Leonidze wrote for *Mzechabuki* is not adapted from a work of national literature, Leonidze was a beloved Georgian poet, respected by both the official and public spheres. He chose to base the libretto off a legendary peasant revolt that was a part of the national folklore.

The ballets at the heart of this chapter are *Mzechabuki* and the re-staged version that premiered in Leningrad with the new title of *Heart of the Mountains* (*Serdtse gor*, 1938), as well as *Sinatle* (1947), *Gorda* (1949), and *Othello* (1957), the first two which follow along the lines of Georgian folk infused drama-ballet productions and the latter an adaptation of Shakespeare that was staged in the Georgian SSR, the USSR, and abroad. As with drama-ballet productions from Leningrad and Moscow, Chabukiani's ballets emphasize the underlying text to maximize the narrative potential. However, as seen in *Mzechabuki* and his ballets that follow, Georgian ballet demonstrated a unique position of national expression due to the autonomy granted to the all-Georgian creative team, stemming from its historical relationship to imperial Russia, geography on the western edge of the Soviet Union, notoriously difficult language, and the change in the nationality policy from a friendship of the peoples to a celebration of national cultures. While these are aspects unique to creating a Georgian ballet, the way in which drama-ballet was transposed from Moscow to Tbilisi illustrates how the mandates of socialist realism that led to the creation of drama-ballet as a genre also lent it itself to be adapted for use elsewhere. What the case of Georgia demonstrates, though, is that ideology, particularly when it is a mandated

ideology, does not transpose itself in such clear cut ways as it does within Moscow and Leningrad.

Chabukiani is the central figure of this chapter for his outsized role in the creation of Georgian national ballet. A Tbilisi native, he trained under the tutelage of the Italian ballerina Maria Perini (1873-1939) before continuing his training at the Leningrad State Choreographic Institute in 1926, debuting with the Kirov Ballet in 1929, and then permanently returning to Tbilisi in 1941 as the artistic director of the Tbilisi Opera and Ballet State Theatre. Despite his contributions to ballet, there is a dearth of scholarship on both his life and his works. While this chapter centers on national identity within Soviet Georgian ballet, Chabukiani is unavoidable given not only his role as choreographer, artistic director, but also as an international ballet star who changed the very image of the male ballet dancer. Vera Krasovskaya, the Russian ballet historian, wrote the most complete biography on Chabukiani in 1956, initially completed for her doctoral dissertation.[201] The work provides an overview of his life and works while toeing the ideologically appropriate discourse on his place in ballet history. Yuri Slonimsky, the Soviet ballet historian and critic, included some discussion of Chabukiani's works into his writings.[202] However, keeping with a centered focus on Moscow and Petersburg, his short discussion on Chabukiani's first choreographic work omits *Mzechabuki* given that it premiered in Tbilisi and instead discusses only *Heart of the Mountains*, which premiered two years later in Leningrad. Such an omission is prevalent in much of the scholarship emanating from Russian historians on the ballet. In the Georgian scholarship, Eliso Jalukidze's unpublished thesis on the artist Soliko

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[201] Вера Красовская, *Вахтанг Чабукиани* (Москва: Государственное издательство "Искусство," 1956).
[202] Yuri Slonimsky, *The Soviet Ballet* (Philosophical Library, 1947).

Virsaladze serves as an in-depth resource on details surrounding Chabukiani's ballets.[203] In the English language, Chabukiani has been written about in reviews of his more famous ballets, such as *Laurencia* (1939), but his works have never been contextualized to their singular role within Soviet ballet, let alone Georgian ballet, history. For example, Joan Lawson, the English ballet historian, wrote an article about *Heart of the Mountains* and Chabukiani, yet neglects its original history as *Mzechabuki*, and thus places it as following the Caucasian theme of ballets such as *Prisoner of the Caucasus* (*Кавказский пленник*, 1938).[204]

Given the state of scholarship currently available on Chabukiani and Georgian ballet, this chapter operates with a few goals. The first is to examine the underlying literary culture of the Georgian SSR, tracing back to Ilia Chavchavadze's "Society for the Propagation of Literacy in Georgia" in the 1870s and continuing to the role of poets of in the Stalinist era that straddled the divide between national and Soviet patriotism. Giorgi Leonidze, as one of the most prominent poets of the 1920s and 1930s, played on this duality in addition to penning the libretto of *Mzechabuki*. The second is to understand the autonomous position of Georgian Soviet ballet in the context of the development of drama-ballet. This follows over two decades beginning in 1936 with the premiere of *Mzechabuki*. Third, and lastly, is to examine the elements of Chabukiani's ballets that garnered their positive reception as authentic representations of national culture. While folk dance rose in popularity in the latter half of the 1930s, as seen with prominence of the Igor Moiseyev Dance Company, Chabukiani maintained the distinctive nuances of Georgian folk dance, which differs between the various regions of Georgia, while

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[203] Eliso Julakidze, "ქართული ბალეტის მხატვრობის სამი ძირითადი ეტაპი (The Three Main Stages of Georgian Ballet Painting)" (Masters Thesis, Tbilisi, Georgia, Tbilisi State Academy of Arts, 2019).
[204] See Lawson, "A Short History of Soviet Ballet 1917-1943"; Joan Lawson, "'The Heart of the Hills,' A New Departure in Soviet Ballet" The Dancing Times, no. 346 (July 1939): 389–92.

adding a level of technical sophistication from classically trained ballet dancers. Combined with Balanchivadze's scores, which similarly fused folk and classical structures, Chabukiani's Georgian ballets adapted the specifications of drama-ballet – narrative, seamless, accessible – to a specifically national audience at a time when patriotic sentiments required a balanced approach. While Chabukiani's ballets fall under the category of "Soviet" given Georgia's place as a republic within the Soviet Union at the time, by contextualizing the surrounding culture, history, and influences it is the overarching aim of this chapter to emphasize the independence of artists even at the height of the purges.[205] The lens of decolonization hovers over this and seeks to remove the previously dominant voice of Soviet/Russian scholarship on Georgian ballet, which again was typically adhering to formulaic descriptions of what was expected of Soviet ballet versus what artists were attempting through a type of creative double discourse.

GEORGIAN ARTISTIC AUTONOMY

How did Chabukiani and his fellow compatriots gain such creative control over the course of Georgian ballet? To fully understand the unique position of the Georgian SSR in the 1930s within the larger Soviet Union, the seeds of the relationship, both culturally and politically, between Georgia and Russia must be traced back to the nineteenth century. Having annexed eastern Georgia in 1801, the fate of Georgian culture under Russian imperial rule differed greatly from other colonized areas. In terms of religion, Georgia not only was a fellow Orthodox Christian nation, but the founding of the nation's church predated Russia's by several centuries to the fourth century. The long-established Georgian nobility had privileged access to

[205] It shsould be noted that while the main artists working on the ballet with Chabukiani survived the Great Purge of 1937-38, the conductor of the orchestra for the premiere of *Mzechabuki*, Evgeni Mikeladze (1903-37), was executed.

both their own national culture and to Russian imperial high culture due to this shared religion, as well as to the high rate of literacy that enabled such access. As Erik Scott points out, this stands in stark contrast to the Ukrainians, whose nobility was Russian, the Baltic region, whose nobility were German, or most of all to the Muslim-majority regions of the Caucasus and Central Asia, whose populations rarely contributed to the cultural life of the Russian court at all.[206] By the mid-nineteenth century, Georgian nobles were studying in the universities and conservatories of Moscow and Saint Petersburg, attributing to the Georgian cultural ascendancy.

One such noble was Prince Ilia Chavchavadze (1837-1907), prominent within Georgia as a writer, poet, journalist, and publisher, as well as the leader of the *Tergdaleulebi* – literally meaning "those who drank the waters of the River Terek," as in those who have been to Russia – a revolutionary youth intellectual movement of the 1870s and 1880s dedicated to the social and national liberation of the Georgian people. He founded the popular journal *Iveria* in 1877, sought to revive Georgian self-awareness through his fiction writing, which supplanted the Russian realist model of the era, and also ran the "Gentry's Land Bank" for shareholders that later became known as the "Georgian Parliament." Most significantly, however, was his "Society for the Propagation of Literacy in Georgian," which countered Russification by establishing modern Georgian as the language for public and private discourse.[207] In addition to promoting the Georgian language, the society also created human networks within education and the arts, inspiring and enabling a generation of youth to opt for study in Europe rather than solely in Russia. However, despite this push for preserving and promoting Georgian culture, the goal of

[206] R. Erik Scott, *Familiar Strangers: The Georgian Diaspora and the Evolution Familiar Strangers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 129-130.
[207] Donald Rayfield, *Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 303.

these revolutionary groups was never independence, but rather a more progressive Russia where local languages and customs, and universal human rights would be respected.[208] Chavchavadze did envision a future where the Georgian nation-state achieved liberation from the Russian Empire, but such a scenario seemed only feasible if Georgians first advanced a modern national identity and adopted contemporary European social and political ideas.[209]

The legacy of Chavchavadze's efforts is evident in the influences on the artists in the early twentieth century who maintained ties with both Western Europe and Russia. With the establishment in 1917 by the Russian poet Yuri Degen and other artists of the first literary café, the Fantastic Tavern (*Pant'ast'ik'uri samik'it'no*), artistic life in Tbilisi began to resemble that of Paris and Saint Petersburg where artists, poets, and actors encountered one another through public discussions, concerts, performances, and literary evenings.[210] The Blue Horn Poets, consisting of youths from Kutaisi who had studied in Saint Petersburg, France, and Germany, were at the forefront of this bohemian lifestyle after their formation in 1916. Giorgi Leonidze was the youngest member of this group, which also included the more prominent members Titsian Tabidze, Paolo Iashvili, and Grigol Robakidze.[211] The Blue Horns aspired to follow in

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[208] Scott, *Familiar Strangers: The Georgian Diaspora and the Evolution Familiar Strangers, 303*.
[209] Bela Tsipuria, "Ilia Chavchavadze: Georgia's Cultural Saint and a Saint of the Georgian Orthodox Church," in *Great Immortality: Studies on European Cultural Sainthood*, ed. Jón Karl Helgason and Marijan Dović (Carol Stream, UNITED STATES: BRILL, 2019), 246.
[210] Mzia Chikhradze, "A City of Poets: The Cultural Life of Tbilisi 1910-1930," *Modernism/Modernity* 21, no. 1 (2014): 301.
[211] Titsian Tabidze (1895-1937), a founding figure of Georgian poetic modernism, was also well-known through his friendship and correspondence with Boris Pasternak, who translated a number of his poems in the 1930s. While this chapter focuses on Soviet ballet in Georgian national form, Ram Harsha's article on this relationship between Pasternak and Tabidze offers an alternative perspective of artistic relations via the poetics of the Russian-Georgian contact zone. See: Harsha Ram, "Towards a Cross-Cultural Poetics of the Contact Zone: Romantic, Modernist, and Soviet Intertextualities in Boris Pasternak's Translations of T'itsian T'abidze," *Comparative Literature* 59, no. 1 (2007): 63–89.

the steps of Oscar Wilde, Paul Verlaine, and the Russian symbolists, experimenting and westernizing Georgian poetry from its former reliance on syllable count to using new meters and percussive rhythms.[212]

Georgia experienced a brief period of independence between 1918-1921 before becoming part of the Soviet Union in 1922. By this time, there were four distinct groups in Georgian literature: the Academic Group, who opposed the policies of the Soviet authorities; the Blue Horns, under the twin banner of "poetry for poetry's sake" and "Georgia above all;" the Futurists, influenced primarily by West European and, to a lesser degree, Russian futurism; and the Association of Georgian Proletarian Writers, which was the official organ for the Communist Party's policies.[213] While these were divergent groups, the modernist poets amongst them struggled for "reestablishing Georgian statehood and reconceptualizing Georgian literature, which should rejoin Western cultural flows and become a part of the context of European modernism."[214] In 1926, Filipp Makharadze, the head of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia gathered all Georgian writers and told them that culture and literature was now under Bolshevik control and that they needed to accept the revolution. Despite this pronouncement, for writers, scholars, and artists, the 1920s was a fruitful era for culture: Georgian historians, linguists, poets, painters, filmmakers, and composers exhibited immense creativity. Even under Lavrenty Beria's ruthless tactics as Chairman of the GPU, the political police, starting in 1926, there was an atmosphere of "laissez faire chaos" where scholars

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[212] Donald Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia: A History*, 2nd ed. (UK: Clarendon Press, 2000), 230.
[213] Ilia Kutschuchidse and Elizabeth von Boyko, "Georgian Poetry of the Soviet Period," *Books Abroad* 49, no. 3 (1975): 467.
[214] Bela Tsipuria, "The Spatial Representation of Tbilisi in Georgian Poetry. Georgian Modernism and Soviet Modernisation," *Les Cahiers de La Mémoire Contemporaine*, no. 15 (September 1, 2021): 253.

such as Akaki Shanidze and Arnole Chikobava continued their work on Caucasian languages and folklore, and writers prospered.[215]

The mid-1920s was also a watershed moment in the poetry of Giorgi Leonidze. While his previous works were noticeable attempts at imitating the style of Western poets, such as Oscar Wilde, his poetry adopted more historical and patriotic themes in response to the Bolshevik censorship. These were expressed through imagery of nature, particularly the flora and fauna of his native Kakhetia, an easternmost region of Georgia, and through themes revolving around the violent imagery of the medieval era.[216] In his poem *The 13th Century* (1926), Leonidze implicitly parallels the historical Mongol invasion of Tbilisi with the 1921 Russian annexation of Georgia.[217] Leonidze's approach to Bolshevik censorship reflects wider aspects of Georgian culture under Soviet cultural policy. In a reluctant pursual of the correct political line, he delved deeper into Georgian nationalism, making him a very popular poet. Combining his former influences under Western poetry with the tradition of Georgian folk poetry, Leonidze's lyric poetry demonstrated the spiritual qualities of both pre-revolutionary and present-day Georgia, "producing an artistic generalization of purely national ideals and those common to all mankind."[218]

In terms of Soviet cultural policy, the earlier dominating metaphor of the 1920s across the USSR of the "Brotherhood of the Peoples" (*bratstvo narodov*) was replaced in the 1930s with the ubiquitous "Friendship of the Peoples." While Russians, Russian culture and RSFSR

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[215] Rayfield, *Edge of Empires: A History of Georgia*, 350-2.
[216] Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia*, 256.
[217] Tsipuria, "The Spatial Representation of Tbilisi in Georgian Poetry. Georgian Modernism and Soviet Modernisation," 272.
[218] Aleksandr Giorgievich Baramidze and David Minaevich Gamezardashvili, *Georgian Literature* (Tbilisi: Tbilisi University Press, 1968), 86.

were still granted a leading role in sustaining the friendship, the non-Russian nationalities saw their status as Soviet nations strengthened, with increased recognition of a nation's history, culture, and separate identities.[219] Through this metaphor of friendship, writers and artists across the Soviet republics were expected to identify both as of their nation and of the greater USSR. Artists in Georgia developed under this colonizing force, what Bela Tsipuria calls, "the development of dual reality."[220] Along with the dominating Soviet myth of happiness that emerged in the late 1920s, and in the same manner that Leonidze reverted to the past events to write about the present, Georgian writers began to exalt their Georgian homeland through patriotic lyric poetry with no mention of this other homeland, the USSR. What was intended as a Soviet myth of happiness was thus transformed to serve solely the Georgian idea of happiness and national identity.[221]

The nationality policy that sought the "Friendship of the Peoples" was contradictory at its inception as it both aimed for a single Soviet people, glossing over Russian colonization and annexation, yet simultaneously strengthened the counter-histories of these colonized republics by promoting national literature and folk traditions. The reaction of Georgian writers and artists in straddling this divide of "dual reality" was a continuation of the nineteenth century relationship between imperial Russia and Georgia and the nationalist movement instigated by Chavchavadze, where Russia was tolerated to a degree in exchange for self-sovereignty regarding language and customs. This promotion of Georgian literacy and language was a significant factor in the

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[219] Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 432.
[220] Bela Tsipuria, "Totalitarian and National Cultural Models as a Binary Opposition," in *Totalitarianism and Literary Discourse: 20th Century Experience*, ed. Irma Ratiani (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UNITED KINGDOM: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2011), 237.
[221] Tsipuria, 239.

prominent position of Georgians amongst fellow nationalities within the USSR. For example, in Moscow, Georgians were far from the largest group of non-Russians, yet their overrepresentation in political, cultural, and economic roles conferred greater prominence than their national population would seemingly indicate.[222] The lasting imperial relations from the nineteenth century between Georgian nobles and the Russian court was one factor that set the nation apart from other republics, yet language was another key factor. Georgian language enforced a strong sense of inclusion amongst Georgians as it was virtually unintelligible to others.[223] Therefore, it could be used to intentionally exclude outsiders as Georgians navigated this divide between the authentic homeland of Georgia and the façade homeland of the USSR. The Georgian SSR was one of the rare exceptions where the native language remained the official language, with Russian used often amongst bureaucrats and the intelligentsia in public spheres, but never at home as a mother tongue.[224] More relatedly to the artistic autonomy maintained in Georgia was the already established venues of high culture, such as the Tbilisi Opera House that was founded in 1851 as the Tiflis Imperial Theater. In addition to its location as one of the western most republics, geographically speaking, social life in the nineteenth century was remarkably western in its similarities to high culture in European cities: reading literary journals, attending Georgian theater and Italian opera performances, and hiring European architects to design public buildings.[225]

[222] Scott, *Familiar Strangers: The Georgian Diaspora and the Evolution Familiar Strangers*, 9.
[223] Scott, 23.
[224] In 1978, following the newly adopted 1977 Soviet constitution, there was an attempt to change the official language from Georgian to Russian. However, thousands protested this move in Tbilisi, and now April 14 is commemorated as "Day of the Georgian Language."
[225] Tsipuria, "The Spatial Representation of Tbilisi in Georgian Poetry. Georgian Modernism and Soviet Modernisation," 259.

In 1934 at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in Moscow, an event that marked the ascent of high Stalinism, nineteenth century romantic nationalism was at the forefront of a push for national classics. Pushkin and Tolstoy were prominent as representatives of Russian culture, while each other nationality's own approved classics were to be "protected, perfected and, if need, be, invented by specially trained professionals in specially designed institutions."[226] This paralleled the shift from the "Brotherhood of the Peoples" to the "Friendship of the peoples," moving from an emphasis on works created about the revolution to pre-revolutionary classics that highlighted the "depth and historicity of national culture as opposed to the novelty of Soviet national cultures."[227] For Georgia, the founding fathers were Chavchavadze and Shota Rustaveli, a medieval poet known as one of the greatest contributors to Georgian literature for *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* (*Vepkhistkaosani*) a national epic poem from the twelfth century. Both were celebrated with their own jubilees in 1937, a high honor considering that year also marked the Pushkin Centennial, creating an image of the three poets as saints of Soviet secular religion, albeit with Pushkin as the de facto leader of the three. Chavchavadze, in celebration of the 100th anniversary of his birth, was presented for the first time in Soviet history as a significant representative of nineteenth century Georgian literature and a predecessor of socialist ideas.[228]

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226 Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994): 446.
227 Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*, 443.
228 Chavchavadze had been assassinated in 1907 and Georgians were well aware that the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party was behind the murder. Chavchavadze's vision of Georgia as a sovereign state was incompatible with the Bolshevik goal of a unified Russian Empire. The re-presentation of Chavchavadze's works was tailored to highlight his texts that centered on social inequality while omitting those focused on nationalism, religion, a Euro-centric position, and anti-Russian sentiments. Chavchavadze's vision of Georgia was thus presented as in line with what Georgia as a Soviet socialist republic had achieved, in order to portray him as a prophetic figure. For more, see Tsipuria, "Ilia Chavchavadze: Georgia's Cultural Saint and a Saint of the Georgian Orthodox Church"

Rustaveli, on the 750th anniversary of his birth, "was chosen as a timeless marker representing in the Soviet center the strength of the cultural tradition to which Stalin emerged."[229] Events of the jubilees were celebrated both in Tbilisi and Moscow, with publications and mass printings of translated works distributed across the USSR.

While the jubilees celebrated literature and placed the poets on the pedestal of Soviet culture, 1936 was the first year when Moscow hosted *dekady*, or ten-day festival of national art (*dekady natsionalnogo iskusstva*), by delegations from various republics. Each *dekada* would highlight one nation's artistic traditions, including exhibitions of paintings and sculpture, literary readings, and, most prominent of all, performances of opera, ballet, and new orchestral compositions. The first *dekada* featured Ukraine in March 1936, followed by Kazakhstan in May 1936, and then Georgia in January 1937.[230] For music, the republics that lacked a prerevolutionary classical arts tradition were expected to incorporate native folk melodies into Western forms to create a "uniquely Soviet hybrid repertoire."[231] For some republics, particularly those in Central Asia, this created a top-down approach to the arts. Theaters and opera houses were constructed – Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 1929; Frunze, Kyrgyzstan, 1936; Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan, 1933 – and composers were sent from Moscow and Leningrad to create national forms of classical music.[232] Yet because Georgia had a preexisting classical tradition that

[229] Tsipuria, "Ilia Chavchavadze: Georgia's Cultural Saint and a Saint of the Georgian Orthodox Church," 256-7.
[230] Following Georgia's *dekada* the republics were presented as follows: Uzbekistan (May 1937), Azerbaijan (April 1938), Kyrgyzstan (May-June 1939), Armenia (October 1939), Leningrad (May 1940), Belorussia (June 1940), Buryat-Mongolia (October 1940), and Tajikistan (April 1941). At this point the *dekady* went on a decade-long hiatus due to the war and resumed in June 1951 with Ukraine.
[231] Leah Goldman, "Nationally Informed: The Politics of National Minority Music during Late Stalinism," *Jahrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas* 67, no. 3 (2019): 377.
[232] Irina Kotkina, "Soviet Empire and Operatic Realm: Stalinist Search for the Model Soviet Opera," *Revue Des Études Slaves* 84, no. 3/4 (2013): 516.

blended national and European classical styles, even consisting of operas in the Georgian language, this view of national art as imported did not apply to Georgian art.[233] Instead, while the promotion of national art throughout the Soviet Union may have been forced in regards to the forms of art expected and praised, Georgia represented a case of a continuation of identity rather than a construction of identity. Given the propagation of nationalism within poetry, both within Georgia through the works of poets like Giorgi Leonidze or across the Soviet Union in the widely disseminated works of Chavchavadze and Rustaveli, albeit in an image tailored to ideological goals, the Georgian cultural sphere attained an autonomous path of creativity that parallels the developments in ballet.

## CREATION OF MZECHABUKI

Considering the Western-oriented literary and political movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth century in Georgia, as seen through Chavchavadze's influence and Georgian modernist poets, it is not entirely surprising that ballet also implanted itself in Tbilisi directly from Europe rather than from Russia. Maria Perini, an Italian ballerina who opened the first ballet studio in Tbilisi in 1916 which four years later became the State Ballet School of Opera and Ballet Theatre, nurtured a generation of dancers that came to the forefront of Georgian ballet, including Chabukiani. In addition to providing ballet training, Perini also educated her students in the arts of contemporary European culture. Chabukiani continued his training in Leningrad at the State Choreographic Institute before joining the Kirov Ballet in 1929. Here his path crossed with Agrippina Vaganova, who as the artistic director of the Kirov for most of the

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[233] Scott, *Familiar Strangers: The Georgian Diaspora and the Evolution Familiar Strangers*, 128.

1930s contributed significantly to the return of a classical ballet technique that was the foundation for the genre of drama-ballet. In this genre, the source text and libretto were of utmost importance and ballets had to convey both the words of the writer and Soviet ideology. Furthermore, the narrative meaning of the text had to be clearly understood through the choreography so that art could fulfill the revolutionary goal of educating the masses. In order to achieve this goal, dancers trained in the Stanislavsky Method to make the ballets and their characters within them more expressive, and also studied the texts that served as the basis for the ballets. Vaganova also introduced her own training style, termed the Vaganova Method, that considered all movement holistically, creating a union of the body that paved the way to greater expressiveness within choreography. Drama-ballet coincided with the 1934 First Congress of Soviet Writers' mandate for socialist realism and the promotion of prerevolutionary classics, starting with an adaptation in 1934 of Pushkin's poem "The Fountain of Bakhchisarai" (1823) before turning to foreign classics, such as Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1940).

By 1934 Chabukiani was a celebrity in the ballet world, both within the Soviet Union and abroad. Starting at Carnegie Hall in New York on January 12, 1934, Chabukiani and his partner Tatiana Vecheslova, were "the first dancers from Soviet Russia [to] be seen in [the United States]" performing excerpts from Soviet ballets such as "Corsaire," "The Hunchback Horse," "Don Quixote," and "The Flames of Paris" on a four-week tour in Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, Detroit, and Chicago, before going off to Paris.[234] What catapulted Chabukiani's success on the stage was his intrinsically new approach to the male role in ballet. From his debut in New York, the dance critic John Martin noted that,

[234] "Two Soviet Dancers Coming Here to Tour," *New York Times*, January 4, 1934.

> Chabukiani is a swarthy young giant with a dashing manner and a facility for doing unbelievable technical tricks. His leaps, his turns, his lifts are phenomenal, and in the hands of an able choreographer he could undoubtedly be transformed into an extraordinary dancer. Vecheslova seconds him along the same lines, but a woman is always outdistanced in a program of this sort.…The audience simply adored it, and bravoed throughout the evening with real sincerity. Indeed, applause comes almost as an automatic reaction to watching so much violence of movement.[235]

While this impression of Chabukiani's powerful, fierce style of dancing marked the initial view of Soviet ballet abroad, audiences within the USSR were likewise struck by his novel interpretations of the male role. Chabukiani danced lead male roles, such as Prince Siegfried in *Swan Lake* shortly after joining the Kirov, contrasting against the male dancers of the past with their restrained formality with his "brilliant virtuosity and artistic completeness…retaining his inherent masculinity, noble posture, strength and lightness."[236] In adhering to the requisite revolutionary ideology in theme and underlying text, the new genre of drama-ballet – with its deeper emotional and psychological possibilities – created an ideal vehicle for Chabukiani's explosive dance style as compared to the graver princely roles of imperial-era classical ballets.

While dancing in Leningrad at the Kirov, Chabukiani was invited directly by Lavrenty Beria to create a ballet for the Georgian *dekada*, which was to take place January 5-15, 1937. *Mzechabuki* would be the first ballet choreographed by Chabukiani, initially performed in Tbilisi, marking the premiere on December 26, 1936 as the birth of Georgian ballet. Chabukiani returned to Tbilisi with only four months to create the ballet, convening the all-Georgian team of

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[235] John Martin, "Soviet Dancers Make Debut Here," *The New York Times*, January 13, 1934.
[236] *Тбилисский Государственный Ордена Ленина Театр Оперы и Балета Имени З. Палиашвили: Краткий Образ* (Тбилиси: Издание музфонда грузинской ССР, 1950), 34.

Balanchivadze, Leonidze, and Virsaladze as the respective composer, librettist, and scenarist. In Moscow, posters were hung announcing the upcoming performances of *Mzechabuki*, and even the newspaper *Pravda* mentioned the ballet as one of special interest given its status as the first attempt to create an independent ballet.[237] This attention to *Mzechabuki* as the first independent ballet is of particular interest as it exemplifies the relationship between Moscow and Tbilisi. *Mzechabuki* would be seen as an attempt at not only creating a ballet, but a national ballet showcasing Georgian culture. By this time socialist realism was the required style, and thus a need to support the ideals of Soviet society through the dominating genre of drama-ballet were the implicit guidelines. In Tbilisi, Leonidze wrote the libretto in early 1936 in a mere two weeks, basing it on a well-known eighteenth-century peasant uprising in the Aragvi Valley. By this time, the Blue Horns and all literary groups had been abolished at the First Congress of Soviet Writers, yet Georgian writers were still allowed to touch upon national issues. Despite his ascent in the public sphere as a part of official Georgian literature and his parading by officials as a public figure, he was still a beloved writer amongst Georgians who tolerated his Soviet side and adored his national side. While the libretto Leonidze wrote involved universal themes of love, hate, and revenge, the class antagonism between the landlords and the peasantry within feudal society aligned perfectly with the Soviet revolutionary ideology, while the historical reference provided a platform for a distinctly Georgian identity to emerge on stage.

*Mzechabuki* is divided into three acts and takes place in the Aragvi Valley, the region that lies between Tbilisi and the Caucasus Mountains. In the first act, Manizhe, the daughter of Prince Eristavi, is collecting water with her friends on a beautiful spring morning. The girls are

[237] A. Ballikashvili, *Magician of Dance (ცეკვის ჯადოქარი),* (Tbilisi: Art Publishing House, 1960).

immersed in carefree games. Manizhe, though is engulfed in a languid dance, showing a premonition for some unknown hero who shall appear in her life and fill her heart. Her dance unexpectedly ends in tears, and she asks to be left alone to contemplate her feelings. Manizhe suddenly hears a horn, followed by the sight of a slender, young, and handsome hunter. Setting down his bow and captured stag, he bends down to the stream to drink when he catches Manizhe's eye in the reflection of the water. Manizhe offers the hunter, Mzechabuki, a drink from her water jug, which awakens him like a magical potion. They dance together as if they have known each a long time, all their movements showing immense affection and tenderness for one another. Mzechabuki asks her who she is and she responds by pointing to the castle. She does not want to think about how she is a princess and he but a peasant-hunter. Manizhe hands Mzechabuki the handkerchief, kisses him, and runs off to the castle. Mzechabuki is left watching her go, grasping her handkerchief. The second scene of the first act takes place during a village celebration. The peasants all gather to celebrate the day of the hunter with dancing amongst the young and the old. Suddenly, there is the sounds of the trumpet and Muravi, Prince Eristavi's steward, appears with his guardsmen to collect dues. The peasants give the last of what they have, and an old man, Berdia, asks to be spared his only remaining possession, his horse. As Mzechabuki defends Berdia, Muravi waves his whip at Mzechabuki, who quickly rips the whip out of Muravi's hand, splits it in two and hits Muravi in the face. Mzechabuki jumps on his horse and rides off into the mountains. Prince Eristavi then appears, and hearing what has occurred, orders in a rage that all those that defy orders be arrested. Berdia and his grandson Zurab are tied and led up to the castle.

The second act opens with Manizhe with her friends within the castle. They are captivated by Natella's story of love, while Manizhe slowly drifts away, deep in thought. The

girls try to cheer her up with a scarf dance, but as Manizhe joins in and the girls see the sadness within her every movement, they all become increasingly despondent. Outside the castle, the relatives of the imprisoned peasants arrive, asking for their freedom. Manizhe and her father, Eristavi, go outside where the arrested are brought before him. He demands to know the whereabouts of the youth that struck Muravi, but no one is willing to give up Mzechabuki. Eristavi in a fury knocks Berdia off his feet, during which time Zurab frees his hands and escapes while the peasants are returned to their holding cell. In the second scene, Mzechabuki sits in the moonlight upon a mountainside with Manizhe's handkerchief. He hears light footsteps and encounters Zurab who has come to tell Mzechabuki what has occurred at the castle. Mzechabuki decides to free all those arrested and send Zurab to gather the remaining peasants, using a burning branch as a signal to revolt. Mzechabuki hears more footsteps and sees Manizhe and Natella before him. As Mzechabuki and Manizhe share a tender moment, Manizhe reveals that she is in fact engaged to Zaal. Mzechabuki returns the handkerchief to Manizhe as a sign that she free to do as she wishes and tells her that he will always love her. Natella and Manizhe then hurry back to the castle as the peasants arrive to join Zurab and Mzechabuki with daggers, to free the prisoners.

In the third act, there is feast at the castle in honor of the bride and groom, Manizhe and Zaal. The betrothal is a solemn affair with rituals and dances following one after another. A group hooded peasants, including Mzechabuki arrive to offer a gift to the couple. The peasants dance, and Mzechabuki moves closer and closer to a suspicious Muravi until Muravi snatches off his hood and the two stand, facing each other. Suddenly a fight breaks out and Mzechabuki is cornered. Manizhe looks in horror at the bloody denouement of the feast. Mzechabuki is wounded and Manizhe rushes to him. Zaal runs in and sees the two standing together.

Mzechabuki and Zaal then engage in hand-to-hand battle, ending with Mzechabuki's death at Zaal's hand.

*Mzechabuki* premiered with this plot in Tbilisi and the ballet was considered a great success. The musician Giorgi Taktakishvili noted that,

> elements of Georgian folk dances, creatively modified and taken to a new quality, were boldly and talentedly used in the dance itself. There is no doubt that in the same play these precious grains of the innovator were already felt, which later determined the ways of Georgian original realistic development. The Tbilisi audience received *Mzechabuki* with admiration and gratitude. A new page has been opened in the history of Georgian art.[238]

However, the commission for the *dekada* demanded a change to the ending. They found that the death of Djardji, the leader of the peasant uprising, was unacceptable.[239] Given that the *dekada* in Moscow was less than a month away, there was not enough time to change the plot of the ballet. Therefore, *Mzechabuki* was performed only with Leonidze's original libretto at the premiere in Tbilisi. The following month, the performance of *Mzechabuki* at the Bolshoi in Moscow as part of the *dekada* was limited to only a short divertissement from the ballet: the *khorumi*, a folk dance in the second act that comes from the eastern region of Adjara.

Leonidze's original ending culminating in Djardji's death illuminates the more central and heroic role given to the male dancers. However, by ending *Mzechabuki* with the death of the eponymous hero, the ballet bumps against the constraints of socialist realism, the only acceptable form at the time that required dramas to reflect Soviet society not as it was but as a model to

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[238] Ballikashvili.

[239] Julakidze, "ქართული ბალეტის მხატვრობის სამი ძირითადი ეტაპი (The Three Main Stages of Georgian Ballet Painting)."

emulate. Mzechabuki's death transformed the hero into a tragic martyr of the revolutionary uprising against the feudal system, but martyrs, let alone Georgian national martyrs, is not what the commission of the *dekada* sought in highlighting a republic's national culture. Tragedy in general was discouraged in the latter half of the 1930s as "the distinguishing marks of Socialist Realism were clarity, truth-to-life, moralism, hardline didacticism and a striving for clear-cut simplicity…Artists are attracted by clearness, the openness of the world. No one, apparently, was attracted by its hidden side. Tragedy was something that arrived from elsewhere."[240] Even the earliest incarnation of the highly successful production of *Romeo and Juliet* was planned in 1934 in a more optimistic light where the two lovers would survive rather than commit a double suicide. Such a change to Shakespeare's text was rejected, but the idea reflected a widespread endeavor of the era.

Mzechabuki's death can also be viewed in relation to Chabukiani's novel style of dancing and historically in regards to Georgian folk dance, both of which highlight the liveliness of the male dancer. Furthermore, Chabukiani himself was the one performing the role of Mzechabuki with his signature, bravura-filled style. After years of performing the role of the supporting prince, it is unsurprising that once in the role of lead dancer and choreographer he would end the ballet with his own dramatic death. After the premiere in Tbilisi, he even noted that such a change in the perception of male roles was his goal, stating,

> I dreamed of a new ballet in which a dancing man would be equal to a ballerina. The inequality established in the old ballets made the son's dance not a choreographic artistic generalization of thoughts, real life, human feelings, and emotions, but a son's dance as a

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[240] Inna Soloviova, "Socialist Realism, 1929-1953," in *A History of Russian Theatre*, ed. Robert Leach and Victor Borovsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 338.

pure water aesthetic, a formal plasticity of the body, a bloodless coconut. I especially wanted to work on a ballet, in which there would be a central male role. There are no such roles in classical ballet, or, at least, very few. In this ballet, I took the first step to create a dance of strong-willed men, and I think this is the way to build a Soviet ballet.[241]

Considering John Martin's comment on how Chabukiani's partner, Tatiana Vecheslova, was outmatched by Chabukiani at their New York debut, such a central role of the lead male in his own choreography is to be expected and also partially an extension of drama-ballet. When ballets are needed to follow a text to support a seamless narrative, dance scenes straying from the central character become harder to justify without reverting to the classical model of narrative action scenes and divertissement, or pure dance, scenes. Chabukiani was very much aware of the requirements of drama-ballet, stating that "attempts were made to achieve the ideological richness of a ballet performance, to educate a dance-actor who cold embody live, real images on stage," and that "working on the first Georgian national ballet, we set ourselves the task of creating a harmonious, integral, dramatic, plot-rich, meaningful dance performance."[242] Such an emphasis on an "integral" work is central to the genre of drama-ballet, where every element must create a sense of unity. Balanchivadze even remarked that his score was "whole, organically fused" (цельно, органически слитно).[243]

At the time of the production of *Mzechabuki*, folk dance, along with classical ballet, were the two most acceptable forms of dance given the risk of the, often fatal, label of "formalist" that

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[241] As quoted in Julakidze, "ქართული ბალეტის მხატვრობის სამი ძირითადი ეტაპი (The Three Main Stages of Georgian Ballet Painting)."
[242] Vakhtang Chabukiani, "Ballet Performance (Baletnii Spektakl)," *Vechernii Tbilisi*, December 27, 1936.
[243] Andria Balanchivadze, "Our Experience (Nash' Opyt)," *Vechernii Tbilisi*, December 27, 1936.

threatened anything deemed overly Western or not catered to the masses. Rising in popularity within Russia was the Igor Moiseyev Dance Company, based in Moscow, founded by Moiseyev who criticized ballet as too artificial and instead created a new genre of folk dance that could be performed across the USSR, with no identifying sign of national or regional origin. Ironically, the relationship between ballet and folk dance within his company was inextricably linked as his dancers were all trained in classical ballet rather than from authentic folk-dance traditions in their own lives.[244] Chabukiani, however, had a different approach to folk dance within *Mzechabuki*. Throughout the ballet he includes folk dances from different regions of Georgia, most famously the *khorumi* from the western region of Adjara in the second act. The question of how authentic these regional dances were was up for debate. Davit Javrishvili, a renowned artist and choreographer of Georgian dance, argued for the purity of the dances, for example adhering to the untouched traditions that only men could dance on their toes. Meanwhile women had to remain on the balls of their feet, moving in the standard three-stroke slide, a graceful manner of moving across the stage that gives the illusion that the female dancer is floating across.[245] Javrishvili was reacting to the proliferation and altering of authentic folk dances that he was witnessing in popular forms such as through Igor Moiseyev's choreography, and thus did not support Chabukiani's use of folk dance. However, Chabukiani, in creating a truly national ballet sought to keep the subtle differences between the regional dances, and only enhance them with techniques from classical ballet. He saw the two as separate entities that could complement one another:

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[244] Anthony Shay, *The Igor Moiseyev Dance Company: Dancing Diplomats* (Intellect Ltd, 2019), 42.
[245] Julakidze, "ქართული ბალეტის მხატვრობის სამი ძირითადი ეტაპი (The Three Main Stages of Georgian Ballet Painting)."

> Lively, temperamental, saturated with deep content, emotional folk dance is alien to any formalistic clichés that only dry and disfigure our ballet. Enriching classical ballet with the colors of folk dance, it is necessary to correctly understand and preserve the unity of the dramatic content and virtuoso form of folk dances, to preserve and raise to an even greater artistic height.[246]

On one hand, Manizhe needed to be able to dance en pointe for a classical pas de deux with Mzechabuki, but Mzechabuki also dances on his toes in the tradition of Georgian folk dance. Specifically for the *khorumi*, Chabukiani stresses the necessity of maintaining the form and using it as "a theme for artistic composition. Complicating the dance, enriching its dynamics, we at the same time fully preserve its character and rhythm."[247] While the very structure of *Mzechabuki* merges folk dance with classical forms, the technical capabilities of the lead dancers also demonstrate an authentic grasping of both. Furthermore, it is significant to note that Chabukiani also expresses a dedication to the goals of drama-ballet, namely the "unity of the dramatic content" along with his novel contribution of folk dance, or more specifically the colors of Georgian national dance.

The costumes that Virsaladze designed for *Mzechabuki* are also of note for the fusing of authentic national dress and modernized ballet wear. Eliso Julakidze emphasizes that the men's costumes in particular at first glance did not differ from the classic Georgian national dress. However, Virsaladze was able to synthesize the necessary wear of classical ballet – such as tights that allow for greater flexibility and mobility – with the stylized look of the national costume so that the regional differences were still apparent. For the women, their costumes needed to

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[246] Vakhtang Chabukiani, "Narodnie Tanza v Balete," *Vechernaya Moskva*, May 8, 1940.
[247] Chabukiani, "Ballet Performance (Baletnii Spektakl)."

balance covering the arms and legs to as is the custom with Georgian traditional dresses yet the women also needed the ability to dance en pointe and turn without interference. Virsaladze created dresses that layered many layers of linen to create the illusion of a full-bodies costume that was also light and airy enough to perform movements from classical ballet.[248]

After the Georgian *dekada*, the production of *Mzechabuki* was added to the Kirov's repertoire in Leningrad, premiering on June 28, 1938. However, the ballet underwent several changes. The title was changed to *Heart of the Mountains* (*Tserdtse gor*), the hero of the ballet was renamed Djardji, and the scenarist, Soliko Virsaladze, created entirely new sets. Most importantly, the ending where Mzechabuki, now Djardji, dies was changed. The librettist N. Volkov altered the ending so that when Zaal rushes in and sees Manizhe and Djardji standing together, Manizhe throws herself between Zaal and Djardji, and Zaal kills her. She dies with the handkerchief in her hand, which Djardji raises to his lips before draping over Manizhe.[249] Manizhe's death deemphasizes the role of Djardji, granting greater significance to the role of the lead ballerina. It also removes the possibility of Djardji as a Georgian martyr. Instead, the ballet concludes with Djardji further emboldened to pursue his revolutionary uprisings against the feudal aristocracy that has taken away his love. Vera Krasovskaya, writing about the main themes of the ballet, remarks that "love, conquering the fear of death, leads the heroes of *Heart of the Mountains*. The tragic conflict here is based on class enmity. The oppressors trample on freedom and humanity. The liberation struggle of the people is a struggle for the triumph of true humanity."[250] By invoking the universal theme of love the ballet opens to a greater meaning

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[248] Julakidze, "ქართული ბალეტის მხატვრობის სამი ძირითადი ეტაპი (The Three Main Stages of Georgian Ballet Painting)."
[249] Plot as per the program for *Heart of the Mountains*, printed in 1938 for the Kirov Academic Theater of Opera and Ballet. From the archive at the Tbilisi State Opera and Ballet Theater.
[250] Красовская, *Вахтанг Чабукиани*, 67.

beyond Georgian national identity. However, we can also see Manizhe's death in a class context. Given that she is princess betrothed to a fellow aristocrat, her death aligns more closely with the ideological goal of supporting the proletariat and giving Djardji further motivation in his revolution against feudal society. Manizhe may have taken a defiant stance in her love a peasant, but only her death could absolve her of her life as a princess.

After the premiere in Leningrad, Chabukiani was welcomed as not only a talented dancer but as a worthy choreographer. The Soviet dance critic, Yuri Slonimsky, despite erroneously overlooking *Mzechabuki* and remarking that *Heart of the Mountains* was not the first Georgian ballet but followed upon Georgian themes in ballets such as *Partisan Days* (*Partizanskii dnya*, 1937), did praise the ballet's "grains of the new, from which shoots of a truly Soviet choreography grow."[251] Slonimsky also added that compared to the folk choreography in *Partisan Days*, Chabukiani's folk dancing was an organic part of the ballet, it wasn't folklore but an "authentic art of the stage" (*podlinnoe iskusstva stseni*).[252] The critic Viktorina Kriger lauded Chabukiani's singular dance style and his popularity with Soviet audiences:

> Chabukiani at the end of the dance, after rapid circles, falls to his knees in front of his beloved girl Manizhe – this moment cannot be forgotten due to its dramatic power. Of this one dance one could write a book. Chabukiani personifies the courageous beginning, the heroic element, the flame of creative temperament. His success with Soviet audiences is not the ordinary success of a brilliant dancer. This success is much deeper, for he

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[251] Ю. О. Слонимский, "Балет 'Сердце Гор,'" in *Ленинградский Государственный Ордена Ленина Академический Театр Оперы и Балета Имени С.М. КировА* (Ленинград, 1940), 86.
[252] Слонимский, 88.

proves how with the whole essence of his talent Chabukiani is close and related to our heroic era.[253]

Kriger's assessment reinforces the view of Chabukiani as a dancer firmly in the mold of the ideal Soviet dancer: heroic, dramatic, and powerful.

*Heart of the Mountains* remained in the Kirov's repertoire for many years, and the following year Chabukiani choreographed *Laurencia* (1939) for the Kirov, a ballet based on the Spanish playwright Lope de Vega's 16th century play *Fuenteovejuna*. Despite the positive reviews from critics and even Kriger's remark on his immense success with Soviet audiences, Chabukiani was expelled from the Kirov. Ironically, at the premiere of *Taras Bulba* on December 12, 1940, Chabukiani performed the role of Andrei, which was intended to be the negative character, with such bravura and to such applause from the audience that he was accused of intentionally performing the role with the incorrect ideological message.[254] In 1941, Chabukiani returned to Tbilisi and became the artistic director of the Tbilisi State Opera and Ballet Theatre, a position he retained for the rest of his career. He added *Heart of the Mountains* to the company's repertoire and although the ballet marked the birth of Georgian ballet and paved the way for more ballets in this style, it was not considered the greatest and most popular of Chabukiani's works within Georgia.

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[253] As quoted in Красовская, *Вахтанг Чабукиани*, 80. (Викторина Кригер, "Мастера Ленинградского Балета," *Ленинградская Правда*, 1940.)

[254] Similarly, a decade prior the dancer Olga Iordan's role as the "Diva" in *The Golden Age* (Золотой век, 1930) was intended as the anti-heroine, a symbol of the decadence of the Western world, yet became the highlight of the ballet. The ballet production was abruptly pulled from the repertoire when critics began to question the popularity of her pas de deux. A clip of Chabukiani's performance in *Taras Bulba* can be viewed online, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jSL6Z6DvpU

POST-WAR: *SINATLE* (1947) AND *GORDA* (1949)

Back in Tbilisi, Chabukiani had greater freedom to create his own ballets. Even though *Mzechabuki* was not presented in its full form at the 1937 *dekada*, the fact that Chabukiani had created a successful ballet that was restaged and added to the repertoires of the Kirov allowed him greater creative autonomy as the artistic director in Tbilisi. Of the ballets he created after *Mzechabuki,* the two of note are *Sinatle* (1947) and *Gorda* (1949), with the latter coming to represent the heart of Georgian ballet. For all his ballets, Chabukiani had followed the drama-ballet model, using a libretto from a national author, imbuing the dancing with drama techniques from the Stanislavsky Method, and, most importantly, creating works that were accessible to the audience, often through choreography combining classical ballet and folk dance. For the librettos of these ballets, using a preexisting text – either a national work or in the case of Leonidze, a contemporary national poet – allowed for greater permanence of the ballet itself and, more importantly for educating the masses, greater comprehension of the ballet's plot and intended ideology. For ballets created in the center – Moscow and Leningrad – this exclusively implied the use of the classical canon of Russian literature, before shifting to classics of foreign literature towards the end of the 1930s. However, Tbilisi, through the works of Chabukiani, came to represent the third most important city of ballet outside of the center, the capital of the periphery. Chabukiani was able to adopt the drama-ballet model yet, much as Georgian literature came to live in the "dual reality" between Soviet and Georgian, it too existed in a distinct form that was not necessarily about dissent but rather about independence. Krasovskaya even writes,

Georgian ballet was the first among the national ballets of our country to receive a full-fledged work about the fate of its people, where the theme of a selfless patriotic deed was revealed in the

poetic forms of a folk tale, where the greatness, strength and wonderful spiritual qualities of the heroic people of the people were sung.[255]

However, further enforcing the position of Tbilisi as of the periphery, Krasovskaya argues that June 28, 1938, the day *Heart of the Mountains* premiered in Leningrad, marks the true birth of Georgian ballet.[256] Such a statement attempts to lessen the degree to which Georgian ballet belonged to Georgia, granting significance to its national ballet only in terms of its success within the center – Leningrad. Meanwhile, official histories of ballet from the Tbilisi State Opera House consistently refer to 1936 as the birth of Georgian ballet. Such a discrepancy reflects the subtle ways in which Georgian ballet diverged from the center, using the drama-ballet model for its own national story.

*Mzechabuki*, rather than basing the ballet off Georgian literature, instead relied on a libretto by a prominent contemporary writer within Georgia. One that was likewise celebrated for his parallel developments to Soviet literature, with it but never entirely of it, adhering to the necessary façade of a Soviet public writer while writing homages to Georgia in Georgian that alluded only to the relationship with the USSR in veiled terms. Aside from not basing ballets on classic works of Georgian literature, these ballets still aligned with the core principles of drama-ballet: unity through narrative and choreography, a textual basis for greater audience comprehension, and psychologically driven characters a la Stanislavsky.

*Mzechabuki* was created not on the initiative of Chabukiani or any other creative from Tbilisi, but at the behest of Beria for the Georgian *dekada*. While *Mzechabuki* marked the birth of Georgian ballet, and is still considered so today, the ballet itself is more notable for

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[255] Красовская, *Вахтанг Чабукиани*, 112-13.
[256] Красовская, 112.

introducing Georgia as a formidable creative force for ballet within the Soviet Union and for buying valuable time to freely create. *Dekada* culminated in prizes and receiving one allowed artists a chance to work on projects of their own. After the war, Chabukiani as artistic director and the main choreographer at the Tbilisi State Opera and Ballet Theater was given ample room to create his own ballets. He did stage the revised *Heart of the Mountains* in Tbilisi in 1940, adding it to the company's repertoire. However, *Sinatle* and *Gorda*, both created and staged following World War II, represent the independence with which Chabukiani was granted in his ballets.

*Sinatle* was only ever staged in Tbilisi, premiering on March 5, 1947, and while Chabukiani received the prestigious Stalin Prize for the ballet, it was never truly adopted by Georgia. The ballet, Georgian for "light," was based on a play originally written in 1913 by Iosef Gedevanishvili (1872-1939), a playwright and novelist who was involved with Bolshevik groups and whose works aimed to revolutionize the working masses prior to the establishment of Soviet power in Georgia.

The plot of the ballet, which was adapted from Gedevanishvili's play by Otar Eradze, is divided into three acts. In the first act melancholy reigns in the court of the childless tsar, Jimsher. The country remains without an heir to the throne. Suddenly thunder is heard, and the lord of the underworld, Davrish, appears in the palace. Davrish promises the queen two sons, but on the condition that one of them, after coming of age, will be given to him. The tsar and tsarina agree and Davrish presents them with a bush covered in fruits. Plucking a fruit and taking a bite, the queen becomes the mother of two. Later over two golden cradles, Davrish casts a spell and disappears into the underworld. Fairies appear who then dispel Davrish's charms with a lullaby. Eighteen years then go by and we see the tsar celebrating the coming of age of his two sons,

Avtandila and Ramaza. A masked lord appears, presenting the two with military armor and blessing them, before removing his mask and revealing himself to be Davrish. Davrish then carries off Avtandila to the underworld.

In the second act at Davrish's underworld kingdom, Avtandil is chained and brought in. Sorcerers and creatures of the underworld pounce upon him until Davrish appears with the beautiful Mzetunahavi. Avtandil is charmed by her beauty and gradually takes part in the festivities. At this time the good fairy arrives who awakens Avtandil and reminds him of his homeland and peoples. Avtandil breaks free of Davrish's charm and hurries away with the fairy. Davrish is left in a fury.

In the third act in the kingdom of the fairies, Avtandil is in a deep sleep. The fairies remove Davrish's charm from Avtansil and give him a golden torch. The fairies then tell Avtandil that his country has been taken over by monsters. Avtandil hurries home to rid his home from evil forces. Avtandil returns to Jimsher's kingdom where he fights the monsters. Suddenly Davrish bursts out of one of the monster's heads. Avtandil aims the light from the golden torch at him causing him to drop dead. The final scene ends with the people celebrating their freed homeland and greeting the return of their hero.[257]

Very little is written about the reception of *Sinatle* and even amongst the archives of the Tbilisi State Opera and Ballet Theater the ballet elicits shrugs more than anything else. Given that this was the first Georgian ballet that Chabukiani choreographed after the war, it is likely that he felt the need to create a patriotic ballet that emphasized the homeland, despite the motifs of the underworld and fantastical creatures. It is telling that Krasovskaya, consistently following

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[257] Ballet plot summary based on the original program issued for the premiere of *Sinatle*. From the archive at the Tbilisi State Opera and Ballet Theater.

the Soviet ideological interpretation, lauds Chabukiani for “his active attitude towards heroics of the Great Patriotic War” and “to the victorious struggle of the Soviet people,” in creating “a work of truly Soviet Georgian culture.”[258] Musically, the score of *Sinatle* followed the traditions of Russian academic ballet more so than Balanchivadze’s score of *Mzechabuki* that weaved in Georgian folk themes. Furthermore, Gedenvanishvili never played an active role in the literary scene of Georgia, rather he was in favor of a unified Russian empire, on the opposite spectrum of a writer like Leonidze who composed his poetry in a double discourse supporting Georgian nationalism. The plot, furthermore, is much more in the style of such nineteenth century ballet classics, such as *Sleeping Beauty*. The two share similar structures in that the hero is placed under a spell, aided by fairies and the whole ballet culminates in a celebration as the hero returns from a spell-bound death, either literally or figuratively in the case of *Sinatle*. The plot does not showcase Georgian national identity in the way that *Mzechabuki* so explicitly did.

Premiering two years later on December 30, 1949 was Chabukiani’s crown jewel in Georgian ballet, *Gorda*. Again, the creative team was entirely Georgian; David Toradze composed the music, Parna Lapiashvii was the scenarist; Chabukiani choreographed and performed the eponymous lead role; and Otar Egadze wrote the libretto based on the nineteenth century novella *Surami Fortress*. The novella was written by Daniel Chonkadze (1830-1860) and mixes folklore, history, political protest, and romantic drama to attack serfdom.[259] In order to evade censorship, Chonkadze, much like Leonidze does in his poetry half a century later, sets the work in the medieval ages. *Surami Fortress* is the first work to attack the nobility, and did so in

[258] Красовская, 118-19.
[259] Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia*, 153.

the plain, colloquial language of the people.[260] Filipp Makharadze, who two decades later would become the head of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, wrote in his biography on Chonkadze in 1903 – *Daniel Chonkadze and His Time* – that he "was the first to raise his voice against the feudal system, who first condemned it and exposed it appalling and unbearable aspects to the public."[261] Chonkadze's novella was based on the social inequality he witnessed around him in Samegrelo, a mountainous region in western Georgia, where the Russian nobility controlled not only the economic and social conditions of their serfs but also their human relations, forbidding marriages out of fear of diminishing the workforce. In 1856, nearly twenty thousand serf peasants rebelled in Samegrelo, followed by another rebellion the following year in the neighboring region of Imereti. The Russian military suppressed the rebellion, exiling a number of participants to distant parts of Russia. Chonkadze was the first to speak publicly about the fate of these people swallowed up in slavery, labor, and exile.[262]

The ballet, running through four acts, begins with a young sculptor named Gorda who is in love with the princess Irema. Javara, the daughter of a noble, loves Gorda and does not hide her feelings. A group of hunters appear and try to shoot down an eagle that has Irema's beloved falcon in its talons. Gorda grabs a bow and shoots down the eagle. Javara realizes that Gorda is in love with Irema, not with her. She vows to take revenge, praying for the strength to do so, and turns into a prophetess. In the second act, a rivalry between Gorda and Prince Mamia, who also loves Irema, arises but is quickly put aside at the news that Arab Khalif demands Irema's hand in

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[260] Solomon Khutsishvili, "Daniel Chonkadze," in *Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia* (Tbilisi, 1987), 404.

[261] As quoted in Giorgi Javakhishvili, "ამბოხი ლიტერატურიდან | დანიელ ჭონქაძის დრო (The Revolt of Literature: The Time of Daniel Chonkadze)," Indigo, October 28, 2022, https://indigo.com.ge/articles/ambokhi-literaturidan/.

[262] Javakhishvili.

marriage. The king writes a refusal and instructs Gorda to deliver it. Irema sees Gorda off and in a sign of her deep love gives him a handful of native soil.

In the third act, Gorda arrives to the court of the Khalif, who is furious at the king's refusal. Gorda and the Khalif begin to fight, with Gorda killing the latter. The Khalif's commander summons the army and announces an attack on Georgia. Gorda escapes and returns to his native land. In the final act, Gorda marries Irema and they have a son, Badri. Suddenly, the fortress begins to crumble and no one can explain why. The king sends Gorda and Mamia to the prophetess Javara who again begs Gorda for his love. Refused again, Javara pulls the arrow out of the eagle that Gorda had earlier shot. She tells Mamia to find the owner of the arrow and encase his son in the walls of the fortress. Gorda realizes it is his son who must be encased. The Arab army arrives, and in the chaos, Javara grabs Badri and brings him to the fortress. Everyone can hear the cries of the child in the fortress. The Arabs and Georgians battle fiercely. Mamia and Gorda together defeat the commander of the Arab army. With his death, the army drops their weapons and the saved Badri is brought out. Gorda holds his son, who is saved from death by this victory, and Javara never gets her revenge.[263]

*Gorda* was immensely popular in Tbilisi, more so than any other of Chabukiani's ballets. In the similar vein of other drama-ballet productions, the key was the source of the libretto. Chonkadze's novella was well-known to Georgian audiences, allowing the ballet to be appreciated in terms of comprehension of the narrative as well as a dual understanding of the plot as integral to the nation's sense of identity, separate from any oppressor. In 1923 there was a film version of the novella by Ivane Perestian, in 1933 it was adapted into a play by Aleksandre

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[263] Ballet plot summary based on the original program issued for the premiere of *Gorda*, printed by the Ministry of Culture of the Georgian SSR. From the archive at the Tbilisi State Opera and Ballet Theater.

Takaishvili and Simon Mtvaradze at Tbilisi's Theater of Young Spectators, and in the 1950s it was added to the national school curriculum.[264] Furthermore, Gorda differs from the protagonists of *Mzechabuki* and *Sinatle* in the change he undergoes as a character. While all three characters embody the revolutionary spirit of the people, Gorda transforms from a sculptor into a hero that saves a nation and as a father that saves his family. He must leave his homeland to feel the joy of returning back to it. Avtandil journeys to the underworld as a captive, but his return hinges on the self rather than the collective. Likewise, Mzechabuki fights for the people and his own personal love, remaining the same static character throughout. The irony of the popularity of *Gorda*, and its success in the Soviet world as a recipient of Stalin Prize, is that Chonkadze's tale of revolt against the feudal system was a revolt against Russian oppressors. As the first written work, predating Chavchavadze's writings, to publicly push for Georgian autonomy, the ballet follows in the same vein of double discourse by both following the Soviet ideology of rebelling against the aristocracy while shrouding in its historical setting the defiant message of nationalism and love of the homeland.

Further emphasizing the division between the center and the periphery of how Chabukiani's ballet were received is the ballet film *Masters of Georgian Ballet* (*Mastera gruzinskogo baleta*, 1955). The previous year saw the release of two successful ballet films – *Stars of the Russian Ballet* (1954) and *Romeo and Juliet* (1954) – both of which allowed Soviet ballet to reach a wider audience, domestically and internationally. By creating ballet films, Soviet cultural power was broadcasted to the world while also establishing a permanence for an artform that had previously been eternally ephemeral. In *Masters of Georgian Ballet* though, two

[264] Javakhishvili, "ამბოხი ლიტერატურიდან | დანიელ ჭონქაძის დრო (The Revolt of Literature: The Time of Daniel Chonkadze)."

ballets were featured: *Laurencia* and *Sinatle*. It would perhaps be more fitting to have named the film simply *Master of Georgian Ballet*, given that Chabukiani not only choreographed the ballets but also danced the lead role of both. The choice of ballets also demonstrates the image that Moscow wanted to send out: Georgian ballet had conquered a foreign work – *Laurencia* having been adapted from a Spanish play – as well as created a ballet based on national folklore that propagated a revolutionary good versus evil, a literal victory of light over dark.

## THE END OF DRAMA-BALLET

Drama-ballet, while derided as an ideological vehicle in ballet that represents merely a return to prerevolutionary ballet, is an integral component of Chabukiani's style of dancing and choreography. Chabukiani was a loyal adherent to the genre, who felt that ballet needed a narrative, that without a story there was no feeling in ballet. Abstract ballet and the increasingly modern style that began to prevail towards the end of the 1950s was anathema to Chabukiani. He was entirely steeped in the psychological drive of his characters that lent such high emotions to his explosive dance style. Pedagogically, he created a distinctive training style that differed from the European or Russian styles that he had trained in. His training emphasized a rapid progression through the foundations of ballet, with an emphasis on jumps, not entirely surprising considering his own famed virtuosic jumps. While drama-ballet was the officially sanctioned form of ballet, Chabukiani's own deployment of its style displays a dual approach of basing his style on the foundations of the genre, satisfying the expectations of his era, while using it as a personal vehicle to develop the male dancer's role and create a platform for Georgian national ballet.

As mentioned earlier, drama-ballet in Leningrad and Moscow developed first on a basis of Russian literature before turning to foreign classics. Chabukiani also paralleled this shift, creating *Othello* in 1957 for the Tbilisi stage in preparation for Georgia's second *dekada* held in Moscow in 1958. Chabukiani once again was the choreographer and lead dancer, Soliko Virsaladze was the scenarist, and Aleksi Machavariani (1913-1995) composed the music. *Othello* was the most popular of Shakespeare's works in the era of high Stalinism, with 100 productions of the work in 1938 alone across the USSR due to the preference for southern tragedies and comedies set in the Renaissance period.[265] Therefore, the choice to stage *Othello* already fit into the model of using a well-known text. However, as Natalia Tvaltchrelidze has argued, productions of Shakespeare in Georgia had a greater underlying importance as a marker of national identity. Chavchavadze had planned a production of *King Lear* in the 1860s at a time when Georgian language in public could warrant exile to Siberia. To bypass this, he created a version where an actress sat behind a curtain reading the Georgian translation of the play while the actors pantomimed. This legacy of Shakespeare from the nineteenth century, where productions represented the fight for Georgian national identity, carried into the twentieth century where directors used Shakespeare's works to fight against Soviet authority.[266] Chabukiani received the Lenin Prize in 1958 for his production of *Othello* and the production, beyond the *dekada* in Moscow, also was staged internationally in Japan. Such a shift in viewership from domestic to international adhered to the original goals of using foreign works:

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[265] Arkady Ostrovsky, "Shakespeare as a Founding Father of Socialist Realism: The Soviet Affair with Shakespeare," in *Shakespeare in the World of Communism and Socialism*, ed. Irena Makaryk and Joseph G Price (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 61.
[266] Natalia Tvaltchrelidze, "Shakespeare Against War and Tyranny: A Georgian Example," *Critical Stages/Scènes Critiques*, no. 17 (June 2018), https://www.critical-stages.org/17/shakespeare-against-war-and-tyranny-a-georgian-example/.

to create a ballet that could be shown to the widest audience in order to spread Soviet ideology. The production was also a success in Tbilisi due to Chabukiani's magnetic interpretation of Othello. Structurally, though the ballet marked an end of an era. While the choreography still used classical ballet, adhered to a textual libretto, and was steeped in the same Stanislavskian psychological character development, the format of the acts deviates from the standard model of ballet, indicating Chabukiani's only concession towards the incoming wave of modernism. After *Othello*, Chabukiani stepped down as the main choreographer at the Tbilisi State Opera and Ballet Theater, focusing his attention as the artistic director and head ballet master. Modernism no longer saw a need for dance-actors or text-laden choreography, and with that went Chabukiani who had come to epitomize that style.

Analyzing the progression through the ballets *Mzechabuki, Sinatle, Gorda,* and *Othello*, drama-ballet can be seen as a genre to be imported and applied as template for staging nationalism. While drama-ballet was intertwined with socialist realism at its inception, as it left the center for the periphery, its use expanded as a tool with greater ambiguity. At the forefront is the libretto, and more importantly, the textual basis of the libretto, for lending cultural significance to a ballet's interpretation. Georgian culture, with a strong lineage of national identity from the nineteenth century, developed a dual reality that was woven through literature and therefore through Chabukiani's ballets. Leonidze, who wrote a 150-page epic poem in honor of Stalin without ever once mentioning a single biographical detail about Stalin, embodied this duality between art and reality.[267] The success of *Sinatle* in the center rather than in the periphery is contingent on Gedenvanishvili's own background as a Bolshevik supporter rather than a Georgian nationalist, yet its success granted greater independence to Chabukiani as an artist.

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[267] Rayfield, *The Literature of Georgia*, 256.

Chonkadze exists both as a writer exalted by head of the Bolshevik censors, Makharadze himself, while concealed behind a historical layer is a premiere work calling for Georgian sovereignty. Lastly, the use of Shakespeare satisfied the Soviet internationalist goal of reaching the wider world while also representing a voice of historical dissent domestically. These works all created Tbilisi as another important producer of ballet within the Soviet Union. Yet, while ballets from the center were intent on spreading Soviet ideology to shape the masses, ballets from Tbilisi were interpreted by local audiences as a sign of Georgian nationalism. Much like the Georgian literature produced in the 1920s and 1930s, Chabukiani's ballets created ballets that appeared Soviet, yet exalted the homeland of Georgia, not the homeland of the USSR.

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# Conclusion

## Soviet Drama-Ballet and its Global Aspirations

In the early 1930s the state of ballet around the world was in a very different position. If you trained in Paris, then you trained in the French school. If you trained in Copenhagen, then you trained in the Bournonville Method. In New York, where George Balanchine had yet to establish his School of American Ballet, dancers trained under the tutelage of dancers who had come from Europe, imparting the training they were steeped in. Today, the Vaganova Method is taught in ballet studios around the world. Nearly any country with a ballet company will have studios that either exclusively follow the Vaganova Method or teach it alongside the French school or Cecchetti Method. Emigration of dancers from the Soviet Union, as well as a desire by many to capture that ineffable Russian style – emotionally-laden and capturing a unity of the body from the tips of the fingers through the spine to the toes – has led to its global popularity in the ballet world. Along with this is the Vaganova Method's reputation as a strict training process. At the Vaganova Academy in St. Petersburg, dancers are selected based on physical attributes at the age of ten and undergo eight years of carefully designed training. Any individual who is deemed to not have the right physical characteristics, whether it is natural flexibility, the shape of the foot, or height, is rejected from entering the academy assuming that they would not successfully reach graduation.

Much of the popularity of the Vaganova Method is intricately tied to the global reach of the genre of drama-ballet. The Soviet goal was to create a genre of ballet that could be used to reach audiences across the Soviet Union and then around the world. The post-revolution

directive to educate the masses followed by the ambiguous mandates of socialist realism to "depict reality in its revolutionary development" ultimately led to the safer recourse of utilizing literature for the librettos, rather than risk being labeled "formalist" for anything deemed too experimental or avant-garde. While librettos existed for ballets prior to drama-ballet, Soviet culture's elevation of literature, and the word in general, created a layer of permanence that was previously unavailable to ballet as an ephemeral artform. Alongside nationwide events such as the 1937 Pushkin Centennial, the text exerted a larger influence over the audience. The Performance Studies scholar Susan Leigh Foster, using a methodology reminiscent of Viktor Shklovsky's literary device of defamiliarization (*ostranenie*), describes all the outside influences of a performance on a viewer.[268] Her analysis highlights the many layers in which the viewer is primed with language prior to the performance itself. Information about a performance is first taken from an announcement in the newspaper, on the internet or radio, or by word of mouth. The information that the announcement contains will already set a certain level of expectation. A small venue may imply a more experimental performance while an established concert hall may be a more traditional genre of performance. The adjectives used to describe the performance, such as breathtaking, compelling, or provocative, will likewise guide the viewer to certain expectations.[269] These layers of language, from the announcement wording to the performance details in the program, combined with the pre-existing knowledge of the libretto's source text all impact the viewer's interpretation of the movements performed.

This is not all to say that a reliance on the word in dance was a new innovation. The dance scholar Mark Franko has shown how interwoven text was in the geometrical dances of late

[268] Susan Leigh Foster, *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).
[269] Foster, 60.

Renaissance culture. Franko emphasizes how geometrical dances of the court were seen as co-existing with texts and that "by becoming textual at the time of its deployment within the theatrical sphere, dancing became identified with highly rhetorical forms of late Renaissance culture."[270] This textual identity manifested itself in two different ways. The first was a very direct textual implication. For geometrical dances the poses, rather than the movement between poses, was of utmost significance. Often these poses had a literal meaning, in that a pose could attempt to manifest a letter, with a group of dancers spelling out a word. In such cases, "viewing a group of dancers as a living alphabet, and dancing bodies as letters, the spectator would reassemble each sequence of letters as a word, and each sequence of words as a phrase."[271] Over time, these logocentric poses shifted from a literal verbal meaning to poses that implied a phrase but could be more widely interpreted. When speaking about text and dance, music also plays a significant role between the two. Franko discusses the relationship between the three as music, the signifier, connects through dance to text, the signified. Since dance uses the same rhythmic action and metric structure, it provides a visual confirmation of the link between music and dance. When dance, text and music combine into one form, there is the notion that text can then transcend the written.[272] This idea of textual transcendence is useful when thinking about narrative and what narrative's function is with dance. André Lepecki, in speaking about text and movement, refers to the "metaphorical explosion" in arguing that text in dance does not operate in naming but rather in creating connections and increasing the potentiality of meaning in

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[270] Mark Franko, *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body*, RES Monographs on Anthropology and Aesthetics (Cambridge [England] ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 15.
[271] Franko, 16.
[272] Franko, 27.

movement.[273] Words and movements alone may take a singular signification, but, combined, the interactions between them can create a larger range of meaning that expands or contracts the interpretation of the performance.

For drama-ballet, the key difference is in the audience's knowledge of a particular text. The pervasive presence of the texts used for the ballets groomed the audience for greater accessibility. For the authorities, worried about how an audience would interpret a performance, particularly after *The Bright Stream* (1935) and its satire of collective life, the text ensured that there could be an unambiguous portrayal of characters and overall ideology. In the 1930s up to the late 1950s when the Bolshoi went on their first tour to the United Kingdom and the United States, drama-ballets were hailed for their innovations: the emotional depth of the dancers acquired from the Stanislavsky Method, the seamless linkage of the plot throughout the ballet borrowing from film techniques, and the new movement vocabulary from the Vaganova Method. This is not to say that drama-ballet has continued to be highly praised today. Even in 1959 when the Bolshoi performed in New York, the audiences were enthralled by the above-mentioned aspects seen in *Romeo and Juliet*, but they also were perplexed at what appeared as an old-fashioned ballet, particularly compared to the neoclassical works of Balanchine that were popular at the time. Balanchine's works, such as *The Four Temperaments* and *Jewels*, sought the other side of the form versus content debate that appeared in 1927. His works emphasized the relationship between dance and music, eschewing any type of plot whatsoever, while his new pedagogical training exhibited athleticism and quick, dynamic movements.

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[273] Scott deLahunta, "Dance Dramaturgy: Speculations and Reflections," *Dance Theatre Journal* 16, no. 1 (2000): 22.

Despite drama-ballet's arcane seeming adherence to literature, it nonetheless promoted an approach to dance that offered the possibility of capturing greater emotions. The Stanislavsky Method and Vaganova Method combined offered new avenues for a dancer to expand their capabilities. In an era today when the level of athleticism for dancers is so much greater and virtuosic tricks, such as thirty-two fouetté turns en pointe, are achievable by many, the difference between a good dancer and an incredible dancer comes down to dramatic expression. One can watch the classic *Swan Lake* over and over again, but oftentimes the key differentiator is in the leading ballerina's emotional presence as Odette. When she plunges to her death in the final scene, is it merely a jump and an end of the act? Or as an audience member are you left stunned with tears streaming down your face that she would rather throw herself off the cliff to her death than live as a spell-bound swan?

Drama-ballet, along with its emotional power, has one other aspect contributing to its longevity as a genre. As discussed in relation to Soviet ballet in Georgia, drama-ballet came to serve as a template for staging national ballets. Within the Soviet Union, this template allowed Tbilisi to serve as the cultural center of its own national mythmaking rather than take directives from Moscow or Leningrad. It first used texts by national authors, creating an engaged audience within Georgia, before adapting Shakespeare, in this case *Othello* for the stage, in a production that was highly successful not only in Georgia but also in Moscow and abroad. Beyond the scope of this dissertation are other case examples to consider. In Central Asia, particularly in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, drama-ballet was likewise imported but with artists sent from Moscow to aid in composing music with local folk motifs and choreography aligned with works from national poets. These ballets created, such as *Gulyandom* (1940) in Uzbekistan, served to initiate the national repertoires within the ballet companies of these Soviet republics. The idea of

drama-ballet as a template stills stand, although the question of authenticity, a highly debatable issue, comes into play when we consider non-locals creating a work for local audiences.

The trajectory moves beyond the borders of the Soviet Union, particularly to Egypt and Cuba in the 1960s, an era when the Soviet Union was seeking greater influence abroad during the Cold War. The introduction of ballet in Egypt was initiated in 1958 when the Minister of Culture, Dr. Tharwat Okasha, asked the Soviets for assistance in setting up a national ballet school. The Bolshoi Ballet of Moscow sent experts to set up the school and select local children to go through their signature training method. During this time the Bolshoi Ballet selected a few promising students to attend their school in Moscow, training them in the technically rigorous Vaganova Method that Soviet ballet is based upon. Eight years later, Egypt had its own ballet company with Egyptian dancers. The first production staged was *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* and Leonid Lavrovsky, a former dancer and choreographer of many acclaimed productions including *Romeo and Juliet* (1940), was sent from Moscow to stage the ballet. Principal dancers from the Cairo Ballet Company, most notably Magda Saleh and Abdel Moneium Kamel, would later go on tour with the both the Bolshoi and Kirov ballet companies, dancing the lead roles in various ballets. This type of cultural exchange was part of the Soviet's Middle East policy, which focused in particular on relations with Egypt between 1956 to 1974. In Cuba, as opposed to Egypt where there was no prior history of ballet, Alicia Alonso, the famed dancer and founder of the Cuban National Ballet, had already made a successful career dancing in New York as well touring in Moscow prior to the Cold War. Due to this preexisting ballet tradition, the importation of Soviet ballet and drama-ballet in particular had a very different reception and evolution. The Cuban National Ballet was noted for its productions of *Giselle*, rather than the staging of an

overtly Soviet ballet. The influence became not a dominating one, but one that merged with the Cuban pedagogical method.

For both Egypt and Cuba, the genre of drama-ballet was imported and used to help create national ballets. In Egypt, after the Cairo Ballet Company's first ballet production of *The Fountain of Bakhchisarai* in 1966, the company went on to specifically develop Egyptian ballets based on folk tales and mythology, including *Cleopatra* (1978) and *Osiris* (1984). Given that the company was steeped in not only the pedagogical training from the ballet masters of the Bolshoi but also in staging a classic drama-ballet production, future ballets relied on this template that had formed the foundation of their repertoire. In Cuba, works by the Cuban choreographer Gustavo Herrera, whose ballets were mostly staged in the 1970s at the height of the Cuban-Soviet cultural exchange, exemplified the criteria of drama-ballet. His ballets are based on national texts, for example *Elegías antillanas* (1970) based on a poem by the national poet Nicolás Guillén and *De cara al sol* (1972), based on the poem by José Martí, and link the choreography to the text much in the style of Soviet drama-ballet.

Ultimately, as this drama-ballet template is adapted and used in countries further away from Moscow, the role of ideology diminishes. For Georgia, ideology was already seen as an element that could be minimized and made more ambiguous. In the periphery of the Soviet Union, the general themes of revolution and class struggle were enough to satisfy the need for depicting socialist realism. In the case of *Romeo and Juliet*, the production's success abroad was seen by Soviet authorities as success for spreading the Leninist-Marxist principles. The irony is that rather than convince audiences in New York that such principles were worth following, it instead influenced the creation of Jerome Robbins' *West Side Story*, which when released as a film version in 1961 became one of the highest grossing musical films of all time, with such pro-

capitalist hits singing “I like the shores of America / Comfort is yours in America / Knobs on the doors in America / Wall-to-wall floors in America!”[274] Irony aside, drama-ballet broke the choreographic conventions of nineteenth century ballet, elevating the word in the new relationship between dance, music, and narrative. Emerging from the shadow of European influences and conventions that had dominated ballet in Russia until its inception, drama-ballet established Soviet artistic power on a stage for all the world to watch.

[274] Sondheim, Stephen, lyricist. “America.” *West Side Story*, music by Leonard Bernstein, directed by Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins, A Mirisch Pictures and Seven Arts Productions, 1961.

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