A Voice Unknown: Undercurrents in Mussorgsky’s *Sunless*

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The only element I have here is feeling, and the result isn’t half bad.
—Mussorgsky

Sunless (Bez solntsa), the cycle of six short songs set in 1874 to poems of Count Arseny Arkad’evich Golenishchev-Kutuzov (1848–1913), is unique in Mussorgsky’s slim output. Composed between 7 May and 25 August 1874, it is perhaps his single most intimate and directly personal artistic utterance. While it was far from unusual for Mussorgsky to put something of himself into his songs and other works, his common practice was to mediate and “objectify” such personal injections by the adoption of an alternative persona, as that, for example, of the young “village idiot” in the early song “Darling Savishna” (Svetik Savishna). In Sunless Mussorgsky adopted a far more unmasked, “subjective” approach; in crude terms the cycle represents a turn from realism to Romanticism. This fundamental change in aesthetic orientation has spawned much speculation on its motivation. A common explanation is that Sunless represents Mussorgsky’s reaction to a number of problems in his life and

1All dates are given in Old Style. The exact chronology of its composition, according to the completion dates on the autograph score, is as follows: 7 May, no. 1, “Within Four Walls” (V chetyrekh stenakh); 19 May, no. 2, “You Did Not Know Me in the Crowd” (Ty menia v tolpe ne uznala); 19–20 May (i.e., overnight), no. 3, “The Idle, Noisy Day is Over” (Okonchen prazdnyi, shumnyi den’); 2 June, no. 4, “Ennui” (Skuchai); 19 August, no. 5, “Elegy” (Elegiia) and 25 August, no. 6, “On the River” (Nad rekoi). Mussorgsky did not work solely on Sunless during these months. Between nos. 1 and 2, he completed the ballad “Forgotten” (Zabytyi), also to a text by Golenishchev-Kutuzov, written after Vasily Vereshchagin’s famously censored, anti-war painting. According to Orlova, Mussorgsky at one point seriously considered including this song in the Sunless cycle, but later changed his mind. See Alexandra Orlova, *Mussorgsky’s Days and Works: A Biography in Documents*, ed. and trans. Roy J. Guenther, Russian Music Studies 4, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown [Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983], p. 16. Between nos. 4 and 5, Mussorgsky completed *Pictures at an Exhibition* (dated 22 June) and began work on a satirical vocal work to be called “The Hill of Nettles” (Krapivnaya gora), but never completed it.

career in the period leading up to its composition. Pavel Lamm, for example, suggested that *Sunless* was an “answer” to the vicissitudes Mussorgsky had met in early 1874 in relation to the staging of *Boris Godunov*, its subsequent harsh critical appraisal [by friend and foe alike], and, ultimately, the break-up of the *moguchaia kuchka* itself. More recently, Alexandra Orlova has cited personal difficulties, including the deaths of his friends Viktor Gartmann, on 23 July 1873, and Nadezhda Opochinina, on 30 June 1874, as background factors to the notably gloomy disposition of the cycle. Between Lamm and Orlova, Soviet writers of the Stalinist and immediate post-Stalinist period were required to search for a greater-than-personal motivation to justify the *Sunless* cycle’s descent into pessimism. Thus, Iury Keldysh submitted that the cycle reflects the malaise of the liberal, mixed-class intelligentsia, the so-called *raznochintsy*, in the depressing social conditions of the 1870s. This supposed class malady served, in fact, as an explanation for what Keldysh saw, or had to see, as a general decline in Mussorgsky’s work after *Boris Godunov*. This line was continued by V. A. Vasina-Grossman. Although orthodox Soviet views like those of Keldysh and Grossman now seem overly tendentious, it is certainly possible to give more than a little credence to those of Lamm and Orlova. These, however, largely, or indeed completely, ignore the author of the cycle’s texts. Golenischev-Kutuzov remains today not much more than a footnote to the history of Russian letters, and it is difficult to assess precisely what sort of aesthetic influence he may have had over Mussorgsky. Richard Taruskin notes that Golenischev-Kutuzov’s aristocratic “aestheticism” was strongly at odds with the populist and realist strains in art that, as espoused by polemists like Stasov, temporarily held sway in the 1860s and 1870s. It was Mussorgsky, of course, that Stasov held to be the prime exemplar of these strains in music. Thus, in stark contrast to the commonly received artist-of-the-people image of Mussorgsky, sponsored primarily by Stasov, Golenischev-Kutuzov was far, aesthetically, from being a man of his times (although he would come into his own much later in his career, during the so-called Silver Age). Late in the 1880s Golenischev-Kutuzov completed a memoir of Mussorgsky, which was not published until after the poet’s death. His intention in it, quite explicitly stated, was to

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4Orlova, *Mussorgsky’s Days*, pp. 23–24. Death can certainly be interpreted as a theme in *Sunless*, but it is hard to see the cycle as a specific response to the death of individuals. In the case of Gartmann’s death, this had already been memorialized, in a style very different from that of *Sunless*, in *Pictures at an Exhibition*. In the case of Opochinina, Mussorgsky had already completed the first four numbers of *Sunless* before her death. Orlova notes that Mussorgsky attempted to memorialize Opochinina in a work titled “The Epitaph” (*Nadgrabnoe pismo*) but was unable to complete it, and that he eventually “returned to *Sunless*, the completion of which was a more natural response to the loss of his dear friend” (*Mussorgsky’s Days*, p. 24). The title of the fifth number, “Elegy,” does loosely suggest that the song may have a memorializing intent, but it is difficult to draw a specific conclusion concerning this.

5Iurii Keldysh, *Romansovata lirika Musorgskogo* [*Mussorgsky’s Lyric Romances*] (Moscow: Gos. muzykal’noe izd-vo, 1933), p. 7, cited in Walker, “Mussorgsky’s *Sunless* Cycle,” p. 387. After the decade of the “Great Reforms,” the 1870s were a period tinged with mixed progress of continuing reform and increasing reaction. Views such as Keldysh’s should be compared with the position of Richard Taruskin, who argues that Mussorgsky never fully, if, indeed, at all, identified as a *raznochintsy*. See *Mussorgsky: Eight Essays and an Epilogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 383–90.


deconstruct the very image of Mussorgsky carefully crafted by Stasov. As Taruskin points out, Golenishchev-Kutuzov's account of Mussorgsky's artistic significance is every bit as tendentious as Stasov's, but it does perform the service of a valuable corrective, even if it is as suspect as the portrait it sought to revise. Golenishchev-Kutuzov himself does not claim to have exerted an influence, aesthetically, over Mussorgsky. Rather, the line that emerges from the memoir is that Golenishchev-Kutuzov merely provided a necessary outlet for a powerful, and pent up, "aesthetic" streak that was already intrinsic to Mussorgsky's artistic make-up, disposition, and, indeed, social class.

If this be accepted, then Sunless can certainly be explained as one of the most distinctive products of Mussorgsky's supposedly suppressed pure-art vein. The literary tone of Golenishchev-Kutuzov's texts for Sunless—which, their author later stressed, Mussorgsky chose himself—is deeply melancholic and narcissistic. In his memoir, Golenishchev-Kutuzov notes that the "five [sic] poems in the [Sunless] collection are purely lyrical . . . their subjects are fleeting, emotional moods in Fet's vein." In keeping with this more autonomous aesthetic streak, Mussorgsky's music in Sunless largely eschews the stylistic traits of kuchkism (assuming there to be a homogeneous set of these in the first place). Gone are the sharp characterizations of Mussorgsky's earlier songs. With a couple of exceptions, the piano accompaniments in Sunless are highly effaced and lack the self-conscious stylization, pictorialism, and "commentary" of many of Mussorgsky's other songs. More so than in any other of his songs, in these it is the harmony alone that bears the burden of expression and sympathetic connection with the texts. Kuchkist recitative has largely been supplanted by a more measured rhythmic delivery, with the voice occasionally partaking of lyrical cantilena, foreshadowing the "intelligently justified melody" he later described to Stasov in connection with his ongoing work on Khovanshchina. In sum, this music is, for Mussorgsky, one that is drastically reduced in terms of its reliance on external elements and references; indeed, it is one of the most introspective, interior pieces he wrote.

Naturally enough, his former kuchkist associates decried Sunless implicitly, if not explicitly, on these terms. They uniformly wrote it off as a feeble work, the product of a fading artist. As Walker points out, Stasov could find little praise for Sunless in his biographical sketch of Mussorgsky, written in 1881. For Rimsky-Korsakov, the year of the creation of Sunless (1874) marked the beginning of Mussorgsky's creative decline. For César Cui, Mussorgsky's former ally, Sunless was "formlessness carried out to the illogical, to the absence of musical sense." Published reviews of the cycle, which was printed in 1876, were predictably scathing.

12Michael Russ describes the first two songs, in particular, as "acts of compositional withdrawal" ("Modeste Mussorgsky and Arseny Golenishchev-Kutuzov," Irish Musical Studies 5 [1996], 247).

13See his letter to Stasov of 25 December 1876, quoted in Orlova, Mussorgsky's Days, p. 515.


16See, for example, those of Konstantin Galler and Herman Laroche. Galler's review appeared on 24 March 1875 in Birzhevye vedomosti [The Stock-Exchange Gazette], no. 81, Laroche's on 9 June 1876 in Golos [The Voice], no. 158. So unremittingly harsh was Laroche's appraisal that Golenishchev-Kutuzov was moved to pen a defense. His essay, extant in several incomplete versions, was never published. Significant parts from all the above are quoted in Orlova, Mussorgsky's Days, pp. 452, 494-95, and 496-97 respectively.
hindsight, Golenishchev-Kutuzov saw all this coming:

"Many say," he [Mussorgsky] told me once, "that my only qualities are fluid form and humor. Well, we shall see what they say when I show them your poems [Sunless]. The only element I have here is feeling, and the result isn't half bad."

The result was indeed good, but not to the taste of the "worshippers," who demanded a continuation and a repetition of "Peepshows," and "Seminarians," but Musorgsky was no longer capable of that style.18

To this brief sketch of Sunless as one of the ripest fruits of Mussorgsky's "aestheticism," we may now add a little further color. Mussorgsky had first met Golenishchev-Kutuzov some time in the early 1870s. By the time of writing Sunless Mussorgsky was on intimate terms with him, and at some point they shared an apartment. It is not known exactly how long the two cohabited, but if Richard Taruskin's estimate that it was around "fourteen months, beginning at the end of March 1874"19 is correct, then this time included the composition of Sunless. The close friendship that Golenishchev-Kutuzov claims was shared by the two, and the nature and tone of several of Mussorgsky's later letters to him have raised some questions on the exact nature of their relationship in its most intimate phase. Taruskin suggests that, if not sexual, it was at least "homoerotic."20 It was Golenishchev-Kutuzov's decision to marry, taken in late 1875, that marked the clear and abrupt cessation of this phase of their friendship.21 The decision provoked a strong emotional reaction from Mussorgsky. Surviving letters to Golenishchev-Kutuzov of December 1875 betray a tone of desperation. For example,

10-11 December—night again
... I entreat you: understand, and if you can, with the heart (how could you not!)—you are the chosen one, one can't help loving you—what is this that you're doing? This week has a Friday—we await you, friend.

Yours, forever, without doubt, your Modeste22

By the end of December Mussorgsky was clearly resigned, though not yet in any way reconciled, to his friend's decision:

My friend Arseni, it is quiet in the warm, cozy home, at the writing-table—only the fireplace sputters. Sleep is a great wonder-worker for those who have tasted the affliction of this earth, thus sleep reigns—powerful, tranquil, loving. In this silence, in the peace of all minds, all consciences and all desires—I, adoring you, I alone threaten you. My threat has no anger: it is as calm as sleep without nightmares. Neither goblin, nor ghost, I stood before you. I should like to stay a simple, artless, unfortunate friend to you. You have chosen your path—go! You disdain all; an empty intimation, the joking sorrow of friendship, the assurance in you and in your thoughts—in your creations, you disdained the cry of the heart—and you do disdain it! It's not for me to judge; I am no augur, no oracle. But, at leisure from the anxieties that are

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19Taruskin, Mussorgsky, p. 14. Taruskin cites Orlova, "Trudy i dni M. P. Mussorgskogo: letopis' zhizni i tvorchestva" [Moscow: Gos. muzykal'noe izd-vo, 1963], p. 390 in support of this time period. The reference to March 1874 is also found in the later English translation and revision of Orlova's work; see Mussorgsky's Days, p. 411. Golenishchev-Kutuzov himself more vaguely recollected that it was in the autumn of 1874 that he and Mussorgsky "decided to share rooms" (Golenishchev-Kutuzov, "Reminiscences of Mussorgsky," p. 95). More recently, however, Orlova has expressed reservations about the length of time Golenishchev-Kutuzov claimed that it was the two shared quarters, suggesting that it was only for "a very short time" and not before 7 March 1874. She details documentary evidence, mainly in the form of correspondence between the two, in order to prove that they lived apart for much of 1874-75 (Mussorgsky Remembered, p. 174, n.20). She also claims that Golenishchev-Kutuzov falsely augmented the time he and Mussorgsky lived together in order to strengthen the claim to intimacy between them presented in his "Reminiscences" (Mussorgsky Remembered, p. xii).
20Taruskin, Mussorgsky, p. 30.
21They were nonetheless eventually reconciled, and Golenishchev-Kutuzov was one of those who tended Mussorgsky in his final days (ibid., p. 14).
coming for you alone, do not forget
"The narrow, tranquil, peaceful room,
And me, my friend,
do not curse."
Forever your
Modeste
23–24 December, '75.
At night, "sunless."23

It is at this point that one must assess what lay at the heart of Mussorgsky's distress. There are two views here. One is clearly that Mussorgsky, at the very least, held on to some sort of infatuation with Golenishchev-Kutuzov and was naturally wounded by his decision to marry. There being little significant evidence at all about Mussorgsky's sexuality, it would be unreasonable to discount this position on the grounds of lack of positive evidence of his homosexuality.24 Taruskin is of this view and finds that the language of those final letters of 1875 gives, at the very least, cause to "wonder about the nature of their 'most intimate friendship'."25 The other position holds that Mussorgsky's reaction to Golenishchev-Kutuzov's impending marriage was purely an artistic one. This position is maintained by Orlova and amplified by Michael Russ, who notes that Mussorgsky tended to ladle his communications to friends with an excess of sentiment (declarations of love, hugs, and kisses, etc.), which is prone to misreading by contemporary, Western readers. He also maintains that marriage was held by Mussorgsky [and Stasov] to be a "barrier to artistic creation." He cites disappointment on Mussorgsky's part toward Rimsky-Korsakov's marriage as support for this and overall dismisses the possibility of a sexual or even homoerotic link between Mussorgsky and Golenishchev-Kutuzov.26 I leave it for the reader to follow up and consider these arguments on their merits. (In what follows, I am inclined to accept Taruskin's view in these matters.)

If a homoerotic dimension to their relationship is accepted—even, indeed, if it was only ever a one-sided infatuation—Sunless emerges as a work almost certainly colored by something of this relationship. Quite apart from the obvious fact that it is a collaborative effort, there is reason to consider not only that it contains some level of interior, covert, private significance, but also that it may deal in some way with the homoerotic as a theme. In his memoir of Mussorgsky, Golenishchev-Kutuzov relates how it was Mussorgsky who decided on the poetic contents of the cycle by choosing pre-existing poems from the poet's notebook. Going further, Golenishchev-Kutuzov added, "I must emphasize that Musorgsky chose the poems himself, and his choice was not without a special significance."27 In the aftermath of Golenishchev-Kutuzov's decision to marry, two references to the cycle made in written exchanges between the two collaborators betrays something of the special significance that Sunless held for both of them. The first of these occurs in the second letter quoted above, in which Mussorgsky beseeches Golenishchev-Kutuzov not to forget "the narrow, tranquil, peaceful room." This is a very pointed reference to the first line of the first poem in the cycle, a reference to the fruits, the child, of their first collaboration. In dating the letter, Mussorgsky writes "at night," a common addition made to letters he wrote overnight, but in this instance adds, "'sunless'," thus linking his current nocturnal solitude to that of the protagonist in the cycle. In its rumination on ear-

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24Taruskin details a host of "oft-noted if seldom interrelated" circumstances that could conceivably conspire to substantiate Mussorgsky's homosexuality, but he is reluctant to drive the point very far. See Mussorgsky, p. 30n. To date, the only dedicated investigation of Mussorgsky's sexual proclivities is June Turner, "Musorgsky," Music Review 47 (1986–87), 153–75. Turner expounds an elaborate thesis to substantiate Mussorgsky's not only homosexual, but masochistic, make up, based on the interpretation of letters and other texts found mainly [and in translation] throughout Leyda and Bertensson. While there does seem to be grounds to assert that Mussorgsky's sexual being was complex (whose isn't?), some aspects of Turner's pathological exegesis tend, for me at least, to stretch credulity.


27Golenishchev-Kutuzov, "Reminiscences of Musorgsky," p. 95. This precedes the line concerning the poems' "lyrical" nature, quoted above. The context does not make clear, however, if it was simply the "Fet-like" character of the poems that was especially significant, or something else, undisclosed.
lier intimacy now lost to unending gloom and solitude, *Sunless* had surely come to seem at least a little prophetic for Mussorgsky. In this sense, the cycle may be understood to be, for Mussorgsky at least, emblematic of his former intimacy with the poet. On the face of it, therefore, it seems reasonable to propose that at the time of its composition it spoke, perhaps even in some fatalistic way, to Mussorgsky’s then attachment to Golenishchev-Kutuzov. On Golenishchev-Kutuzov’s part, we have the reference to *Sunless* in the context of an undated poem entitled “To M. P. Musorgsky” (*M. P. Musorgskomu*). Orlova dates the text, or at least sketches for it, at “early 1876”.[28] Taruskin, who considers the poem of sufficient significance to quote it in its entirety, concurs and proposes that the poem can be construed as a “maximally flattering peace offering . . . after renouncing their unwholesome intimacy in favor of marriage.”[29] The crucial lines for consideration of *Sunless* are 19–38.

> It used to be that, late in evening’s quiet,  
> Visions and dreams came flying to me,  
> Some full of woe, doubt and torment,  
> Others bright-eyed, with smiling lips . . .  
> I poured out my thoughts in truthful lines,  
> And you would clothe them in mysterious sounds,  
> As if in wondrous priestly vestments—and, sung by you,  
> They sparkled in undreamt of beauty!  
> It used to be . . . But why arouse these recollections,  
> When the warm light of hope burns in my soul?  
> Let my song not be a song of parting,  
> Better let it ring with future greeting.  
> The mist of magic reveries, of secret strivings,  
> The narcissistic folly of mad youth  
> I have put away—and of new inspirations  
> An untold vastness has opened up before me.  
> “Sunless,” I had to grope about me clumsy in the world,  
> The only tongue I heard amid the dark was death’s;  
> But the morning hour has come, and out has come the sun,  
> And a bright face of beauty new now stood before me.[30]

Lines 19–27 surely describe the writing of *Sunless*. Interestingly, they suggest a slightly different approach to the collaboration than that recollected by Golenishchev-Kutuzov in his memoir—not only different, but more intimate. This is obviously a romanticized version of events, but what we find here is the impression, or ideal, of a continuity of flow of inspiration through the vessel of the poet, thence seamlessly through that of the musician. It is also worth noticing the value placed on the cycle, irrespective of the “unwholesome” relationship that may have given birth to it. The lines are, indeed, “truthful,” and the songs themselves “sparkled in undreamt of beauty.” Thus, the poet is careful to quarantine *Sunless* itself from the personal renunciation alluded to later in the verse. It is those very “mysterious references to secret wishes, narcissism, and dementia in lines 31–32” that Taruskin quite plausibly suggests may contain “a clue to the homoerotic nature of the former relationship.”[32] These are then renounced, “put away,” in the second half of the quatrain (lines 33–34), revealing the new horizons thus “opened up.” This theme of folly and renunciation is then rehearsed in the following quatrain, in which *Sunless* is invoked as emblematic of that time of “magic reveries,” “secret strivings,” and “mad youth,” following which, now, “out has come the sun.” *Sunless* then, may be understood to have been entwined, no less in Golenishchev-Kutuzov’s mind than in Mussorgsky’s, with their former shared intimacy, whatever exact form it took.

## II

The circumstances surrounding the cycle’s composition, as we can understand them, provide as much reason to consider the cycle an expression of the most intimate, covert feel-

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31It is unlikely to refer to the *Songs and Dances of Death*, Golenishchev-Kutuzov’s and Mussorgsky’s only other major collaboration. This later project also involved Stasov, who made certain suggestions to Golenishchev-Kutuzov about the contents of the texts. See Orlova, *Musorgsky’s Days*, pp. 446, 448. As Russ notes, Golenishchev-Kutuzov may have thought of these texts as “something constructed to order” (“Musorgsky and Golenishchev-Kutuzov,” p. 249). As such, these would emphatically not be the “Visions and dreams [which] came flying,” as described in the poem.
ings and ideas of its composer, as they do to consider it an expression of wider personal vicissitudes or, less plausibly, some sort of class reaction to the increasingly conservative flavor of the 1870s. (Of course, one should keep in mind that these options are not mutually exclusive.) Given both this possibility and the much more introverted nature of the cycle, compared to the bulk of Mussorgsky’s previous output, there seems a need to consider its musical technique and style from a more interiorized vantage point than might be the case in a repertoire whose references are more overt and whose level of communication is somewhat less abstract and withdrawn. The remaining parts of this article investigate the music of select numbers of Sunless—specifically songs 1, 2, 3, and 6—with the cycle’s interior orientation as a critical perspective. The analysis advanced will suggest evidence in these songs of both an immediate, intuitive, emotional response to the “moods” of the text that complements, indeed, dovetails remarkably with, a more intellectual, symbolic system of reference and textual reading.

The harmonic language of Sunless, especially in the songs considered in detail here, is extensively reliant on modal mixture. Indeed, mixture predominates in Sunless to the extent that other forms of chromaticism, for example, that produced by temporary tonicization at various levels, are largely absent. The expressive harmonic world of Sunless thus achieves much of its uniformity of tone through this singularity of chromatic procedure. As noted above, this harmonic element carries much of the weight in “clothing” the shifting, expressive moods of Golenishchev-Kutuzov’s text. This fluctuating modal fabric of the music is a readily perceived phenomenon, of course, lying very much on the surface. A second, more specific, feature of harmonic organization in Sunless is the use of pitch symmetry, in particular: the use of tritone juxtaposition and fleeting, but suggestive, references to the whole-tone scale. This aspect introduces into the cycle another potential layer of meaning, one that is at once more symbolic and “knowing,” and one that suggests a planned, or preconceived, approach to composition, rather than an intuitive one. In this aspect of its form, Sunless clearly modifies and adapts a pre-existing referential system often associated with symmetrical usage in nineteenth-century Russian music. The specifically Russian symbolism of the whole-tone scale extends back, at least, to Glinka and Ruslan and Ludmilla, in which it is directly associated with the powers of evil magic, personified in the dwarf Chernomor, whose appearance it underlines. From here grew the Russian tradition of using “synthetic” chromaticism, generally born of octave symmetry, to signify the world of magic and fairy tale (evil or benign), opposed to the worldly and human, as signified by means of “natural” diatonicism, or, at least, more normative harmonic practice. Although this tradition was still in its adolescence in the 1870s, no one in progressive Russian musical circles was unaware of it. Rimsky-Korsakov’s two early orchestral works, Sadko (1867) and Antar (1868), both utilized symmetrical procedures at dramatically appropriate moments. Mussorgsky himself made use of such procedures, notably in Boris Godunov, where we find him adapting the symbolism of symmetrical structures to his own dramatic ends. The Ruslanesque fairy-tale domain was clearly inappropriate to this context, but the signification of evil remained a vital component in the drama, and synthetic chromaticism plays an important part in connoting the complex of ideas around murder, guilt, paranoia, and so on. A further facet of the

33For an account of whole-tone usage in Ruslan and Ludmilla, see Mary S. Woodside, “Leitmotiv in Russia: Glinka’s Use of the Whole-Tone Scale,” this journal 14 (1990), 67–74.

34The development of symmetrical chromaticism in Russian music of the nineteenth century has been exhaustively charted ➔ Richard Taruskin, “Chernomor to Kashchei: Harmonic Sorcery; or, Stravinsky’s ‘Angle,” Journal of the American Musicological Society 38 (1985), 72–142. As Taruskin demonstrates, the later nineteenth-century Russian penchant for symmetrical chromaticism grew very much out of an interest in the novel harmonic procedures of progressive Western composers, especially Liszt, and especially cyclic rotations of harmonic structures based on partitioning of the octave by thirds. While Glinka’s occasional experiments themselves were, as Woodside suggests, unlikely to have been borrowed from Western models of his day, the techniques associated with octave symmetry in later nineteenth-century Russian music seem, thanks to Balakirev, largely to have been adopted from Western models. Glinka’s bequest to later nineteenth-century Russian octave symmetry lies probably more in the particular semantic associations he established with it.
symmetrical usage in *Boris Godunov* is its emphasis on tritonal oppositions, revealed most famously at the beginning of the Coronation scene with its famous “dominant sevenths a tritone apart.” Although Mussorgsky was not the originator of this harmonic device, his use of it here and elsewhere in symmetrically based passage work in the opera—see, for example, the scene with the chiming clock and final hallucinatory monologue in act II—shows that tritone opposition was integral to his thinking in symmetrical structures. Extending this concept, tritone polarity also plays an important part in key signification in the opera, as demonstrated by Robert Oldani. In the scheme that Oldani proposes, tritonal key relationships can be found that express referential dichotomies intrinsic to the drama.

This background is important to the consideration of *Sunless* despite the very different generic and aesthetic nature of the work. The important aspect about symmetry is less the specific significance attributable to individual cases than its general potential to signify a dichotomy, whether through juxtaposition of symmetrical against normative harmonic procedures, or through the related concept of tritone juxtaposition of pitches, chords, and keys (particularly I and IV). It is this general referential capacity that Mussorgsky draws on, not infrequently, in *Sunless*. It will be seen in more detail below how parts of the text (especially in the first three poems) make important distinctions, for instance, between past and present. The present, in Golenishchev-Kutuzov’s poems for *Sunless*, is unremittingly gloomy while references to the past hint at happier, although perhaps misspent, times. This past-and-present concept may be expanded, not unpredictably, to embrace other dichotomies, including love and loss of love, company and solitude, rapture and oblivion. At a further extent of interpretation, we might even propose juxtapositions between decadence and wholesomeness, between unwholesome homoeroticism and upright, but stifling, “normality.” It is up to the reader how far to pursue these readings, but the possible viability of such interpretations is not to be dismissed outright.

One of Mussorgsky’s special achievements in *Sunless* is the way he managed to blend the two means of harmonic organization discussed in broad terms above and, thus, blend the expressive and symbolic aspects of the cycle’s meaning. Unlike the gaudy necessities of operatic presentation, in these salon romances referential juxtapositions are softened and “ nuanced” in a way entirely appropriate to the “subjective lyricism” of the poetry. In order to achieve this, Mussorgsky draws on the potential of modal mixture to incorporate aspects of symmetrical organization. His means of doing so is varied in each of the songs, but some very basic principles (of which he was clearly, in some sense, aware) are worth reviewing briefly.

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36See Caryl Emerson and Robert William Oldani, *Modest Mussorgsky and Boris Godunov: Myths, Realities, Reconsiderations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 239–76. On p. 240, in figure 9.1, a number of referential tritone juxtapositions are schematicized, including: D, “retribution” / A♭ “Desire for peace”; A, “Release from Dmitry” / E♭, “Dmitry.” An alternative scheme has been proposed by Allen Forte, who denotes a series of tritonally opposed, referential pitch classes (all derived from a single octatonic scale), which may function as roots of referential chords, or tonics of significant keys, but which also retain referential significance in their own right. See “Mussorgsky as Modernist,” *Music Analysis* 9 (1990), 6ff.

37Tritonal harmonic dichotomies as signifiers of homo/heterosexuality may recall, to those familiar with them, Timothy Jackson’s arguments about the symphonic works of Tchaikovsky. → Timothy Jackson, “Aspects of Sexuality and Structure in the Later Symphonies of Tchaikovsky,” *Music Analysis* 14 (1995), 3–25, and *Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 6 (Pathétique)*, Cambridge Music Handbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). The present analysis is cautious of Jackson’s bolder assertions, but a parallel reading reveals some superficial comparisons, which I somewhat defensively acknowledge. For instance, Jackson’s “reading of the Fourth Symphony [of Tchaikovsky] proposes that fated homosexuality is represented by an ‘unorthodox’ k5/4 chromatic-enharmonic deformation of the dominant and subdominant scale degrees” ("Aspects of Sexuality," p. 11). This might find a parallel in the salient, and clearly referential, use of k5 in the first three numbers of *Sunless*. The differences with the present offering are that my analysis does not attempt to specify symbolic meaning to quite such a degree and that Jackson argues for these references at deep levels of structure (employing Schenkerian apparatus to reveal it). This latter aspect to his argument is both his most intriguing and, unfortunately, controversial point. For a review of Jackson’s analysis of Tchaikovsky’s Sixth Symphony, see Marina Frolova-Walker, review of *Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 6 (Pathétique)*, by Timothy Jackson, *Music & Letters* 82 (2001), 128–31.
Example 1: Models for modal mixture and whole-tone interaction.

in the abstract. One direct path to this nexus of modal mixture and (specifically whole-tone) pitch symmetry exists in the combination of generically major and minor scale forms in the lower and upper tetrachords, respectively, of a “standard” seven-note scale structure.38 In terms of the mixture/symmetry nexus, this combination can be considered a first degree of mixture, producing the form given in ex. 1a, which retains the other two “structural” pitches of subdominant and dominant in unaltered form. Present in this seven-note collection is a whole-tone pentachord (beamed). The rearrangement of the form shown in ex. 1b, a sort of turning “inside out,” reveals the symmetrical aspect of this stage of mixture more clearly, where the tonic, C, becomes an axis with a mirror-image interval series (2–2–1 etc.) radiating outward from it. In this latter arrangement of the model, the whole-tone pentachord is expressed as a single, contiguous scale segment balanced on the tonic/axis.

In the second stage of this model, further mixture to either tetrachord—altering the lower one to Lydian, or the upper one to Locrian, as in ex. 1c and e—produces a complete whole-tone hexachord bounded, in the inside-out version, by either b6 and #4, or b5 and 3, in ex. 1d and f, respectively. In these cases, the whole-tone presence notwithstanding, the role of the tonic is not truly axial because the positioning of the whole-tone hexachord tends to suggest either a quasi-authentic (ex. 1c and d) or quasi-plagal (ex. 1e and f) structure—that is, preserving either the natural dominant or natural subdominant, but not both. This stage presents, therefore, a midway point between uncompromised functionality and total symmetry. In the third and final stage of mixture in this model, a combined presence of Lydian lower and Locrian upper tetrachords produces a “seven-note” whole-tone scale, ex. 1g, with a notational “overlap” at the tritone from the tonic (whose traditional sense must now be considered severely denuded). Turning this inside out (ex. 1h) provides a contiguous whole-tone series.

38Related to this derivation, of course, is the “Liszttian” rotation of triads through a cycle of major thirds (for example, I–VI–III–I), which also invokes the principle of mixture. As acknowledged above (see n. 34), such progressions, typical of progressive mid-nineteenth-century music, certainly form a backdrop to the investigation of symmetrical routines (both whole-tone and octatonic) in Russia.
spanning an augmented seventh, poised on an axial tonic whose status is now defined solely by its symmetrical positioning. The doubly spelled tritone might, in this model, even be considered to take on an abstract role of substitute subdominant and dominant. In summary, these examples suggest how the path traveled, from the conventional functionality implicit in ex. 1a to the symmetrical, nonfunctional environment of ex. 1h, is not a matter of different techniques but, rather, of the degree of application of a single technique.

Another model that relates modality to symmetry is what might be called “slippage.” Instances of individual chords and even progressions that seem to have slid down, or up, a semitone, are not infrequent in Mussorgsky's music. (Slid, that is, from a position that would produce a more normative sounding progression.) There are several instances of this type of progression in Sunless, especially in the third song. The result of this phenomenon often invokes the substitution of a structural tritone relation in lieu of a structural fourth or fifth one. If we keep the discussion in the scalar context for the moment (allowing that the degrees altered or otherwise can form roots, or even other chordal factors), it can be seen, for instance, that a flattening of the upper tetrachord of a diatonic major scale produces a model in which there is, again, a strong whole-tone presence (ex. 2). Two contiguous, three-step whole-tone segments are “divided” by pitches a tritone apart. These dividers are the subdominant and the enharmonic leading-note/flat tonic. This pair, as a tritone, has a strong dominant functional tendency [labeled “D” in ex. 2], pointing simultaneously in two directions (as indicated by the dual notation 7/8) to tonal centers that are themselves a tritone apart. The lower tetrachords and leading notes of both of these centers are represented in the structure. This is, therefore, another significant model for symmetrical/functional inter-

39A harmonized variant of this final model is found explicitly in act II of Mussorgsky's Boris Godunov (in the 1872 version), accompanying Shuisky's first mention of the Pretender to Boris. Each note of a contiguous whole-tone series from $G$ to $F#$ (an octave higher) is harmonized by a major triad in root position. The bass line moves in contrary motion, outlining an octatonic hexachord ($G$–$F$–$E$–$C$–$B$–$A$–$F#$). Allen Forte has pointed out this remarkable passage in the context of his discussion of incipient modernism in Boris Godunov. See Forte, “Mussorgsky as Modernist,” pp. 11–12. Although he acknowledges the whole-tone element, Forte's commentary is more concerned with the passage as an octatonic outgrowth of the famous tritone-related dominant-seventh chords of the Coronation scene (Prologue, scene 2).

40This functional duality will strike a chord in readers aware of the concepts of the early-twentieth-century Russian theorist, Boleslav Lavorsky. In his theory of “modal rhythm” (which extends far beyond the mere concerns of pitch structure, being intended as a universal theory of music) the tritone is the fundamental source of harmonic “gravitation.” The theory allows for a particular set of phenomena called the “duplex modes” in which the ambiguous resolution potential of the tritone, to resolve “inwards” or “outwards,” is integral. For further discussion, see Gordon D. McQuere, “The Theories of Boleslav Lavorsky,” Russian Theoretical Thought in Music, ed. Gordon D. McQuere, Russian Music Series 10 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), pp. 109–64; for an application of the theory to music of Mussorgsky, see Gordon D. McQuere, “Analyzing Mussorgsky’s ‘Gnome’,” Indiana Theory Review 13 (1989), 21–40.
action.\footnote{It is also worth noting that this slippage effect is a phenomenon relatable to octatonicism in early-twentieth-century music; that of Stravinsky and Bartók springs to mind in particular. In the case of Bartók, the phenomenon has been referred to by János Kárpáti under the rubric of “mistuning” in the context of his discussion of “tonality and polytonality.” See Bartók’s Chamber Music, trans. Paul Merrick, trans. rev. Fred Macnicol and Mária Steiner [Stuyvesant, N.Y.: Pendragon Press, 1994], pp. 197–217. “Mistuning” as a concept developed by Kárpáti can relate to individual notes, but he also extends it to larger structures. He specifically links it to modal structures, considering, for instance, the “scale . . . of alternating whole tones and semitones” \cite{that is, the octatonic} to be a “mistuned form” \cite{of Dorian origin} (p. 199). Interesting, also, in the context of the discussion above, is Kárpáti’s observation that the “mistuning” phenomenon is linked to bitonality in Bartók’s music \cite{p. 218}. Many authors, of course, have pointed out the octatonic usage in Stravinsky, especially in The Rite of Spring. In terms of the relationship of octatonicism to modal structures, especially tetrachordal segments, in The Rite of Spring, Richard Taruskin’s consideration is probably the most penetrating in terms of its demonstration of the context out of which this nexus grew. See Stravinsky and the Russian Traditions: A Biography of the Works Through Mavra, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), I, 934–50. In particular, Taruskin demonstrates how a significant proportion of the folk materials used by Stravinsky in this work provided him with the basis for a “brilliantly original and thorough synthesis of the folkloristic and modernistic traditions of Russian art music” \cite{p. 937}. In other words, what had previously existed as antitheses in Russian art music, especially opera, since Glinka—\cite{the modal diatonic world of human character[s]} as opposed to the evocation of the supernatural through (especially symmetrical) chromaticism—were fused in The Rite. “Having drawn much of his material \cite{for The Rite} from the most archaic strata of surviving Slavic folk music—that of ceremonial and ‘calendar’ songs—and having therefore adopted or invented a fund of themes and motives that were more or less restricted in their melodic compass to the tones of the minor tetrachord \cite{T–S–T}, Stravinsky was led to base the harmonic idiom of the ballet with remarkable consistency on the hitherto very rare partition of the octatonic collection into two such tetrachords pitched a tritone apart” \cite{ibid.}).}

III

In the final number, “On the River,” the relationship between the text and referential symmetry in the musical organization is most overtly realized, and on this basis it provides a good starting point for the present analysis. The more or less overt theme of the text is one of increasing suicidal obsession. In a less specific sense the poem suggests a surrender to impulse, which may lead to alternative interpretations.

Mesiatova zadumchivyi, zvëzdy dalëkie
S sinego neba vodami liubiuutsia.
Molcha smotriu ia na vody glubokie;
Tainy volshebnye serdtsem v nikh chuiutsia.
Pleshchut, taitsiatsa, laskatel’no nezhnye;
Mnogo v ikh ropote sily charuiushchei:
Slyshatsia dumy i strasti bezbrezhnye . . .
Golos nevedomyi, dushu volnuiushchii.
Nezhit, pugaet, navodit somnenie.
Slushat’ velit li on? S mesta-b ne svinul’sia;
Gonit li proch’? Ubezhal by v smiatenii,
V glub’ li zovët? Bez ogljadki-b ia kinulsia!

(\textit{The pensive moon, the distant stars}  
Admire the waters from the dark blue heavens.
In silence I watch the deep waters;
In them I sense magical secrets of the heart.

They splash, conceal, are soothingly tender;
There are bewitching powers in their murmur:
Thoughts and reckless passions may be heard.
A voice unknown, which disturbs my soul.

It caresses, frightens, raises doubts.
Does it demand my attention? I would not move away;
Does it drive me off? I would flee in disarray;
Does it call me to the depths? I would cast myself in without a glance!\footnote{The prosaic translations of the song texts given in this article are my own; I take pleasure in thanking Dr. John McNair of the School of Languages and Comparative Cultural Studies, Faculty of Arts, The University of Queensland, for his perusal of and helpful advice on these translations.}

The text begins with the expansive, luminous imagery of “pensive moon,” “distant stars,” “dark blue heavens,”\footnote{\textit{S sinego neba} (From the dark blue heavens) is given alternatively as “\textit{S dal’nego neba}” (From the distant heavens) in the manuscript, while Golenishchev-Kutuzov appears originally to have written “\textit{S tëmmogo neba}” (From the dark heavens). See Lamm’s note in Musorgskii, \textit{Bez solntsa}, p. 19.} and “deep waters.” By the end of the first quatrain, the subtle rhythms of the river have begun to cast their spell over the protagonist. The waters “bewitching powers” are elaborated in the second quatrain before the emergence, in its final line, of a “voice
unknown," beckoning from the depths. In the third quatrain, all focus shifts to this mysterious voice as the protagonist attempts to understand its meaning. The final question, “Does it call me to the depths?” is resolved unequivocally: “I would cast myself in without a glance!”

It is not certain whether this voice represents some “real,” external force, or some inner compulsion of the protagonist. Ultimately this distinction may remain a matter for the individual reader, although, given the “subjective” orientation of the verse, the latter may be the preferred reading. What remains central to any reading of the text is its “process”—specifically its narrowing of focus and increasing obsession with a singularity (the “voice”), accompanied by a corresponding fading of the background imagery present at the opening. And it is precisely this process, more than any particular meanings or images, which is reflected in the musical setting.

Much could be written about the rhythmic aspect of this song alone. Suffice it to say here that qualities of repetitiveness, periodicity, and smoothness at various levels are calculated to underlie the protagonist’s self-absorbed, almost hypnotic, state. Similarly, too, pitch organization is exploited to underlie these characteristics. The most overt feature in this regard is the continuously oscillating C# pedal, which not only supports the sense of stasis and inner absorption, but also determines the song’s tonality, established here by salience rather than function. Over this point of stasis, an unfolding series of modally mixed harmonies supports the subtly shifting images and “moods” of the text. This sinuous thread of harmonies largely characterizes the song’s “tone.”

If the general factors of rhythmic organization and tonality may be understood to support aspects of the obsessive, but strangely trancelike, emotionally faced affect of the text, then it is largely the aspects of thematic design and distribution that support its process. This is realized by Mussorgsky’s increasingly restrictive thematic usage, one that parallels the text’s shift from expansive water imagery to concentration on the mysterious “voice” that calls the protagonist to his suicidal plunge. As the poet’s concentration narrows, two distinctive and related figures, or motives, come increasingly to dominate the musical material. These are shown, in the form in which they each first appear, in ex. 3 [labeled x and y]. They comprise the only recurring thematic materials of the piece and receive only small, but not insignificant, degrees of variation in subsequent appearances. Of these motives to come to dominate the thematic material can be gauged statistically. Of the fifty-two measures comprising the piece, just less than half, twenty-six, are given over to these two motives in some form or another, leaving twenty-nine for “free” material. Their specific appearances, moreover, show marked concentration toward the end of the song. In the first quatrain (mm. 2–17), only two out of sixteen measures are given over to this material (in the form of x), in the second quatrain (mm. 18–33) six of sixteen measures contain x or y material, while in the final quatrain (mm. 34–49), twelve measures do so, leaving only four for free material. The postlude is dominated by motive y to the exclusion of all other thematic material. It can also be seen by their distribution that x and y gradually come to share a close relationship. Tonality in this song, as suggested above, is articulated chiefly by the salience of C#, rather than by its functional definition. In the absence of such means, x takes on the role of a cadential gesture, as evidenced by its terminating role in each of the three quatrains. With the emergence of y in the second and third quatrains, a kind of antecedent-consequent structure is set up between y and x. This structure is first evident in the pairing of these motives in mm. 30–33 (where x closes the second quatrain); it is then strongly exploited in relation to the question-answer constructions in the last three lines of the text—that is, the three pairings of y and x that occupy mm. 38–49 [see ex. 6].

Significantly, both y and x relate to the tonic C# not functionally but symmetrically. This symmetry

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44The view that the C# supports an unresolved dominant prolongation seems untenable, despite the major-minor seventh on C# being an oft-used sonority in this song. Michael Russ tends slightly to this view of its tonality, but is somewhat equivocal about it. See “Be Bored: Reading a Mussorgsky Song,” this journal 20 (1996), 30. Arguments against F# as a tonal center would have to include the seven-sharps key signature that Mussorgsky himself supplied and the fact that the bare C#-major triad [sans seventh] is used at key points of internal termination—not least at the end of each quatrain.

45That is, a single introductory measure, forty-eight measures for each of the sixteen-measure quatrains, and six measures of piano postlude.

46The specific distribution is as follows: mm. 16–17; x 24–25; x 30–31; y 32–33; x 38–39; y 40–41; x 42–43; y 44–45; x 46–47; y 48–49; x 50–51; y 52–55.
a. Motive \textbf{x}.

Example 3: “On the River,” motives \textbf{x} and \textbf{y}.

b. Motive \textbf{y}.

Example 4: “On the River,” symmetrical properties of motives \textbf{x} and \textbf{y}.

is quite easily shown in relation to the linear aspect of each motive [see ex. 4a]. Motive \textbf{y} consists of two diminished triads a whole tone apart, symmetrically positioned within the compass of an octave C\# which they fill in an ascending motion. Motive \textbf{x} then partitions the same octave in the reverse direction by major thirds. Because of their clear relatedness, the two motives together, as “antecedent/consequent,” might also be considered usefully as a higher unity, \textbf{y}-\textbf{x}. The notation of both motives confers a central role on C\# as articulated through the division between A\# and E\# in each case. In other words, in both motives, there is a mirror dividing the first and second half of the motive so that the interval series traced from the originating C\# in the first half is reflected in the interval series approaching the terminating C\# in the second half. Motive \textbf{y} can, indeed, be considered a variant of \textbf{x} by inversion and “filling in,” such that the descending major thirds in \textbf{x}, C\#-A\# and E\#-C\#, become filled-in ascending minor sixths in \textbf{y}. The pitch content of ex. 4a is easily rearranged to show C\# more clearly as an axis [ex. 4b].

Both \textbf{x} and \textbf{y} as realized, however, have added components that contaminate the symmetry around...
but G# is subsequently supplied in the C#-major triad as a simple augmentation of the C#-B.-C# neighbor figure and later as a descending line (C#-B-C#) as "roots" for incomplete major-minor seventh chords. Both the A and E#-major-minor seventh chords are rendered complete by fortuitous metrical placing of C# and its lower neighbor B#, respectively, in the pedal figure [see ex. 3a above]. The initial C#-major-minor seventh is without its fifth, but G# is subsequently supplied in the C#-major triad that terminates x. The vertical elements these chords impose result in a much richer pitch collection, of course, than the linear elements of x alone. The thirds and sevenths of these three major-minor seventh chords complete the whole-tone scale already suggested by the pitch classes (C#, A, and E#) of x, by adding B, D#, and G [not to mention Gx, already present as A#. The fifths of these chords, however, contaminate the whole-tone structure by adding the non-whole-tone related pitch classes C#, E, and B#. These relationships are shown in ex. 5, which places the pitch elements of x around the axial C#, showing whole-tone scale members in open note heads, nonmembers in filled note heads. The maintenance of the intervocalic structure of the chords in motive x accounts for Mussorgsky's unusual notation [see ex. 3a], which includes C#, Gx, and G# in close proximity. The array produced is not absolutely symmetrical in relation to C#, but it displays an interesting, if well-known, notational phenomenon based on its relation to the whole-tone scale. When spelled as a contiguous series of "degrees,"

the whole-tone scale does not replicate in spelling at the octave. Instead, octave equivalence is represented by doubly augmented sevenths. The result is a scale whose notation grows increasingly sharp in ascent, and correspondingly flat in descent, a sort of continuum that radiates outward in both directions: D#-E#-F-G-A-B-C-D-E-F-Gx-Ax-Bx. Example 5 shows how the full pitch-complement of motive x balances itself more or less around the axial C#, with members of the E#-major-minor seventh tending to fall on the sharp side of the whole-tone continuum and members of the A-major-minor seventh tending to fall on its flat side.

The symbolism invoked in all this is clearly related to the mysterious "voice." Its whole-tone aspect certainly draws on the usual references to magic and evil, but transforms these meanings. This is not the magic of fairy tale, but the beguiling power of inner compulsion, narcissism, fascination with death, or an irrational impulse to total surrender. The associative link between these concepts and the open-ended symmetry exploited in the figures themselves is entirely apt. Unlike the protagonist's immediate state and surrounds, these things are infinite, boundless, unknowable. Similarly so, in a sense, is the axial symmetry invoked—it has no limits, no finite boundary. Although it replicates in pitch class, in representation of pitch it does not; rather, it lies on a continuum that spills out in an endless conceptual enharmonicism in either direction, sharp and flat.49

47Altogether, the resultant collection can be thought of (though Mussorgsky would hardly have done so) as a mode of limited transposition, one categorized by Messiaen, for example, as mode 3 (transposition 1) of his modes of limited transposition. See Olivier Messiaen, The Technique of My Musical Language, trans. John Satterfield, 2 vols. (Paris: Alphonse Leduc [1956]), I, 60.

48These juxtaposed inflections of the dominant pitch are symptomatic of its denuded functional status in this song. Mussorgsky's knowledge of and admiration for Schubert's songs could be considered a significant factor here. A number of these employ enharmonicism structurally and symptomatically to great effect. In the present case, one is reminded of "Wegweiser," which Mussorgsky may well have known, with its famous omnibus progression based on a centric G tonic and pointed tritone enharmonic simultaneity on D#/C#, beneath the lines "Einen Weiser seh' ich stehen / Unverrückt vor meinem Blick, / Eine Straße muß ich gehen, / Die noch keiner ging zurück." Another of Schubert's songs to use enharmonicism distinctively is, of course, "Der Doppelgänger." For an analysis of the significance of this enharmonicism, see Eytan Agnon, "Music and Text in Schubert Songs: The Role of Enharmonic Equivalence," Isreal Studies in Musicology 4 [1987], 55-58. "Der Doppelgänger," moreover, was highly rated by

Example 5: "On the River," scalar array of chordal elements of motive x.

C# outlined in ex. 4. In the case of y, there is an occasional counterpoint, which appears in mm. 38-39 as a simple augmentation of the C#-B-C# neighbor figure and later as a descending line (C#-B-C#) in mm. 42-43 and 50-51. In the case of x, in its most often used form, the corruptions are brought on by the use of the three linear pitch elements (C#, A, and E#) as "roots" for incomplete major-minor seventh chords. Both the A and E#-major-minor seventh chords are rendered complete by fortuitous metrical placing of C# and its lower neighbor B#, respectively, in the pedal figure [see ex. 3a above]. The initial C#-major-minor seventh is without its fifth, but G# is subsequently supplied in the C#-major triad that terminates x. The vertical elements these chords impose result in a much richer pitch collection, of course, than the linear elements of x alone. The thirds and sevenths of these three major-minor seventh chords complete the whole-tone scale already suggested by the pitch classes (C#, A, and E#) of x, by adding B, D#, and G [not to mention Gx, already present as A#. The fifths of these chords, however, contaminate the whole-tone structure by adding the non-whole-tone related pitch classes C#, E, and B#. These relationships are shown in ex. 5, which places all the pitch elements of x around the axial C#, showing whole-tone scale members in open note heads, nonmembers in filled note heads. The maintenance of the intervocalic structure of the chords in motive x accounts for Mussorgsky's unusual notation [see ex. 3a], which includes C#, Gx, and G# in close proximity. The array produced is not absolutely symmetrical in relation to C#, but it displays an interesting, if well-known, notational phenomenon based on its relation to the whole-tone scale. When spelled as a contiguous series of "degrees,"

the whole-tone scale does not replicate in spelling at the octave. Instead, octave equivalence is represented by doubly augmented sevenths. The result is a scale whose notation grows increasingly sharp in ascent, and correspondingly flat in descent, a sort of continuum that radiates outward in both directions: D#-E#-F-G-A-B-C-D-E-F-Gx-Ax-Bx. Example 5 shows how the full pitch-complement of motive x balances itself more or less around the axial C#, with members of the E#-major-minor seventh tending to fall on the sharp side of the whole-tone continuum and members of the A-major-minor seventh tending to fall on its flat side.

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47Altogether, the resultant collection can be thought of (though Mussorgsky would hardly have done so) as a mode of limited transposition, one categorized by Messiaen, for example, as mode 3 (transposition 1) of his modes of limited transposition. See Olivier Messiaen, The Technique of My Musical Language, trans. John Satterfield, 2 vols. (Paris: Alphonse Leduc [1956]), I, 60.

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To get a further idea of how intrinsic is the symmetry found in these motives with regard to the textual process, it is instructive to compare in detail the final three appearances of y-x as a complex, those that accompany the three question-answer constructions at the end of the poem (see ex. 6). The degree to which the symmetry that lies at the root of the y-x complex is explicitly realized in the music in each particular case corresponds so convincingly to the varying degrees of commitment shown by the protagonist to the mysterious beckoning of the “voice” as to rule out coincidence. The first question-answer pairing, “Does it demand my attention? I would not move away,” is equivocal in that no specific action is inferred. The line is anticipatory; the protagonist is committed to listen further but, at this stage, no more than that. The next line, “Does it drive me off? I would flee in disarray,” suggests a panicked rejection of the compelling, yet frightening invitation. The final coupling, “Does it call me to the depths? I would cast myself in without a glance,” can mean nothing else than total surrender to its bewitching enticements. In the first of these three lines (mm. 38–41), the formulation of x (mm. 40–41) is intrinsically similar to the earlier appearances at mm. 16–17 and 32–33. That is, the pitch-symmetry in Mussorgsky. It was included in a select list of examples of “perfection” in a letter to Rimsky-Korsakov in early October 1867 [Orlova, Mussorgsky’s Days, p. 154]. For another consideration of enharmonicism as a structural and symbolic device in Schubert’s songs, see the discussion of “Nacht und Träume” in Carl Schachter, “Motive and Text in Four Schubert Songs,” Aspects of Schenkerian Theory, ed. David Beach [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983], pp. 71–76.
cal organization is powerfully felt but, as we have seen, not uncorrupted by vertical elements. At mm. 42–45, the asymmetrical potential of the motives is most strongly exploited. Motive y receives its fullest counterpoint and x is altered such that its harmonic accretions suggest resolution to A# minor, that is, “escape” from the symmetrically defined tonic C#. This is clearly reinforced by the asymmetry in the notation, as well, which now abandons A# entirely in favor of G#, the leading note to A#. Finally, in mm. 46–49, the most “purely” symmetrical formulation of y-x is found. The counterpoint for y is abandoned. Abandoned, too, are the major-minor sevenths in x. Its pitch content and its notation are completely symmetrical with regard to a C# axis. The realization of the symmetry is reinforced by the anacrusis figure that is now attached to motive x. This figure is necessitated by the redistribution of syllables in the final pair of question-answer constructions [lines 11–12, mm. 42–49], where what was initially a balanced 6–6 [question-answer] syllable count in line 10 becomes, in lines 11 and 12, a 4–8 distribution. In both cases of this 4–8 distribution, the first pair of syllables of the answer is set to an upper #7–8 figure. In the final line (mm. 46–49), this figure is counterbalanced by the motion 12–1 at the lower octave. Also, where the final three syllables in lines set to previous appearances of figure x enlist other members of the C# triad, in this final statement, the voice exclusively enforces its root.

“On the River” displays a remarkable connection between poetic and musical processes. As the text’s protagonist moves from morose contemplation of his surroundings to a state of total inner obsession, so does the music move from “free” material with modal mixture as its main chromatic harmonic determinant to “fixed” material with symmetry as its main determinant. It is important to recognize, as suggested above, the connection between the modal mixture and the (largely whole-tone) symmetry exploited in the music. There is no sharp contrast or clear dichotomy, nor is there intended to be—only a slow, subtle shifting from one state to another. From one world it is but a short step to the other. This proximity is evident, for example, even in the opening five measures of the piece [ex. 7], a phrase that can understandably give rise to the idea that the tonality of the piece is F#. In traditional terms we have here a V7/IV moving to an auxiliary six-four colored by modal mixture. The scale used is a mixed one—indeed it corresponds exactly to the first model put forward in ex. 1—with major lower and minor upper tetrachords: C#–D#–E#–F#–G–A–B–C#. This contains within it the pitch contents intrinsic to the structuring of x and y—in the case of y the pitch content is identical—but these contents work, in the beginning of the song, as part of a more traditionally defined tonal collection. Thus, the song may be understood to operate on at least two distinct planes of expression. Most immediately felt is the free, affective plane sustained by the fluctuating harmony, with its rich modal mixtures, that dominates the song’s first half. On a more intellectual plane we discover a symbolic system of reference associated with symmetrical usage. By the end of the song it is possible that this symmetrical aspect comes to exert a visceral, albeit subtle, expressive pressure on the listener as it gradually asserts itself over, yet simultaneously out of, the milieu of free mixture. At no juncture is the boundary between these expressive means sharply drawn, and it is precisely Mussorgsky’s deft and seamless handling of their relationship that underpins the elusive, but devastating, power of this song.

IV

In the first three songs a rather different approach is found with respect to the interactions of mixture and symmetry. This is demonstra-
bly associated with differences in the text to do with broad concepts of time. “On the River” orients the reader toward the future, albeit an unknown [indeed, unknowable] one. In the first three texts, the reader’s attention is swung to the past and its contrast with the present. Recollections of the past in these three texts recall happier times, but are suffused also with the bitterness of the protagonist’s present desolate state. This theme of past and present is given a rather subtle airing in the first song, but is more explicitly revealed in the second and, especially, the third. In connection with this, tritone polarity plays a much more concrete role in these songs. In “On the River,” the tritone pole, although certainly lying somewhere on the whole-tone continuum, is never given a definitive form, is never strongly articulated as an alternative center or focal point, and is never, indeed, concretized. In the first three songs, by contrast, it is materially present, and at crucial moments, in the form of b5 as a chordal root or, even, as a local pitch center. The flattened dominant is, in these songs, symbolically tied up with a complex of images and ideas associated with the past. The choice of this particular notational form (as opposed to #4) has, moreover, its own significance, as will be discussed below.

In the first song, “Within Four Walls,” the linkage between the lyricism of the poetry and an apparently theoretically unfettered approach to modally mixed harmony is on full display. Of all Golenishchev-Kutuzov’s texts in Sunless, this one may without any hesitation be called a series of “fleeting, emotional moods.”

Komnatka tesnaia, tikhaia, milaia;
Ten’ neprogliadnaia, ten’ bezotvetnaia;
Duma glubokaia, pesnia unylaia;
V b’iushchemsia serdtse nadezhda zavetnaia;
Bystryi polet, za mgnoven’em mgnoveniia;
Vzor nepodvizhnyi na schast’e dalekoe;
Mnogo somneniia, mnogo terpeniia.
Vot ona, noch’ moia, noch’ odinokaia.

A distinctive, and putatively “Fet-like,” quality here is the absence of verbs, the reliance on fragmentary nouns modified by evocative adjectives. Accepting Golenishchev-Kutuzov’s version of how Sunless was composed [see above], it seems likely that Mussorgsky may have eventually settled on this poem as the first because of the way in which it so strikingly sets the mood for the whole cycle. Central themes of night (“sunlessness”) and solitude are introduced here. Also, in the fifth and sixth lines, the rupture between past and present is subtly invoked. The adjective dalékii (far-away, remote) in line 6 need not be constricted to denoting geographical remoteness, and the image of time passing in the previous line suggests, more than anything, that the “happiness” is remote in time.

The fragmentary unfolding of the text is simply, but beautifully, reflected in the music (ex. 8). Unlike the sixth song, where aspects of the piano figuration may to some extent be heard as a sympathetic “pictorialising” of the river, there is no device in the music to this song that might evoke any sympathetic external image. The overall sense of inhibited, curbed emotional range that may be detected in the verse is conveyed [somewhat similarly to the case of “On the River”) in the highly measured regularity of the vocal rhythm. Also supporting this sense of emotional numbness is, of course, the unifying device of the omnipresent tonic pedal. As for the subtly fleeting “moods,” modally mixed harmony here carries the primary burden of expressive response to the text. Two-measure phrases set each line. These are heard as fragmentary, discrete entities without obvious harmonic interconnectedness. Fermatas at the end of each phrase serve to heighten the effect of discontinuity. As in the final song, there is virtually a complete absence of traditional functional relations in the harmony—witness, if nothing else, the extraordinary VII–I final cadence (mm. 16–17).

Each phrase can be thought of as based on a mutation of the basic diatonic mode (D major).50 These

50It will be useful in this song to make a distinction between types of variation in modal structure. While each phrase may be thought of as based on a mode on D, this is not to say that each of these various modal structures is presented without its own chromatic alterations. There-
are set out in ex. 9, in which an inevitable degree of subjectivity in the allocation of “degree” status must be acknowledged in some cases. In this example, the notes “of” the particular modal variant are stemmed and beamed, so that smaller, stemless note heads represent local embellishment of the mode through mixture. Occasionally it has been impossible to determine which of a pair of semitonally adjacent pitches holds “degree” status, testifying to the existence of further mutation through the course of a
Example 9: “Within Four Walls,” modal structures.

Thus, at the climax, not only is the emotional temperature (measured as a function of degree of modal mutation) the highest, as would be expected, but a symbolic link is suggested, tenuously at this stage, but nonetheless strikingly, between the polar tritone, represented by the flattened dominant, and the idea of time’s passing, or time past—“The swift fight of moment after moment.”

Example 9 highlights another important factor in the modal structure of this song. Of the seven degrees represented, only two remain unvaried, uninflected, throughout the entire song: 1 and 4. Overall, the song’s modal organization articulates a consistently “plagal” nature, which further points to the weakened status of the usual dominant. The unaltered dominant is really heard in a strong position only once in this song—at the end of the first phrase. Even here its usage, while not remarkable, contains a harbinger of more unusual things to come. The progression of this opening phrase, over the tonic pedal, is functionally quite determinate: tonic
proceeds, via a chromatic passing chord to subdominant, thence to dominant. While not very conspicuous, it is worth noting the changing nature of the linear process after the arrival of the subdominant triad. The progression over the pedal from the opening tonic to the subdominant is governed by the expanding wedge by semitones in the outer active voices (excluding the pedal)—A–Ab/B♭–G/B♭. From the subdominant to the dominant, the same parts now move in parallel major tenths by whole step. This particular tenths progression recurs, as a motive, in the final cadence of the song (mm. 16–17). The difference between the parallel tenths motive in m. 2 and in mm. 16–17 is that in the former instance it occurs as a quite functional harmonic progression, whereas in the latter it challenges normal tonal functions by the introduction of a lowered leading note (and this within the final cadence). The Cs in m. 16 draws greater attention to the parallelism inherent in the motive and suggests, still tentatively, a link to whole-tone thinking. In this cadence—with its characteristic coloring derived from a note of the minor upper tetrachord—it becomes possible, in a way that seems unlikely in the IV–V context of m. 2, to conceive of the pitch-classes in the outer voices—C–D–E–F♭—as a whole-tone tetrachord [albeit one contaminated by the perfect fifths above C and D supplied in the inner voice].

Also significant is the way in which this final cadence, while unusual and distinctive, has a remarkable assuredness.51 It may be that the surprising “rightness” and aural firmness of this cadence are at least partially explained by the motivic resemblance it bears to m. 2, which subtly identifies the parallel progression as a cadential marker. [It also underlies a closing semantic link between the “little room . . . loved” and the “lonely night.”] The other key instance of this tenths motive is to be found in a modified appearance embedded in the piano accompaniment of the climactic fifth phrase [mm. 9–10]. In this instance, the parallel motion is not direct, but occupies the entire phrase and is mediated by the first inversion Eb triad in the second half of m. 9. Despite this mediation, the governing tenths structure, with its whole-tone inference, remains quite audible; indeed it governs the linear structure of the accompaniment, although with the direction of motion now inverted. Somewhat separate to this inversion of the tenths progression, the vocal line in mm. 9–10 may be understood, if we accept the vocal part in m. 9 as a prolongation of Bm, to provide an overall shape of Bk–C0–Ab. This is none other than a transposition by tritone of the final cadence melody—E–F♯–D. Cumulatively these pitches belong to a single, complete whole-tone series [summarized in ex. 10]. Although the whole-tone aspect is far from explicit in this song, it does appear to maintain a degree of subtle “presence” at key emotional junctures in the piece.

Considered in this light, the song presents an interesting and remarkable synthesis. Generally, the

51 This progression is just the type of thing, surely, that Calvocoressi had in mind when he wrote of Mussorgsky: “His tonal and modal schemes may be impossible to define safely in terms of usual theory, but there is nothing elusive, ambiguous, or shaky about them. In fact, the tonal basis feels so firm that the discovery of devices which should make for instability will often come as a surprise to analysts” (Calvocoressi, Modest Mussorgsky, pp. 256–57). The three “Technique and Style” chapters at the end of this, Calvocoressi’s final [posthumous] and most comprehensive, monograph on Mussorgsky, edited by Gerald Abraham, still warrant close consideration, despite the book’s age, for their pertinent observations.
Example 11: “You Did Not Recognize Me in the Crowd.”

song retains a strong suggestion of the intuitive harmony that Mussorgsky is so often said to have created, the harmony, no less, of the “fleeting moods” of Golenishchev-Kutuzov’s text. But there is also clear evidence of structural and referential planning extending beyond the intuitive. Progressive modal mixture results in the climactic phrase’s articulating the greatest harmonic opposition [literally, the tritone, or $bV$] to the governing tonal center of the piece, a contrast heightened by the continuity of the tonic pedal beneath the increasingly distant harmony. Although this substitution of $bV$ challenges the then usual means of large-scale tonal definition [the regular dominant], on a different organizational level, a coherent link can be shown to exist between the final cadence and the midpoint climax. The referential whole-tone scale, while hardly impinging strongly on the surface of the piece, nonetheless provides the structural link between the most distant harmonic event in the piece $bV$, with its reference to distant times, and its conclusion, with its gloomy affirmation of the present. Unlike the final song, the symmetrical element here lies much less conspicuously on the surface, but nonetheless insinuates itself meaningfully on the structure as a whole.

The second song, “You Did Not Recognize Me in the Crowd” (ex. 11), shares the same tonal center as the first and shows a certain similarity in its brevity and pared-down texture. Despite these affinities, however, there are several points of distinction, and it is worth
recognizing that, in compositional chronology, this song is much closer to the third than to the first. Alongside this proximity must be noted the affinity of theme between the second and third texts (see below). Although less than half the length of the third poem, “You Did Not Recognize Me” similarly sketches out the theme of a happier, although perhaps “mis-spent,” past bitterly contrasted against the lonely present. Thus, something only hinted at in the first number is now clarified in this song (and will be amplified in the next). Unlike the first poem, the second contains a suggestion of narrative. A person, the object of the protagonist’s affections, is addressed directly, although it is evident that this person does not hear (or in anyway acknowledge) the protagonist. The narrative consists of the protagonist telling his unhearing former lover of the effect on him of their brief, one-sided encounter.

Menja ty v tolpe ne uznala;
Tvoi vzhday ne skazal nichego.
No chudno i strashno mne stalo,
Kogda ulovil ia ego.
To bylo odno lish’ mgnoven’e;
No, ver’ mne, ia v ném perenés.
Vsei proshloi liubvi naslazhden’ia,
Vsiu gorech’ zabven’ia i slez!

[You did not recognize me in the crowd;
Your glance told me nothing at all.
But I was overcome with fear and wonder,
When I caught sight of you.
It was but a moment,
But, believe me, it swept me away.
All the rapture of former love,
All the bitterness, oblivion and tears!]

This brief text, of course, conveys more than loss of love. It also talks, in that opening reference to the “crowd,” of alienation, of the sense of difference and un-belonging. This is hardly a novel topos in Romantic literature, of course, but it remains nonetheless intrinsic to the understanding of this song and the cycle as a whole. It enriches the basic dichotomy between past and present alluded to in the text inasmuch as the past emerges not only as a happier time, but one of belonging. Thus the protagonist in this cycle finds a certain affinity with the anti-heroes of Schubert’s two great cycles, as well as countless other Romantic profusions.

The second song is, with one notable exception to be discussed below, cast in a recitative style; of all the numbers in Sunless, this comes closest to the kuchkist ideal of vocal declamation. Despite its even greater brevity and apparent freedom, however, the song is in some senses more conventional than the first. It is formally rounded by the appearance of a close variant of the first phrase at the song’s close. Both these opening and closing phrases are essentially chromatically enriched plagal cadences. The main source of variation from the first to the final phrase is in the form, as might be expected, of modal mixture: the final phrase is strongly inflected in the parallel minor, most noticeably in its substitution on the final chord of bVI6 for I. This is accompanied by a rising minor sixth, D-Bb, in the vocal line, terminating on the pungent and affective word slēz (“tears”). Although these outer phrases once again suggest structural priority of the subdominant over the dominant, the latter has a much greater structural role to play in this piece than in the first, a feature that points to a more normative aspect of its harmonic idiom. As the reduction of the song in ex. 12 shows, dominant function is clearly felt as the main harmonic determinant in the middle part of the piece (mm. 3–6), in which role it is elaborated by the b6 as an upper neighbor, in both the bass and

52 See n. 1 above. Given the very close proximity of the completion dates of these songs, it seems likely that the third song followed directly from the completion of the second in a more or less single, short burst of creative activity.
53 One cannot help but surmise, in light of the relevant biographical elements outlined in the first part of this article, that this particular song may have come to seem especially prescient to Mussorgsky late in 1875.

54 In the opening phrase this bass progression rises and in the final phrase it falls, suggesting a framing symmetry of sorts.
55 Here is a particularly creative instance of what Russian musicologists have called sekstovost’, a word without a real English equivalent but that refers to the quality of a musical, particularly melodic, style that is saturated with sixths. It is sometimes claimed to be a distinct stylistic feature of the Russian romans of the earlier nineteenth century, a genre that, prerealist as it was, is strongly evoked in this cycle. Richard Taruskin (who translates the term as “sixthiness”) discusses this quality at some length in reference to Tchaikovsky’s deliberate emulation of the romans style in Eugene Onegin; see Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 55–58.
Example 12: “You Did Not Recognize Me,” foreground graph.
eral fall of darkness—"The shadow of a May night"—but later, from the third quatrain onward, to "shades," personages from the protagonist's happier past, now effectively (even if not literally) dead to him and "resurrected" in his imagination. In the third stanza, we learn more about the past: not only was it happier and spent in company, but, again, it was perhaps in some way misspent, with its references to "the poison / Of spring" and "a series / Of hopes, impulses, and mistakes . . ." The final transformative, perhaps almost transfigurative, event, which unfolds in the final quatrain, witnesses the protagonist silently passing the burden of his past happiness, indeed, his soul, to "one shadow / . . . a faithful friend of days past" through the vessel of a solitary, long cherished tear.

But sleep flies from my eyes.
And, by the dawn of a new day,
My imagination turns over
The pages of years lost.

As if breathing in again the poison
Of spring, of passionate dreams,
In my soul I resurrect a series
Of hopes, impulses, and mistakes . . .

Alas, they are but ghosts!
I'm bored with their deathly crowd,
And the noise of their old chatter
Has lost its hold on me.

But one shadow, of all the shadows,
Appeared to me, breathing love,
And, faithful friend of days past,
Bent quietly towards the bed.

And bravely I gave to her alone
All my soul in a silent tear,
Visible to no one, full of happiness,
In a tear, I cherished since long ago!

The first two sections (comprising mm. 1–15) are especially close in musical content and may be logically considered together. Example 13 aligns reductions of each for means of comparison. Both share a distinctive approach to their cadences, and there are similar aspects to their opening gestures. Indeed, both openings exhibit different realizations of an interaction between symmetry around an axial C and a more traditional definition of C as tonic. In both cases, significant elements of the melody and bass line articulate C as a centric pitch surrounded by upper and lower major thirds, E and Ab. And in both cases, while the E serves as the major third of tonic harmony, Ab can be understood to function as a borrowed sixth degree participating within iv or viio7. Thus, again, these symmetrical pitch elements derive from a mixed mode with major lower and minor upper tetrachords. Further alteration to this structure in the climax of the song, where the complete whole-tone scale is made explicit for the only time in the cycle, will be shown to provide a decisive link between modal alteration and symmetrical usage.

Probably the most distinctive harmonic feature of these opening two sections is their striking articulation of tritonal relations between the tonic and the flattened dominant. This is forced home without demur by Mussorgsky in the stark semitonal sideslips across mm. 6–7 and within m. 14. In both instances, a locally tonicized G♭-major triad moves


directly to V7 in the tonic key. This bold harmonic slip relates, in the first instance, directly to the first appearance of the poetic theme of the “shadow,” in this case the shadow of the May night. The tonicized G♭ triad in m. 6 coincides precisely with the word ten’, thus offering a clear referential relationship between this image in the text, as described above, and V7 harmony. In the second instance, the G♭ chord receives the stressed syllable of godov (years), referring here to the protagonist’s past [see line 8 of the text], which is also, as the song unfolds, found to be a realm of shadows of a different kind.

In both instances, the harmonic distortion offered by V is strongly exposed only in retrospect, by a wrenching back to the “correct,” diatonic dominant. The motion toward the G♭ triad is somewhat smoother than that away from it in both cases. Predictably enough, the triad is heard each time as an outcome of increasing modal mixture. In the first instance, the V7/V in m. 6 exploits the common tone F in relation to the distinctively voiced subdominant chord of m. 5, which it directly follows. In the second instance, the linkage is subtler. The pivotal chord is perhaps now harder to determine with precision, but the minor subdominant in the second half of m. 12 is probably the only element that offers a viable interpretation in either C or G♭. The F# root in the bass marks a clear point of overlap, in respect of the symptomatic notation with its distinctive triple representation of F (F♯, F♮, Fb), suggesting that the descending scale mutates to a flattened version of itself. As ex. 14 shows, this distinctive bass line is bounded by D and Db an augmented octave lower, that is by 2 and b2. The triple representation of letter name F clearly indicates the point of “stretch” or “slip” in the scale. Another way of viewing mm. 11–15 is to see the second half of m. 12 to the first half of 14 [inclusive] as a kind of insertion, which disrupts the logical progression of V/V/V. In similar fashion, m. 6 in the first section can be seen to interrupt the otherwise diatonic progression IV–V. [These “insertions” are shown by means of the square brackets in ex. 13.] The V/V has moved to first inversion by the first half of m. 12 so that the bass F# and the harmony above could resolve quite smoothly to the V7 in m. 14 without the intervening material. There is a sort of harmonic irony, therefore, in the way the G♭ in m. 14 does move up to G♭ but in no
way resolves to it as the Fl, as leading tone, would be understood to do. The written bass progression, G6–G♯ supports not a resolution but a point of maximal harmonic dislocation within the phrase. The point of all this, of course, is that G♯ is easily arrived at, but jarringly quitted. There is a distinct flavor of attraction followed by abrupt denial in this action. G♯ is heard as an alluring, although harmonically distorting, force, which must be resisted. The past that it symbolizes is similarly one that entices (after all, it is now known to be one of rapture), but that, for whatever reason, must be rejected, although not without discomfort.

Measures 16–23, setting the third quatrain, usher in a distinctive change in style as the poetic text turns, on cue, to its resurrection of the past and the “poison / of spring, of passionate dreams.” With the imposition of triplets uniformly in the piano and voice parts, the meter effectively becomes compound duple, although unmarked. The singer’s rhythms become less angular; the “melody” is an awkward, constricted chain of contorted intervals, harmonized opportunistically with the chordal accompaniment. In the piano the previously solidly grounded harmonic support is now abandoned for a literally “bass-less,” parallel chordal figuration in the mid-to-treble register of the instrument (ex. 15). These combined textural changes serve as a marker for the backward glancing, dreamlike state of the protagonist. The G♯ influence for these “pages of years lost,” the world of a shadowy former life, is now felt in an entirely different and much more subversive way. Whereas the tritone influence in the previous sections was stated clearly through juxtaposition, albeit retrospective, in this passage it is more subtly felt than stated through a process of blending or synthesis. And where the force of G♯ had been contained, resulting in the clipped, jagged cadence formulae of mm. 7–8 and 14–15, section B provides a lyrical pouring [at least, of sorts] as a reaction to the emotionally pent-up characteristics of the previous material. G♯ is now, indeed, the intoxicating “poison” that infects C. C remains felt as the underlying tonality, but the use of mixture is so persistent and extensive that its modality cannot be ascertained with any certainty. Given that the basis of the chromatism here is modal mixture, the notations employed show that at some point in the passage every degree save the subdominant, F, is flattened. This includes the tonic, whose flattened form creates an enharmonic relation with the leading note. The collection of pitch-class referents in this entire passage can be shown as an overlay of C and G major (ex. 16). This does not exactly suggest that some sort of bitonality is operative, but proposes that the extensity of mixture employed leads to a degree of undermining of the tonic’s local force through the intimation of the alluring IV.

Section A’’ [mm. 24–30], re-establishes the recitative-like texture of the opening sections and re-establishes certain of their vocal contours. Harmonically this section retains a degree of modal mixture, but not to the extremity of the previous section. The tonal center of C is affirmed strongly, via the plagal relation of the subdominant (in either its diatonic or borrowed form). This return to an unthreatened C major coincides with the return to a clear separation in the protagonist’s mind between the ghosts of the past and his sleepless present. In the second half of the fourth quatrain (see mm. 27–30), the protagonist declares, “And the noise of their old chatter / Has lost its hold on me.” This “noise” is evoked in the setting by a recollection of the texture of section B, and the following line is set above the purely diatonic C-major plagal cadence, which concludes the music for this quatrain [ex. 17]. Even before this resolute cadence, however, the loss of “power” of the “ghosts” is reflected in the way the polar key is now felt to be much less challenging to the tonal center of C. The vocal line of mm. 27–28 is less tonally ambiguous than in mm. 16–23, and it simply fills in the fourth C–G, with modal inflection given on A♯. The slippery accompaniment texture of mm. 16–23 is restricted to the left hand and

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28 This idea that F, in both cases, forms some sort of pivot between the centers of C and G♯, based on its combination with the tritone spelled as B or C6, recalls Iavorsky’s duplex modes (see n. 40 above), wherein a single dominant, which in Iavorsky’s sense of the term is an active tritone, can point to tritonally related tonics. For further discussion, see McQuere, “The Theories of Boleslav Yavorsky,” pp. 109–64.

29 This poetic juxtaposition of “poison” (iad) and “spring” is rather striking and certainly reinforces the idea of the past as somehow unwholesome or not entirely healthy. [Despite the unidiomatic flavor of this line in English, there is really no suitable translation of iad other than “poison.”]

30 This passage has become somewhat famous as the putative inspiration for the opening figure of Nuages, the first movement of Debussy’s Nocturnes. Arguments have been made for and against Debussy’s intended or unintended borrowing of Mussorgsky’s figure. Edward Lockspeiser writes, for instance: “As for [Leon] Vallas’s contention, repeated unceasingly in programme notes, that the indefinite, flowing theme of Debussy’s Nuages derives note from Mussorgsky’s song, The noisy day has sped its flight, in the Sunless cycle, this, if still likely to be upheld, can only be put down to a peculiar insensitiveness to concepts of melody that were utterly opposed” (Debussy: His Life and Mind. 2 vols. [London: Cassel, 1962], I, 53).
sandwiched between lower and upper tonic pedals. Further, the notation proves insightful in that, although the first pair of dyads uses exactly the same pitch classes as those commencing m. 16 (E♭–C, G♭–B♭), G♭ is now replaced by F♯, notably disrupting the intervallic pattern of alternating thirds and sixths but yielding a normative representation of a C-centered, twelve-note collection for the four measures concerned: C, D♭, D♯, E♭, E♯, F, F♯, G, A♭, A♯, B♭, B♯, C. Thus the “poison” of G♭ is neutralized—audibly by the unequivocal tonic pedals and symbolically by the enharmonic substitution of F♯. The F♯ can plausibly be taken as an intentional sign of the weakened status of the flattened dominant at this point.
The following section, C, mm. 31–34, brings in an entirely fresh mode, texture, and meaning. There is a direct shift to Eb major supported by a dominant pedal. Above this Bb a new texture is articulated in the vocal and piano parts. The voice now receives its most mellifluous, arioso line of the entire piece (perhaps of the entire cycle), and the piano shimmers above the low pedal. These changes are prompted by a new departure in the text as the final transformative process of the poem begins with the appearance of the “one shadow, of all the shadows.” As this “one shadow” appears to be, in some sense, a source of mediation between the empty present and the misspent past, it is perhaps not surprising to find that its key, or referential pitch, Eb, forms the point of bisection between the centers standing for present, C, and past, Gb.

The final section, A” [mm. 35–40], sets the transformative event of the poem, the passing of the protagonist’s soul through the vessel of the “silent tear,” which prompts a kind of apotheosis in the musical setting. Although the tonality shifts abruptly back to C in m. 35, sections C and A” have the greatest sense of continuity across their boundary of any pair in the piece. The persistent eighth-note triplet rhythm and arioso melodic style of section C continue seamlessly into A”. This melodic line, moreover, in m. 35 explicitly recalls the upper line in the piano figuration of m. 16, but now, at least initially, in unmixed, diatonic form [see ex. 18]. Thus, through a process of direct continuity and thematic recollection, the opening of this final section represents a synthesis of elements from the previous, contrasting sections. Measure 35 is also, as befits the idea of apotheosis, the climax of the piece, evidenced most conspicuously by the voice and piano’s right hand [in unison] reaching their highest pitch on the Eb set to the strong syllable of dushu [soul], beginning the line “All my soul in a silent tear.” In the reduction in ex. 19, this passage can be understood as an expanded cadential six-four, with a somewhat equivocal resolution in m. 36. In the middle of m. 35, however, two mutations to the diatonic structure occur that seal the linkage between modal mixture and symmetrical elements. At the second beat of this measure, mixture, or flattening of the upper tetrachord, results in the line (C)-Bb-A-Gb, to which is added the minor third, Eb (suggesting the unusual Locrian scale), resulting in the aggregate harmony labeled X in ex. 19. At the third beat, restoration of the major third and introduction of the raised fourth, F#, provide the lower tetrachord of the Lydian scale, resulting in the aggregate harmony marked Y, which is nothing but a transposition by tritone of X. Of course, this combination of upper Locrian and lower Lydian tetrachords produces the whole-tone scale [indeed, it is an example of the third degree of mixture described in ex. 1 in section II above], which is given its most explicit statement in the piece [indeed, in the cycle]. There could hardly be a better demonstration of Mussorgsky’s propensity to mix the functional and the nonfunctional than this prominent passage, a cadential six-four that supports a descending whole-tone scale in the melody.
As ex. 20a shows, the pitch contents of X and Y form a distinctive symmetry around an axial C, recalling the more tentative examples in the first sections of the piece. The “parsimoniousness” (to borrow a term from neo-Riemannian theory) of the voice-leading relation of X and Y recalls the famous tritonal juxtapositions at the beginning of the “Coronation scene” in Boris Godunov. In both cases we find an invariant tritone, with one of its members enharmonically spelled, against semitonal motion in the other parts, which also amount to the same structure transposed by a tritone (ex. 20b). Thus, while the climactic moment of the song is supported by a conventional, tension-laden expansion over the cadential six-four, the magical, transformative nature of this climax is reflected, in the Russian musicodramatic custom, by explicit symmetry in the form of the whole-tone scale and harmonic mirror inversion around the axial C. It is a dramatically well-timed revelation of the harmonic/symbolic nexus provided via modal mixture and symmetry. The grappling of this song dispel—although certainly to no happy end—the powers of the past. The next two songs seem to deal more conspicuously with the present, and the final one, as we have seen, is oriented to the future. So it is clearly significant that at this very point the ⅔ form is for the first time in the cycle counterbalanced by the operative presence of the #4 form as a distinctive part of the referential whole-tone collection.

VII

When Mussorgsky reputedly said to Golenishchev-Kutuzov “the only element I have here is feeling,” it seems clear that he was speaking of the means by which his music responded to the emotional imperatives of the text, the means by which it interpreted those “fleeting emotional moods” to which the poet alluded. This is as much a negative as a positive description of the music’s characteristics. It defines the music as much in terms of what it lacks—depiction, caricature, narrative in any strong sense, humor—as what it has—“feeling.” And Golenishchev-Kutuzov’s Mussorgsky regarded it as a distinctive achievement that the music succeeded on this basis alone and without recourse to the usual battery of props and staging of the realist style, and largely without recourse to its typifying “musical speech.” Sunless, indeed, is probably about as close as Mussorgsky ever got to writing so-called absolute music. As I have indicated, it is harmony in the first instance that Mussorgsky relied on to support the shifting moods of the text, almost to the point where “feeling” and “harmony” become, somehow, synonymous. Yet, it seems to be a task that did not come altogether easily, or consistently, to him. On the evidence of the cycle as a whole, the claim he is supposed to have made to Golenishchev-Kutuzov is patently impossible to justify, and it is useful, at this juncture, to refer briefly to the two songs not included in the analysis above. Of these two, the fourth, “Ennui,” has received an impressive formal and contextual analysis by Michael Russ. As Russ reminds us, “Ennui” was the only song in Sunless that Stasov found any praise for. This, of course, should alert us immediately to its differences. Russ analyses the song on several levels, but one of the aspects of his interpretation that seems especially amenable is the concept of

The song’s Russian title, “Skuchai,” presents one of the standard conundrums of Russian translation. Skuchai is the imperative form of skuchat’, the verb “to be bored.” Thus, literally translated, the song’s title is “Be Bored,” which is hopelessly unidiomatic. “Ennui” is a standard solution, but the perfectly acceptable English imperative “Languish” might represent a better compromise between meaning and grammatical function.

the song as a sort of salon genre painting. In the song’s text, the lover addresses the object of his affections ironically—she, having spurned him, may now languish in her stultifying social world until “Drop by drop your strength will wane, / Then you will die, and good luck to you!” (Po kaple ty istratish’ sily, / Potom umrēsh’, i Bog s toboi!). As Russ points out, the music of the piano part acts out different roles to underline the import of the text. A neutral recitative accompaniment style is swapped for an imitation of the nineteenth-century salon romance genre, caricaturing the sounds of the young woman of society playing the piano.64 This device alone puts it on a rather different, and significantly more kuchkist, stylistic plain to the previous three numbers.

In the fifth number, “Elegy,” we enter a different world again. Its text is the longest of the poems used in Sunless, and the song is correspondingly the broadest, and most dramatic, in musical conception. It is the only piece in the set that provides strong internal contrasts in musical style (not to mention it is the only one that relies on internal modulation to any significant extent). The text finds the protagonist amid nature, in a tortured state of mind. A rapid string of poetic images—a shroud of mist, a star glimmering through the cloud, tinkling horse bells, rushing clouds (a not-too-subtly presented metaphor for the protagonist’s confused thoughts), the beloved’s face, the “raucous noise of life,” the tolling of death’s bell, the star again, and, finally, “joyless cloud”—receive distinctive characterizations in the changing stylization of the accompaniment.65 In terms of its reliance on external “effect” in at least equal measure to internal “affect,” this song seems rather closer in style to the music of Songs and Dances of Death than Sunless. It is safe to say, therefore, on the cursory evidence of these two songs, that Mussorgsky was not entirely reliant on “feeling” to the exclusion of all other means in this cycle. (And within the songs examined in the previous sections there are also occasional elements that support this conclusion.)

Various reasons for this lack of stylistic continuity may be proposed. The chronology of the composition (see n. 1) suggests a less concentrated effort after the completion of the third number. This might explain the very close points of stylistic and methodological similarity of the opening troika of songs, and the rather different conception of the final number; it also accounts for the distinctive features of the fourth and fifth. Orlova’s proposal that “Elegy” was written, at least partially, as a memorial to Nadezhda Opochinina could also in some way account for its more “externalized” elements. Probably most important to acknowledge, however, is the varied approach found in Golenishchev-Kutuzov’s texts themselves. The fourth sets itself outside the others in terms of both tone (its irony) and mode (its consistent appeal to the second person as a literary device, and the contrivance of its refrain-like injunction, “skuchai”), while the fifth trucks as much in definite “images” as it does in “fleeting moods.” Mussorgsky’s final ordering of the poems is also instructive. One would not want to be too concrete about this, but there seems a vague chronological character to the ordering of the six items. The first and third deal with the past as contrasted with the present, while the fourth seems to sit pretty squarely in the present. The fifth contains references to both past (“Now, turning into the beloved’s features, / / They call, giving birth in the soul once more to past dreams” [To, prevratias’ v cherty liubimogo litsa, / Zovut, rozhdaia vnov’ v dushe bylye grezy]) and future (“The prophetic star, as if full of shame, / Hides its bright face in a joyless cloud, / / As mute and impenetrable as my future” [Predvestnitsa zvezda, kak budto polnaia styda, / Skryvaet svetlyi lik v tumane bezotradnom, / / Kak budushchnost’ moia, nemom i neprogliadnom]), but sits primarily in the present, with its reliance on immediately felt images. The sixth song, “On the River,” offers a counterweight to the first three in the
way it balances its setting in the immediate present with its impulsive motion toward an unknown future, indeed, toward the infinite. This chronological aspect cannot be conveyed in an affective sense; instead, it is somehow bound, if present at all, to the more symbolic layer of meaning that may be detected in the songs’ symmetrically based elements. Nor need this chronological aspect reside alone in the symbolic realm of the cycle’s meaning. In light of the circumstances surrounding the cycle’s composition, it is impossible not to recognize at least the possibility that the binary of past and present may reside within a system of dichotomies that may have increasingly specific, personal, even covert meanings—meanings that might extend right down to those of shared, or wished for, intimacy between poet and composer. Thus, the final number has a rather different role to play to that of the first three. Unlike those songs, it does not wrench from one side to the other, does not play in poetic juxtapositions in the same manner. Its poetics work through a process of slow, but inevitable, capitulation. It is almost the ultimate expression of self-absorption. Correspondingly, its meaning is almost totally dependent on how we might choose to read the previous numbers in the cycle, especially the homogenous first three.

Of course, a cautionary note about interpretation is necessary at this point. Song is, as many have pointed out, a site of such complexity that interpretative pitfalls for the over-eager are all too many; it is not an area for totalizing efforts. As Lawrence Kramer has written, “In its own right, the text is open to a wide range of possible interpretations, the limits of which can never be drawn with certainty. To set the text to music is to narrow the range”—but not, of course, to define it to the point of singularity. It would not be possible, and much less desirable, to “decode” these songs, or to claim to have done so, simply on the basis of their latent symbolic elements. Nonetheless, the existence of these elements, together with broader speculation (and speculation it remains) about the specific circumstances of the cycle’s composition, stimulates a legitimate mode of inquiry into a level of meaning and interpretation that surpasses, or refines, that of affective generality (or, “feeling”). To quote Kramer again:

The general character of the Lied usually fulfills the traditional mandate of expressing affective meanings. The results are customarily treated as emotional universals, on the principle that primary feelings, like primary colors, are everywhere the same. Critical reflection, however, may unsettle that principle by finding, or simply noticing, the historical conditions in which certain kinds of feeling and expression become possible or important. Singular or arresting events offer these conditions of feelings a concrete realization by inviting, indeed provoking, more specific interpretation.

In this spirit, then, it might be inviting to consider those meanings that penetrate beyond the generally affective (the only layer that Golenishchev-Kutuzov was prepared to acknowledge in Sunless) to the particular, culminating with a brief consideration of the personal, potentially homoerotic, milieu out of which Sunless may have sprung. To assist this brief discussion, ex. 21 (allowing for transposition) summarizes the linkages between interrelated referential concepts and harmonic elements particular and distinctive to the musical language of, specifically, songs 1, 2, and 3 of the cycle, and to some extent no. 6.

Acknowledging the risks of trivializing, this diagram draws in the simple conceptual apparatus put forward in section II above. The tonic (and, by extension, its triad) provides the nexus between a set of normative harmonic relations (in which it functions as tonic) and symmetrical organization (in which it is present as an axis). Underlying the symmetrical aspect is the whole-tone scale, which adapts its typical Russian symbolic references to refer to concepts of the mysterious, the unknown, and the infinite; it may also stand for death, or surrender to impulse. It partakes of a chronological refer-

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67Ibid., p. 13.
Tritone polarity/referential dichotomy (nos. 1-3)

Normative harmonic relations

VI IV

Whole-tone continuum (no. 6)

(“mystery,” “death,” “surrender to impulse,” “the infinite”)

“past”
“happiness”
“intimacy”
“rapture”
“deviance”

“present”
“melancholy”
“loneliness”
“oblivion”
“normality”

Example 21: Possible mapping of references and distinctive pitch structural elements in selected numbers of *Sunless* (nos. 1, 2, 3, and 6).

ence as well. The tonic/axis may stand for the present, sitting on a continuum from “flat/past” to “sharp/future.” Significantly, the polar tritone from the tonic/axis only ever receives degree-like status or weighting in its bV form (songs 1 to 3). Thus the past is concretely represented, while the future is only elusively suggested simply by means of the existence of the continuum [song 6]. There is virtually no point in the cycle where #4 holds a status remotely comparable to that of b5. For instance, bIV is never invoked, while #4 is invoked—and then only once or twice in the entire cycle—only as an element that functions within the normative harmonic range, in which capacity it tonicizes 5. The one exception to this rule is in the climax to the third number—the point at which the protagonist’s unhealthy obsession with his past is finally, although hardly cheerfully, exorcised. The range of normative harmonic relations, indicated within the two vertical dotted lines of ex. 21, embraces much of the modally mixed chromaticism, which, as shown, is the vital component of the expressive tone of these numbers. This realm, therefore, covers considerable expressive range and can still incorporate many of the elements of the symmetrical organization. As we have seen, the dichotomy between harmonic structuring based on modal mixture and that partaking of symmetry is subtle and deliberately blurred throughout the songs examined. In the first three songs, in particular, the entity that provides a challenge to the normative harmonic range is bV. This element provides the basis for the main referential dichotomy. It symbolizes, by its positioning on the whole-tone scale, the past and associated concepts of happiness, love, intimacy, rapture, and so on, concepts that stand in contrast to those associated with the present, for example, melancholy, loss of love, loneliness, and oblivion. Extending this further, and approaching nearer to the particular, we may reiterate that bV is a subversive harmonic element, a threat from outside the normative set of harmonic relations. Thus, it is capable of incorporating associated concepts of deviance, decadence, or “outsider” status. It could, in this sense, stand even as a symbol of homoerotic, “unwholesome intimacy.” Even more specifically, it could refer to the very intimacy of poet and composer; or, perhaps, on the part of the composer, the wished for intimacy between the two.

Lacking at this stage is corroborating historical evidence of the homoerotic, or even homosexual, milieu. There is only a modest amount of writing about homosexuality as a sociological phenomenon in nineteenth-century

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68 Again, this reading is loosely reminiscent of some aspects of Jackson’s reading of Tchaikovsky. See Jackson, “Aspects of Sexuality.”
Russia in general.\textsuperscript{69} What there is, however, might provide some intriguing suggestions. Consider, for example, Dan Healey’s observation on the “significant glance” as an established means of covert sexual communication between Russian males in public places, particularly, but not exclusively, in relation to forms of male prostitution.\textsuperscript{70} Healey quotes an observant moral denouncer of the late 1880s as follows: “tetki [lit. ‘aunties’], as they call themselves, recognize each other with one glance, by signs unnoticeable to passersby, yet, by these, experts can even define the category of tetka we are dealing with.”\textsuperscript{71} This is not to propose incongruously that Mussorgsky was a user of male prostitutes (there is no evidence for or against that), but rather to acknowledge evidence for a cultural phenomenon of nonverbal communication within the homosexual subculture of his place and time, and to acknowledge the obvious likelihood—especially given the moral hostility of the eyewitness in the passage quoted above—that such covert means extended beyond the world of mercantile sex. So what we have here, possibly, is a world of covert communication in which the “glance” is a conveyor of meaning.

Now consider, in this light, the second line of the second poem: “Your glance [vzgliad] told me nothing at all.” Here is a distinctive failure of nonverbal communication. Of course, we cannot know precisely what Golenishchev-Kutuzov meant by this “glance,” or what Mussorgsky made of it. But this lack offers no reason to exclude readings outside of the standard heterosexual, romantic topos of the spurned lover. And it is important to consider that, while the glance of the addressee is explicit in the text, there is also the implicit glance of the protagonist; indeed, one may assume an exchange of glances. The failure of communication could speak of the loss of not only the addressee to the protagonist specifically, but also of the addressee to the male sexual/erotic context in general. Or failure to recognize may, in a sense, refer to the failure of one party to accept, or recognize, the overtures of another—not because of their active wishes, but because of their (sub-)cultural exclusion. In this context, the second line is highly significant. Such propositions clearly add another interpretative layer to the text of the poem. And, indeed, if we consider the “subversive” harmonic role that the flattened dominant (as degree, chord, or key) plays within normative harmonic functioning, the fabric of the song provides some further force to the idea that Mussorgsky might have interpreted it along similar lines.

Given that the song need not always “interpret” the text in a way that might seem intuitively obvious, or “optimal,” we can even propose that if Golenishchev-Kutuzov’s semantic intentions in the opening three texts were not homoerotic, Mussorgsky’s reading of them still might have been. The manner in which the first three songs truck so heavily in the I→V juxtaposition certainly is capable of sustaining this idea. Of course, the more particularized the interpretation becomes, the more vulnerable it is to valid assault. A partial retreat to generality is, given the lack of other evidentiary factors, probably unavoidable. It does seem fairly safe to assert, however, that the general category of solitude is a viable referential element in this cycle,\textsuperscript{72} and while the loneliness of the protagonist in all these numbers can speak simply of the loneliness of the lover spurned, it also can speak, and to my reckoning clearly does speak (as it undoubtedly does in Schubert’s music, which Mussorgsky openly admired) to the solitude of the alienated individual who does not fit within the normative boundaries of

\textsuperscript{69}Not a great deal seems to have changed since Alexander Poznansky noted, in his study of Tchaikovsky, that “modern social historians have yet to tackle to any significant degree the question of homosexuality and the homosexual world in Russia during this period [the later nineteenth century]” (Tchaikovsky: The Quest for the Inner Man [New York: Schirmer, 1991], p. 465). Poznansky’s own work, however, may be cited as an exemplary starting place for reading in this area. See a → Dan Healey, “Masculine Purity and ‘Gentlemen’s Mischief’: Sexual Exchange and Prostitution between Russian Men, 1861–1941,” \textit{Slavic Review} 60 (2001), 233–34. Healey also provides a necessarily brief review of some relevant literature; see p. 233, n.2.

\textsuperscript{70}See Healey, “Masculine Purity,” pp. 246–47.

\textsuperscript{71}Quoted in Healey, “Masculine Purity,” pp. 246–47.

\textsuperscript{72}Vassina-Grossman noted that “loneliness” was the “dominant mood” of \textit{Sunless}. See Walker, “Mussorgsky’s \textit{Sunless Cycle},” pp. 389–90.
society, be those boundaries drawn on political, class, intellectual, aesthetic, or, indeed, sexual grounds.

Clearly one cannot, and should not, attempt to decode these songs to too precise a degree. Readings like that offered above, in relation to the second song, remain speculative. What I wish to emphasize, ultimately, is not any particular "message" of the songs examined here, but the means of delivery that such a message might take—the distinctly two-tiered, but overlapping system of communication. The manner in which these communicative means combine in the cycle testifies to the growing image of Mussorgsky as an "intellectual" composer. There are improvisatory, spontaneous, "felt" aspects to the musical fabric of this cycle, but there are also clearly preconceived, planned, "rational" aspects that are concocted with the express purpose of subtle, symbolic, even covert, communication in mind. The evidence of whole-tone and tritonal elements of harmonic organization, together with the circumstantial evidence that might suggest this cycle as not only a "subjective" but also an emblematic work, conspire to support the idea of some system of symbolic signification operative, of which I have proposed a putative, if still open-ended, reading. This, like any such system, is somewhat separate in kind from the immediately experienced, emotional, "affective" communication of the cycle. But in this case it does grow out of, and at certain important junctures overwhelms, the method of harmonic organization that is the driver of that immediate, affective level—that is, the very individual, expressive chromaticism based on modal mixture. In this continuity between one means of signification and the other, as I stated earlier, lies the cycle's unique power. The carriers of symbolic meaning are, indeed, "felt" as the most extreme elements of the affective chromatic language, as those elements that most challenge the established harmonic system. They do not present themselves as a stark contrast; rather, they emerge and impinge precisely, and powerfully, at the moments of greatest expressive reach. They are thus patently there, strongly felt, their symbolic apparatus ready to be "read." Debussy once wrote of a very different Mussorgsky work, The Nursery (Detskaia), that, "he composes in a series of bold strokes, but his incredible gift of foresight means that each stroke is bound to the next by a mysterious thread." This observation might easily apply to Sunless as well; indeed, it hints powerfully at precisely the carefully co-coordinated division of expressive means that has been elaborated here.

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Abstract.
Mussorgsky's Sunless cycle is aesthetically and stylistically an anomalous member of his œuvre. Its notably effaced, pared-down, and withdrawn qualities present challenges to critical interpretation. Its uniqueness, however, renders it a crucial work for furnishing the fullest possible picture of Mussorgsky as a creative artist. The author of its texts, Golenishchev-Kutuzov (whose relationship with Mussorgsky at the time of its writing possibly extended beyond the platonic) has been identified by recent scholarship as an essential "eye-witness" for those to whom Stasov's populist characterization of the composer does not ring entirely true. Golenishchev-Kutuzov believed that in Sunless Mussorgsky first revealed his authentic artistic self. According to Golenishchev-Kutuzov, Mussorgsky regarded his signal achievement in Sunless to have been the eradication of all elements other than "feeling." In other words, he had thrown off the stylistic shackles imposed by the aesthetics of realism and relied entirely on intuitive harmonic invention as the sole conveyor of a purely subjective, "affective" meaning in the cycle. This hypothesis forms the point of departure for an investigation of select numbers of the cycle. Analysis reveals that the affective aspect is not the only significant element operative. Alongside remnants of the realist style, there is evidence, of varying degrees of subtlety, for a knowing use of symmetrical pitch organization. Mussorgsky not only adapted the usual referential attachments of symmetrically based chromaticism—typically found in Russian operas of the second half of the nineteenth century—he also, through extremely simple but effective means, synthesized the "intuitive" harmonic and "rational" symmetrical elements of the cycle's pitch organization so that the latter emerges seamlessly out of the former. This
remarkable synthesis ensures the cycle’s uniformity of tone while also allowing for a reading that extends beyond the generally affective to the symbolically more specific. This symbolic level of reading offers several interpretative possibilities, one of which may refer even to the relationship of the poet and the composer. Irrespective of such potentials for interpretation, the most significant achievement in the cycle remains the synthesis of the intuitive/affective and rational/symbolic elements of its organization. Songs 1, 2, 3, and 6 of the cycle are considered in detail.

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