

**Title:** Khovanshchina and Musorgsky's Philosophy of Love  
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Musorgsky's final opera, *Khovanshchina* (begun 1872, unfinished at the composer's death), is a contradictory work. Although Musorgsky claimed to be writing a "people's musical drama" [народная музыкальная драма], the people do not figure prominently (or positively) in it. The opera originated from the idea of depicting the fraught period in Russia's history before Peter the Great's rise to power, and Musorgsky based his libretto on historical sources, yet several of the first scenes he composed depict a fictional Old Believer and her spurned love quite unrelated to the historical drama. Indeed, there seem to be two almost independent plots at work: one a historical plot about the fall of the various rival forces that cleared the way for Peter's ascent, and the other a love plot about a fictional woman's unrequited passion. This paper seeks to explain the links between the individual love plot and the national scale drama of Old Russia's fall by shifting the focus away from history and analyzing Musorgsky's overarching philosophy of love in the opera. Musorgsky enlisted family metaphors to shape his depiction of suffering Russia in the national drama, making her into the opera's true beloved. By exploring the type of love she elicits in relation to the love Musorgsky depicts between individuals in the human drama, I will argue for an underlying philosophy of compassion and forgiveness that binds the various strands of the opera's disparate plots.