

Ján Števuliak

OPERA AND CENSORSHIP
in 20th Century Slovakia

Master's Thesis

Sibelius Academy
University of the Arts Helsinki

Supervised by Johan Tallgren

Helsinki, 2024

The Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki

Department of Composition and Music Theory

Opera and Censorship in 20th Century Slovakia

Ooppera ja Sensuuri Slovakiassa 1900-luvulla

Opera a cenzúra na Slovensku v 20. storočí

Ján Števuliak, 2024

Abstract

This thesis examines the development of Slovak language opera in Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1989, focusing on the societal significance and the role of censorship in shaping these works. Through case studies of *Svätopluk* (1960) by Eugen Suchoň and *Vzkriesenie* (1962) by Ján Cikker, this research explores how Slovak composers navigated the political and cultural climate of post-World War II Czechoslovakia under Communist rule. Drawing on Marxist, Foucauldian and Bourdieusian frameworks of culture and power, alongside the *New Censorship theory*, this thesis challenges traditional views of censorship as merely repressive and offers a nuanced understanding of how state control over artistic expression influenced creative decisions. By analysing composers' responses to the pressures of nationalism, prescribed social realism, and Soviet-style cultural policies, this study sheds light on the complexities of cultural production in a totalitarian context. The findings contribute to broader discussions on the intersection of art, politics, and power, particularly in the context of Slovak music history, which has been less explored in comparison to Czech musical traditions. Ultimately, this work offers new insights into the agency of composers in a politically charged artistic landscape.

keywords: *opera, Slovakia, Czechoslovakia, censorship, modernism, nationalism, socialist realism, Suchoň, Cikker, Krútňava, Svätopluk, Mister Scrooge, Vzkriesenie*

Index

| | |
|--|-----------|
| 1 Introduction..... | 1 |
| 2 Method and Literature overview..... | 3 |
| 3 Findings..... | 5 |
| 3.1 Background | 5 |
| 3.1.1 Censorship (re)defined..... | 5 |
| 3.1.2 Power and Western Tradition Opera..... | 9 |
| 3.1.3 The “National Theatre” and Slovakia..... | 11 |
| 3.1.4 Political and Societal Climate 1948-1989..... | 13 |
| 3.1.5 Socialist Realism | 14 |
| 3.1.6 Policies in Culture, Music and Opera | 15 |
| 3.2 Cases | 18 |
| 3.2.1 Eugen Suchoň..... | 19 |
| 3.2.2 Repression after <i>Krútnava</i> | 21 |
| 3.2.3 <i>Svätopluk</i> | 23 |
| 3.2.4 Ján Cikker | 28 |
| 3.2.5 Repression after <i>Mister Scrooge</i> | 30 |
| 3.2.6 <i>Vzkriesenie</i> | 31 |
| 4 Censorship as Red Thread- Discussion and Summary..... | 36 |
| Bibliography | 40 |

1 Introduction

‘The values of culture are hierarchical and thus never unencumbered by power politics.’

-M. Foucault

I study the development of Slovak-language opera in Czechoslovakia between 1948 and 1989 and its societal significance. Presented through the cases of *Svätopluk* (1960) by Eugen Suchoň and *Vzkriesenie* (1962) by Ján Cikker, I aim to explore the involvement of censorship in the overall process. As opera is one of the most expensive ventures of art (or entertainment), it is often closely scrutinised, bringing discourses of power politics and hierarchies to the fore, making them more accessible for study. The outcomes of these studies may provide a glimpse into the era in which these works were created. What kind of challenges did the composers face at the time? Where did they stand within the hierarchies of cultural values? How did the opera production process unfold? And how did the audiences or the critics react?

In the Central European region, the period mentioned above was tumultuous. New nation states established in 1918 have gone through the work of building the institutions, only to face the Second World War ushering a new political and societal reality. The communist parties of respective USSR satellite states have amassed executive power, with reshaping the cultural identity of their citizens ranking high on their agendas. Operas and cantatas were regarded by the Composers' Union of Czechoslovakia (in line with Stalinist propagandist Zhdanov) as artforms promising to appeal to the general working-class.

Concerning Czechoslovakia, international musicological research and interest tends to gravitate towards the Czech region, whose musical history is documented in greater advance and is abundant in renowned figures and works. I therefore focus on the Slovak language works exclusively. Opera and its place within the Slovak society is a peculiar study subject from multitude of points- seemingly conflicting calls echoed through the landscape. The need to establish the repertoire in Slovak language, the need to write works of nationalistic qualities, the pressure to align the artistic creation in the worldview of socialist realism, and the aspiration to keep pace with Western artistic trends. How did Slovak composers navigate nationalism in sovietised society?

I chose the case composers and works due to combination of personal research interest, their variety, contrasts in thematic, dramaturgical and musical approaches, and due to their direct encounters with state censorship. Hailed as the founding generation of Slovak nationalist and modernist music, they received the prestigious “National Artist” Prize and title, openly glorified by the regime. However, was there more to censorship than the documented cases suggest? Did overt state censorship condition the composers to approach their new works differently?

Foucault's and Bourdieu's theories on culture have been among the most cited by scholars seeking to redefine censorship. My understanding of censorship has been so far such that it is solely a repressive force impeding artistic freedom, typically associated with totalitarian regimes. However, authorities rarely admitted to enforcing censorship outright, making such conduct difficult to prove. The New Censorship Theory offers a fresh perspective, striving to understand this issue in a more nuanced way.

Much has been written on composers' relationships with state power, censorship or clashes of values, with figures like Shostakovich or Khachaturian being the most frequently mentioned. The New Censorship discourse started surfacing in 2000's. By questioning explicit and implicit agency in censorship, compiling existing theories, and comparing them, this approach offers a valuable lens through which to examine the cases and their contexts. Applying this perspective may help answer my central question: What was the role of censorship at the time these works were written? Additionally, it could shed light on related questions: How did composers navigate their roles in this environment? Were their interests explicitly expressed? And how might we interpret these works today?

2 Method and Literature overview

The core aim of this thesis is to explore the impact of censorship on the creative processes behind operatic works in 20th century Slovakia. Addressing censorship inherently involves examining clashes between multiple agencies; thus, providing context and background for these interactions is vital to interpreting their nature and consequences. Opera as a genre, the individual personalities and preferences of composers, state policies and ideological machinery, and public opinion or expectations are all potential sources of conflict.

To achieve this aim, the strategy adopted involves conducting secondary research. Various methods, including historical research, literature review, content analysis, and discourse analysis, are employed to provide insight. The researcher's approach is interpretivist and inductive, using a case-study methodology to delve into the broader issue of censorship in 20th-century Slovak opera through two chosen examples.

Censorship, as the central topic of this thesis, requires a nuanced and comprehensive approach. Researching and synthesising arguments broadly, with relevance to historical and current discourse, is crucial in maintaining the objectivity of the discussion. Recent scholarly discourse redefines censorship by engaging with historical theories as well as critical voices; and Foucauldian, Bourdieusian and especially Marxian perspectives are of relevance to the topicality of this thesis.

The history of putting up structures and hierarchies or creating frameworks and forms in Opera is a reflection of practicality and viability of the genre. Examining how the case studies adopt or stretch these conventions provides a foundation to discuss the works' and composers' relationships with state power and society. Therefore, a brief overview of opera's history with regard to its social aspect and relationship to power is offered, drawing primarily from Daniel Snowman's book *The Gilded Stage: A Social History of Opera*. Snowman's perspective is supplemented by additional periodicals and articles.

As a high-cost art form, opera depends on institutional support, which in turn requires stable funding, provided in this case by the state. Institutions depend on content that either was or is being produced, and the study cases offer a glimpse on such repertoire production. Consideration for public preferences and its effect on the creation is yet another question, explored through resources such as *The Oxford Handbook of the New Cultural History of Music*, periodical *Slovenské Divadlo (Slovak Theatre)*, Ther's book *Center Stage: Operatic Culture and Nation Building in Nineteenth-Century Central Europe* or publication *National Theatres in a Changing Europe*.

In the field of culture, state power- either directly or indirectly through its ideological authorities- asserted its policies. Identifying these policies sheds light on the preferences of agents in power and potential value conflicts they might have instigated. Through policy inspection, it is also possible to discern expectations bestowed on the subject composers and how the composers responded to meet them. Sources include several musicological journal articles and academic theses.

The selected cases aim to topographically elucidate the wider landscape of mainstream institutional opera during the specified period in Slovakia. Their juxtaposition reveals variations within the scope of the genre, while the main objective remains to assess whether censorship can be proven and, if so, how it may have influenced these works.

The composers and operas have been subject of musicological research carried out by pre- and post- Velvet Revolution scholars. This distinction is critical, as scientific undertakings in pre-revolution Czechoslovakia may have been subject to moderation. Evidence of censorship may emerge by comparing historical texts with those published after the fall of the totalitarian regime. In a 2014 article *Censorship in Slovak Opera*, Marcela Mojžišová explored censorship in cases of Suchoň and Cikker and their works *Krútnava* and *Mister Scrooge*, which will be referred to.

Primary sources include Slovak- or Czech-language publications ranging from books and theses to journal articles and composer biographies. Notable works include *Slovenská Hudobná Moderna* (Modernism in Slovak Music) by Ladislav Burlas, Vladimír Zvara's monograph on Ján Cikker's opera *Vzkriesenie*, the periodical *Slovenské Divadlo* (Slovak Theatre), and biographies of the composers published after they were awarded the State Prize. For the operas themselves, the libretto, creative process, musical language, and stylistic preferences are considered.

The findings will be presented respectively within their sub-chapters. On the basis of these findings, content and discourse analysis is applied hand-in-hand in the discussion section, where results of this research are reflected on the aforementioned objectives.

3 Findings

3.1 Background

3.1.1 Censorship (re)defined

The scholarly understanding of censorship has undergone significant shifts since the Cold War. The work Marxian philosophers, as well as Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and Judith Butler, has informed what Matthew Bunn terms *New Censorship Theory*.

The conventional perception of the term ‘censorship,’ still prevalent in contemporary societies, originates with liberal theorists and is described as *external, coercive, and repressive* force outside of which exists a domain of free speech. The censorship is understood as external, an accident to speech, representing the intervention of authorities in consensual actions of individuals, namely, civil society.¹ In liberal thinking therefore, it is assumed that non-partisan state, through its institutions, intervenes after correction is necessary to withhold the rule of written constitutions and laws. Paraphrasing Bunn, even though liberal thought regards participators as equal, it fails to address inequities that allow wealthy individuals to regulate speech akin to state censorship- a form of economic coercion. In summary, liberal theory defines censorship as a tangible intervention to balance discourse when rhetoric outside the law causes measurable harm. Scholars agree that liberalist perception defines censorship tangibly but fails in clearly delineate the boundaries of free speech or the way damage is to be measured.

A significant critique of the liberal conception of censorship and an important piece in the puzzle of its contemporary picturing arose within Marxian theorists. Marx argued censorship was used to maintain and reinforce class-divisions, concealing oppressive power relations.² Citing Bunn, ‘[a]lthough the state does act as a repressive force in Marxist society, it does not do so at the *expense* of civil society but rather at its *behest*.’³ Thus, Marxist framing of censorship does not differ from the liberal view in that it is understood to be an external repressive action controlling thought, but rather, as researcher Alexis Kallio notes, Marxian scholars set hitherto unformulated questions *what for? Why censor?*⁴ And Kallio answers:

If censorship was for the people, Marxist scholarship interrogated the assumptions of who these people were, and whether censorship and similar acts of repressive power were for the greater good of society as a whole, or for the good of a select few.⁵

Therefore, Marxism concerns itself with investigating phenomena necessitating censorship and its potential benefits, rejecting the simplistic rhetoric of free speech versus censorship. Instead

¹ Bunn, “Reimagining Repression” p. 29

² Kallio, “Navigating (Un)Popular Music in the Classroom” p. 45

³ Bunn, “Reimagining Repression” p. 34

⁴ Kallio, “Navigating (Un)Popular Music in the Classroom” p. 45

⁵ Kallio. p. 45

of censorship, Marxism introduces *ideology* as principal source of distortion in intellectual life, with *ideology* explaining ‘how people come to see social world through the lens of specific socially sanctioned beliefs and structures.’⁶ In other words, what the intellectuals should have concerned themselves with was ideological critique rather than opposition to censorship. Moreover, within Marxist worldview, ideologies were hierarchised, and some, at *behest* of pursuing social justice, flagged as damaging, ironically mirroring censorship itself.

Among critiques of Marxian challenges, Alvin Gouldner argues that Marx allowed the party dictatorships to prioritise their political goals over freedom of communication.⁷ Ideologisation of public communication has supplemented or even superseded state repression—a phenomenon Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci theorised as *hegemony*. Through control of education, alliances with nominally independent organs of the press, and domination of intellectuals within civil society, a consensus of thought was achieved, supposed to naturalise historically contingent social relations.⁸ Consequently, for producing *hegemony*, the party or the ruling class relied on the ability of intellectuals within each layer of the society to organise themselves institutionally. Applying repression and coercion by the state is therefore not the only way of overseeing communication and securing a desired change— is also possible through allies of the ruling class aligning their respective praxis in harmony with the state through adoption of same ideology. This fact also suggests that within Marxist society, the state and the civil society exercise power collaboratively.

In response to Gramsci, Louis Althusser introduced the concepts of Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). In short, RSAs such as the police and military, but also, the censorship institutions, are seen as secondary deployment of power, supporting the function of ISAs through command of violence. ISAs are responsible for achieving consent required for social order to reproduce itself, but are otherwise conditioned to work relatively independently.⁹ Althusser notes— ‘no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses’¹⁰ Thus, in contexts like 20th-century Czechoslovakia, ISAs, including unions like the Composers’ Union, were key partners in shaping societal ideology and social justice’s bringing about.

Althusser further posited that whereas different ideologies emerge in history, he also sees *ideology* per se as omnipresent and transhistorical, as a form of social mediation and conditioning.¹¹ In conditioning, Althusser argues that we as human beings are a result of what the society shapes us all to be, implying that ideology itself is a process. Under properly functioning ISAs, chances are that the whatever the desired ideology is, the result is a human subject predisposed to adopt or exclude certain thoughts, truths and values, and overt state repression may become unnecessary.

⁶ Bunn, “Reimagining Repression” p. 34

⁷ Bunn, p. 33

⁸ Bunn, p. 35

⁹ Althusser and Brewster, *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*. p. 138

¹⁰ Althusser and Brewster. p 139

¹¹ Bunn, “Reimagining Repression.” p. 35-36— a summary of Althusser’s’ sub-chapter *Ideology has no History* from Althusser’s *Ideology and the State*, in *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*. p 150-152

Bunn credits Marxian theory with laying the foundation for New Censorship Theory by shifting the focus from repression to the control of knowledge production. Formal state repression is, according to Althusser, marginal to the overall strive for making damaging thoughts even unthinkable.¹² Put differently, according to Marxian scholars, censorship is not merely a tool of suppression but also a mechanism for shaping acceptable discourse.

New Censorship Theory, as articulated by Bunn, questions the conventional dichotomy between repression and freedom and strives to reconstruct censorship as a bracket-term that includes all possible kinds of censorship throughout changing societies. Input of philosophers such as Bourdieu, Foucault and Butler, concerned with problematising the very notion of free speech has been among the most cited in research reimagining censorship. In his essay *Censorship and Imposition of Form*, Bourdieu states:

“censorship is never quite as perfect or as invisible as when each agent has nothing to say apart from what he is objectively authorized to say: in this case he does not even have to be his own censor because he is, in a way, censored once and for all, through the forms of perception and expression that he has internalized and which impose their form on all his expressions.”¹³

In the same essay, Bourdieu introduces the concept of *structural censorship*, which he contextualises on grounds which to the contemporary society might resemble gatekeeping- ‘...it is the structure of the field itself which governs expression by governing both access to expression and the form of expression.’¹⁴ To this, Bunn adds: ‘the specialized languages that comprise tests of competency within a field are the most effective, invisible form of censorship, designed to rule out certain speakers and certain thoughts a priori.’¹⁵ Reworded, individuals are shaped by the formatives of their respective field, where hegemony, imposed form and sanctions condition them to naturally, subconsciously adopt thoughts, values, norms and to reject others or they delineate way of voicing opposition. The important takeaway is thus the fact, that censorship is present in contexts that seem consensual; where one’s background, lifestyle and profession shape their way of thinking.

Harkening back to Foucault’s line on power politics and hierarchies of cultural values, let us focus on what power means to him. His definition, ‘an infinitely complex network of micro-powers, of power relations that permeate every aspect of social life’¹⁶ takes power away from the state and institutions that are stereotypically awarded with it and diffuses it horizontally across different actors and their backgrounds. He suggests basing the analysis of power on studying techniques and tactics of domination¹⁷ rather than focusing on the state. Reflecting on Foucault, researcher Patricia O’Brien calls for recognition of ‘truth production as a function of power’¹⁸ – therefore, she sees power as both productive and repressive. Foucault

¹² Bunn. p. 36

¹³ Bourdieu, Thompson, and Raymond, *Language and Symbolic Power*. p. 138

¹⁴ Bourdieu, Thompson, and Raymond. p. 138

¹⁵ Bunn, “Reimagining Repression.” p. 39

¹⁶ Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*.

¹⁷ Freshwater citing Foucault in, “Towards a Redefinition of Censorship.” p. 229

¹⁸ Hunt and Biersack, *The New Cultural History*. p. 35

illustrates censorship's paradoxical power in his *History of Sexuality*, arguing that overall prudery, modesty and sexual repressiveness prevalent in the Victorian society actually prompted obsessive discourse and knowledge generation on sexuality¹⁹ within private circles of the society. Therefore, censorship might be seen as an incitement to discuss the publicly repressed topic.

Theatre Historian Helen Freshwater, in her essay *Towards Redefinition of Censorship*, notes cases of censorship's productive power that might be observed in literary arts- writers employ the expressive potential of the unspoken, circle around meanings and utilise subtext and irony. Or in another mode, the productive power is demonstrated through transgressive, shocking art, as a result of conventions normalised within the society²⁰ - in a stretched example, the members of audience at the premiere of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* were in the position of censors. In such cases, writers or composers actually seem to depend on the censor.

Relevant to many aforementioned thoughts, self-censorship has also provided means to argue that censorship operates in more obscure ways than clearly readable official action. Foucault's idea of *Panopticon*²¹ serves as a topological example- whoever/whatever is in the guardroom, be it the Ministry of Information or anticipation of negative public opinion, the 'actors govern their behaviour through measurement of their position within the society, the strategies available for securing their goals, and the rules and norms of correct behaviour.'²²

The work of Judith Butler further refines the discourse- in their book *Excitable Speech*, they differentiate between explicit censorship (state-imposed) and implicit censorship (structural and self-regulated). According to Butler, the state regulation using explicit forms 'states what it does not want stated' and therefore leaves clear traces.²³ Important is their focus on political and personal aims that legitimise censorship. It might be a part of the process of nation-building, gaining consensus in an institution or achieving personal goals.²⁴ With this view they agree with Foucault and Marx on the productivity of censorship.

Ultimately, after considering all the above input, a disarming feeling of confusion, or fatalistic thought that censorship is omni-present might arise. And indeed, reasonable critique suggests that conflation of different phenomena within one term risks its significance. With this concern in mind, through our examples, it is evident that New Censorship Theory's challenge to notion that the absence of censorship means free speech is valid.²⁵ The importance of concerning oneself with the heterogeneity of censorship crucial in our case. Whether through ideological conditioning, institutional constraints, or self-censorship, the boundaries of acceptable thought and expression are constantly negotiated in ways that extend beyond the simplistic 'free speech good, censorship bad.' Therefore applying the findings on our cases inclusively of their contexts will illuminate how censorship functioned as both a productive and silencing force in 20th-century Slovakia.

¹⁹ Freshwater, "Towards a Redefinition of Censorship." p. 229

²⁰ Freshwater. p. 236-237

²¹ Panopticon- a prison-type edifice with cells built concentrically around a guard room where inmates are aware of being watched, and therefore, out of fear adjust their actions according to desired behaviour.

²² Bunn, "Reimagining Repression." p. 38

²³ Butler, *Excitable Speech*. p. 130

²⁴ Butler. p. 132

²⁵ Bunn, "Reimagining Repression." p. 40

3.1.2 Power and Western Tradition Opera

Through its long journey from the first operas of Monteverdi to John Adams in our days, opera has been connected to powerful agents that made it possible. With its peak the 19th century, it has been involved in socio-political discourses that shaped European nations.

Monteverdi's famed *Orfeo* was no by means the first dramatic work to be sung, but it is thanks to the powerful Family of Gonzaga that it became talked about and left a mark in the history of opera. The Gonzagas invested in artists as they believed impressive art would secure them superior standing in the arena of Apennine nobility, and have ordered *Orfeo* to be published, which 'was as much a political as an aesthetic statement.'²⁶ Monteverdi has later, perhaps thanks to the patronage of Gonzagas- or in opposition to it, as he felt underpaid and quit their court- managed to successfully test opera as a business model with the impresarios of Venice. It became the main means of entertainment, offering yearly subscription which many paid for simply to flaunt themselves at the theatre.²⁷ Opera spread quickly in Italy, leading disproportionate obscenities such as castrations, which, as per Catholic Church's exclusion of women, were paid for handsomely and seen as an escape from impoverishment for many.²⁸ We can assume that opera has been associated with social status or offered opportunities to climb upwards in the social hierarchy. Thus, it has been an intrinsically social phenomenon ever since.

Opera began to spread cross the Alps, as Giovanni Battista Lulli, at service of the Sun King has naturalised to Jean-Baptiste Lully. This is a notable metaphor for the "othering," the censorship of the Italian language at the Palais Royal. The costs of Louis XIV's extravaganzas, as noted by Snowman, were borne by millions who did not have access to them.²⁹ Or as historian Taruskin says, opera was the product of a tyrannical, exploitative class.³⁰ Similar accounts sound throughout the history and Europe- Napoleon used opera akin to the way monarchs did, however, exchanging the nobles with persons of merit. It was to the opera house that Napoleon has rushed to be seen after an alleged attempt on his life. He funded the opera generously regardless of the cost of his war campaigns³¹- the auditorium was the place where his new social order was reproduced.

London of Händel's time set a stage for an interesting peculiarity. His evident success in delivering Italian music was not met with universal acceptance. This resulted in John Gay writing *The Beggar's Opera*, an opera-inspired music theatre work- or rather, anti-opera- which became a symbol of the ideological struggle of the common folk with the rich. With 62 performances in its first season, it became the second most-produced work to date. Its sequel was suppressed.³² Opposingly, in Prague, Mozart's *Don Giovanni* sung in Italian united German aristocrats and Czech artisans and servants, who packed the theatre, all enthused to

²⁶ Snowman, *The Gilded Stage*. p. 24

²⁷ Snowman. p. 34

²⁸ Snowman. p. 36-41

²⁹ Snowman. p. 52

³⁰ Snowman. p. 52, Snowman cites Taruskin

³¹ Snowman. p. 102

³² Snowman. p. 70

see the spectacle.³³ In these examples, we can see that, on the one hand, repressive censorship has been present in strengthening class divides; a on the other, mix of fame and neutral language was able to bring opposite classes together.

Concerning fame and unity, we fast forward to Italy after unification in the 19th century. The press was occupied with the question of naming the successor to Verdi, otherwise Italian opera would see its 'death.'³⁴ Here, we are still in the period where houses did not keep a stable repertoire but commissioned new works. It is thanks to Verdi and Puccini that the concept of a 'national composer' has become so widespread, particularly in nations that started the self-identification process after the 1848 revolutions. Puccini was a celebrity; his personality cult was built through attention his physique, persona and even day-to-day life in the press, as much as his operas. Puccini was mythologised and 'Italianised' in a predetermined agenda that surpassed his musical aims.³⁵ This is due to the fact that the unification process, even though politically executed, stalled socially and culturally on the North-South axis. With the example of Puccini, we can see that it is not just the work or the language but also the composer who might be at the centre of power discourse or utilised to achieve certain goals.

Of great contextual importance is the phenomenon of the nationalisation of opera, observed by Philipp Ther. He suggests that the process may be seen as *differentiative*- as in the establishment of exclusive national schools or canonisation of repertoires; or as *convergent*- as in the common processes is observed throughout Europe during a specific period in opera history.³⁶ Music was regarded, somewhat romantically, as a tool of nation-building- a unifying force that makes its listeners equal no matter their background- but, of course, the common signifier and the necessary 'otherer' was the language. Ther sees the establishment of *national opera* of the Czech, Polish, Hungarian and more Central European nations as a natural result of exchange of neighbouring cultures, noting Germany in particular.³⁷ Aided by the concept of *transferts culturels*, developed in the late 1980s, he suggests that we should look at nationalisation not through an internalist perspective, but by 'studying the possible impact of external factors or agents.'³⁸ The idea of transfer and its local adaptation, creating a consensus that aids minority self-identification is compatible with Judith Butler's view on legitimisation of censorship and the overall idea of censorship as a productive force.

Mussolini's, Stalin's and Hitler's dictatorships all made opera a tool of propaganda alongside the novelty of film. They were aware of the historical role of art in their respective countries; Hitler and Stalin patronised opera companies themselves. Art and culture were weaponised to serve ideological purposes, and works were slammed as formalist or degenerate, with artists silenced in different ways, from defamation to murder.³⁹ Stalin, having seen Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District* himself, authorised the press condemnation of

³³ Snowman. p. 86

³⁴ Wilson, *The Puccini Problem*. p. 21

³⁵ Wilson. p. 25-26

³⁶ Ther, "The Genre of National Opera in a European Comparative Perspective."

³⁷ Ther and Hughes-Kreutzmuller, *Center Stage*. p. 249-252

³⁸ Ther, "The Genre of National Opera in a European Comparative Perspective."

³⁹ Snowman, *The Gilded Stage*. p. 318-319

the ‘fidgety, screaming, neurotic music...’⁴⁰ In later chapters, we will return to Soviet policies and the socialist realism. The fact remains that dictatorships used opera as a propaganda tool and did not shy away from different kinds of censorship, destroying or skyrocketing careers and lives of artists.

The above demonstrates that Opera has been involved with the socio-political discourse of the Western world. By no means has all of it been political, but as often predominant form of entertainment, it has continued to impress masses. Therefore, the important agents of bygone days strove to combine their power with it or to harness it to further their own goals.

3.1.3 The “National Theatre” and Slovakia

Only institutions with generous funding were able to produce opera of relevant quality. Its history points to many stories of bankruptcy or even personal tragedy. Its history is marked by numerous stories of bankruptcy or even personal tragedy. Such was the case of Oskar Nedbal, one of the first directors of the Slovak National Theatre, who was found dead under the windows of the Croatian National Theatre in 1931 after a series of unfortunate events. This chapter follows the history of the Slovak National Theatre’s establishment.

The concept of a National Theatre appeared in different parts of the world during the 19th century with the rise of nation-states. It offered cultural nationalists a space to investigate and exploit folklore, myths, legends and local histories while romanticising the *Volksggeist*- the essence rural folk’s life.⁴¹ These institutions were often either founded and supported by the enthusiasts from within the civil society, relying on crowdfunding; or instated by burghers, nobility, or autocratic decree of the Imperial Courts.

In the area of contemporary Slovakia, which was an integral part of the Hungarian Kingdom, conditions differed from those that led to the establishment of the Czech National Theatre- a project that became a myth in its own right.⁴² In the Hungarian Kingdom, it was common for burghers and aristocrats, primarily of Hungarian or German origin, to maintain professional theatres.⁴³ This applies to the theatre building on what is now Hviezdoslav Square in Bratislava, built in 1886, which today houses the Slovak National Theatre.⁴⁴

The new country of Czechoslovakia emerged on the map after the Kingdom of Hungary was fragmented by the Treaty of Trianon. While the 19th century showcased the two aforementioned examples of establishing a national theatre, the Slovak case was an early case of emulating the trend based on central political decision-making – a pattern that would spread worldwide after the world wars ushered in a new world order.⁴⁵ The suppressive policies of

⁴⁰ Snowman. p. 317

⁴¹ Wilmer, *National Theatres in a Changing Europe*. p. 14

⁴² Ther and Hughes-Kreutzmuller, *Center Stage*. p.133. Ther describes the establishment process of Czech National Theatre allegorically as a 4-act opera. General Czech and even some Slovak schools including mine teach this history in great detail and somewhat sentimentally

⁴³ Tallián, “Opera ako symbol statusu. Maďarská kráľovská opera v rokoch 1884–1920.”

⁴⁴ Lajcha, “Zrod Slovenského národného divadla.”

⁴⁵ Wilmer, *National Theatres in a Changing Europe*. p. 24. Wilmer notes this trend happening in Australia, South Korea, African and South American countries after 1950

Budapest against ethnic minorities has ended. However, whether to prior suppression or a general lack of enthusiasm for culture and theatre among Slovak communities⁴⁶, Slovak-language theatres had previously been limited to amateur or voluntary companies. As a result, politicians invited a provincial but professional Czech theatre company from Pardubice to lay foundation for the new top-tier theatre institution⁴⁷ until a new generation of Slovak artists was ready to take over and adapt theatrical culture to their own needs.

Between 1918 and 1939, even though Pressburg in German or Poszony in Hungarian was renamed to Bratislava, it remained a multi-ethnic city. Hungarian, German, Czech and Slovak could all be heard from the stage. This period of the history of Slovak National Theatre can be described as one of professionalisation and human capital development, achieved both because of and in spite of Bratislava's multiculturalism. German and Hungarian performances featured great and inspirational actors, while audiences were justifiably critical of the quality of first initial productions staged by the Slovak National Theatre's ensembles. Many even boycotted the institution.

The first drama ensemble consisting solely of Slovak actors was established in 1932, while opera remained predominantly Czech until 1938.⁴⁸ Oskar Nedbal, conductor and operetta composer on an artistic exile from Prague, largely programmed works by Smetana or Dvořák. The first opera premiere in Slovak was Ján Levoslav Bella's *Wieland the Smith* in 1926, a work based on a Wagnerian plot. Nedbal believed music could help alleviate ethnic tensions in the city, which was destined to become Slovakia's cultural capital. However, with the advent of the Great Depression, Nedbal could not keep up with the costs of running a theatre that had yet to become a state-budgetary institution. Overwhelmed by debt, he tragically committed suicide.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, he was instrumental in ending the theatre's boycott, attracting new Slovak audiences, and fostering an environment for professional Slovak theatre to flourish.⁵⁰

During the Nazi puppet regime of the Slovak State (1939–1945), the theatre was included in the government's budget plan. However, its ideological radicalism was not matched by any meaningful artistic vision. The programming in the theatre, especially the musical drama, has often managed to escape the ideological programme of the fascists.⁵¹ There was no established repertoire to be exploited- unlike Wagner in Hitler's case- even though the regime produced new operas- most notably *Svitanie* (Dawn) by Ladislav Holoubek and works by Jozef Rosinský, which the contemporary critique resolutely rejected.⁵²

What the democratic and capitalist Czechoslovakia established, and the fascists nationalised, the communists retained and employed to further their goal of reshaping the society. The lack of high-quality content ready for staging presented an opportunity for the communists to implement their vision of Slovak identity in opera largely uncontested.

⁴⁶ Zvara, "Hľadanie zmyslu opery."

⁴⁷ Lajcha, "Zrod Slovenského národného divadla."

⁴⁸ Lajcha.

⁴⁹ Novák, *Oskar Nedbal v Mých Vzpomínkách*. p. 111

⁵⁰ Zvara, "Hľadanie zmyslu opery."

⁵¹ Zvara.

⁵² Nedbal, *Půl století s českou operou*. p. 233

3.1.4 Political and Societal Climate 1948-1989

With the Red Army's "liberation" of Bratislava and Prague from the clerico-fascist government, Stalin's imperialist plans for Central Europe gained greater legitimacy. In Czechoslovakia, the USSR-tilting communist movement was the strongest among the countries that were to comprise what is now addressed as the Eastern Bloc. The period of the Third Czechoslovak Republic (1945-1948) was crucial before "The Great February" coup d'état, ordered by an impatient Stalin. During this time, hegemony according to communist ideology was being built, culminating in its proclamation as the main state ideology after 1948.

If in Gramsci's reading of Marxism the state and civil society exercise power together, then Althusserian ISAs, in our case The Union of Czechoslovak Composers, followed the central directives of the communist party and were ideologically scrutinised.⁵³ The National Front, an organisation encompassing numerous civic organisations and political parties, was tasked after the war with delivering the country from war strain. It was later transformed (or hijacked) into a powerful supervisory tool- an extension of the state that oversaw the ideological transformation of society and propagated party objectives.⁵⁴ The ruling class, through its representatives in ISAs, achieved a power monopoly, enabling it to bring about a cultural revolution across all spheres of public life in both a top-down and grassroots manner.

Rigorous ideological control was meticulously executed at the lowest levels. Nearly all individuals in Czechoslovakia were subject to personal reports/appraisals written by cadres, colleagues or paid staff embedded in the workplaces or educational institutions. These reports, updated throughout an individual's life, were compiled into a dossier accessible to decision-makers at various levels- government or Party officials, university admissions boards, RSAs, or potential employers. The Union of Composers tasked select members with such surveillance, particularly when one of their members was part of a delegation representing the country abroad.⁵⁵ Directors of companies, schools or unions were also subject to reports. Punishment varied, from denial of study place to restrictions in employment opportunities- often relegating individuals to public service jobs- or even imprisonment. This system forced individuals to constantly, and perhaps anxiously, evaluate the potential impact of their actions- such as being outspokenly religious- on their standing in the society, effectively fostering self-censorship.

The ruling class also subjected all relevant media to systemic censorship before dissemination. Any book, news story, or television programme received its 'censorship number' before it could be published or broadcast. This clearance was granted by a central agency,⁵⁶ which also oversaw artistic production, including concert programmes, posters, poems, theatre scripts and opera libretti. Interestingly, even parts of speeches by Communist Party leader Klement Gottwald were subject to checks.⁵⁷

⁵³ Bugalová, "Hudobné inštitúcie na Slovensku." p. 19

⁵⁴ Bugalová. p. 19-20

⁵⁵ Jiráček, "Kulturní politika svazu Československých skladatelů v období socialistického realismu perspektivou Václava Dobiáše." p. 145

⁵⁶ Prague based agency, named *Hlavní správa tiskového dohledu*, transl. as *Main Press Supervision Administration*

⁵⁷ Hubená, "Odras politické situace v kultuře Československa v letech 1948 – 1960." p. 18

In the case of theatre plays and operas, a comprehensive review of all previous scripts was ordered in 1956. Guidelines issued in 1965 mandated that scripts and libretti be submitted to authorities at least four weeks before the start of rehearsals to obtain the necessary clearance for countrywide performance.⁵⁸ Additionally, approval for international performances was controlled by Dilia, a theatre and literary agency tasked with promoting 'proper' socialist artworks and artists abroad while side-lining others. Dilia laid off a total of 600 plays.⁵⁹ Repressive censorship had clear rules and structure, but as seen in the personal report system, it was not the only tool for securing ideological conformity. Rooting out the undesirable and achieving unthinkability required a more covert approach.

One of the undesirable traits of the new socialist citizen was overt religiosity. The Catholic Church's historical dominance over Slovak society motivated communists to propagate myths, such as the Vatican serving as a tool of American imperialism.⁶⁰ Although religious freedoms were nominally granted in Czechoslovakia, individuals and groups engaging in religious activities faced persecution. While much of Slovakia's population remained religiously active, religious affiliation became a liability for those aspiring to leadership positions, university admission, or careers with significant societal impact.⁶¹ Consequently, religious leaders and believers often moved their activities underground, frequently working to disrupt the ideological hegemony of the ruling class.

The political climate in the country was unstable, with constant questioning permeating all spheres of society. The Slánský show trials directly affected the Union of Composers. With the possibility of any member of its leadership being flagged as an enemy, top union officers reflected on their past choices and stances in self-critical speeches. For example, admitting that adopting socialist realism in a strict Zhdanovian matter was a mistake, suggesting instead that it should justify itself in "feeding the soul" and entertaining the working class.⁶² Through this climate of constant self-criticism and fright of repercussions the party cemented its authority, and has directly affected individuals in culture and the freedom artistic creation.

3.1.5 Socialist Realism

To better understand the objectives of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in relation to culture, it is necessary to take a brief detour to define socialist realism, the principal political framework for arts production in the USSR. Understanding its dogmas is crucial, as adherence to or ignorance of them often led to explicit or implicit censorship. C. Vaughan James describes socialist realism in his book *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory* as:

⁵⁸ Tomášek, *Pozor, cenzurováno! Aneb ze života soudružky cenzury*. p. 45-51

⁵⁹ Tomášek. p. 46

⁶⁰ Gonda and Zajac, *Socializmus: realita namiesto mýtov*. p. 82

⁶¹ Gonda and Zajac. p. 85

⁶² Jiráček, "Kulturní politika svazu Československých skladatelů v období socialistického realismu perspektivou Václava Dobiáše." p. 148

‘a world-wide artistic phenomenon that arose under the influences of great social changes...
...-the sharpening contradictions within the capitalist society, the crisis in the bourgeois culture
and the rise of a socially conscious proletariat. It is therefore the reflection in the arts of the
struggle for the victory of socialism.’⁶³

The term socialist realism was coined by Stalin himself in the apartment of Maxim Gorky, after other suggestions such as proletarian, tendentious, monumental, and communist realism were proposed during discussions about the relationship between art and Stalinism. The term combines *socialist*- signifying alignment with the Communist Party’s ideological policies- and *realist*- interpreting life comprehensively through the lens of social relations. Together, the term idealizes the construction of a new society and the struggle to achieve socialism. Vaughan James also recalls the outcomes of the USSR’s Composers’ Union convention in 1959, highlighting the concept of *formalism* as the primary transgression for an artist. Formalism was defined as anything ‘too academic,’ ‘over-refined,’ ‘lifelessly individualistic,’ or ‘naturalistically primitivist.’⁶⁴ This collection of terms allowed for a broad and subjective application of what could be labelled as formalism- perhaps best summarised as anything incompatible with the ‘Soviet people’s perception of the world.’ The problem lay in determining who assumes the authority to define the Soviet people’s perspective, particularly within a regime that often controlled its people using psychological coercion, as noted above.

A significant point in Vaughan James’s analysis is the emphasis socialist realism placed on history and the continuity of nationalist traditions. National cultures were deliberately stimulated, as in the time of Leninist revolution and later in Slovakia, regard for art among the working class in general was low. Encouraging artists to draw upon their customs and traditional culture- the *existing culture*- was a step toward the development of the new, proletarian art- art that was supposed to actively assist and lead the individuals and masses through the ideological reshaping.⁶⁵

It could be argued that the objective acceptability of one’s art hindered individual expression. While it was not clearly stated as a goal, socialist realism surely calls for tearing down the ‘ivory tower’ for the sake of educating the masses in art and cultivating their taste progressively. If art before the October Revolution was alien to the Russian populace, the communists desired to employ it to aid the process of equalisation of classes. Art was seen as a commodity accessible to the wealthy, therefore bringing all people to art and vice versa has taken shape in exact policies, which will be lined out below.

3.1.6 Policies in Culture, Music and Opera

Historians suggest that the period between 1948 and 1960 was marked by the formal construction of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia, often characterised by trial-and-

⁶³ Vaughan James, *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory*. p. 85

⁶⁴ Vaughan James. p. 86-90

⁶⁵ Vaughan James. p. 90-96

error approach in its search for the most effective means of controlling the culture sector. In 1953 alone, cultural affairs in Slovakia have governed by six different centrally managed institutions either in Prague or Bratislava.⁶⁶ Moreover, these institutions frequently clashed over their competencies in shaping the sector,⁶⁷ with disagreements on the implementation of socialist realism and the appropriate approach to ‘modern’ or contemporary art- terms that were often confused or conflated. After Stalin’s death, the cultural landscape began to shift. Strictly dogmatic voices were subdued under the pretext of combating ‘political formalism.’ The newly established Ministry of Culture replaced the Ministry of Information, and the government undertook measures such as expanding the cinema network, investing in cultural centres, and organizing folk festivities and balls. These initiatives resulted in substantial budgetary allocations for culture, which was expected, in the long run, to become self-sufficient. The general vision was to use culture as a facilitator of collective awareness, increased economic productivity, and a “better and happier life” in socialism.⁶⁸ These measures led to greater freedoms, which in the course of the 1960s led to societal reforms that have gone too far for the USSR’ liking. In 1968, the Warsaw Pact forces intervened to bring Czechoslovakia back in line with the Communist agenda. New wave of repression continued until 1989 revolution.

Concerning Slovakia and institutional organisation of musical life, the leadership established the Slovak Philharmonic (1949), Academy of Performing Arts (1949), Music and Art Centre (1950, state-monopoly concert agency), the State Musical Press (1951) and Institute of Musicology at the Slovak Academy of Sciences (1951). These institutions aimed to differentiate Slovak music ideologically from the Western European mainstream while advancing the concept of “revolutionary” music.⁶⁹ In a publication released during the communist rule, musicologist Ladislav Burlas noted that post-1948-coup objective for Slovak music was to oppose the West ideologically while striving to qualitatively match it.⁷⁰ The newly found institutions were meant to aid achieving these objectives, with the Union of Composers guaranteeing both the quality and ideological viability of what has been produced.

Early in the totalitarian period, the Union of Czechoslovak Composers evolved into a powerful institution with the authority to shape the art music scene and music policies beyond it as well. Similarly to other cultural unions, it maintained its own press office and had publishing rights. Membership was exclusive, designed to uphold quality standards and ensure that all members embodied the ideal of a socialist cultural worker.⁷¹ This form of gatekeeping, referred to as structural censorship by Bourdieu, ensured that the members of the Union reached consensus and facilitated hegemony, and monopolised control over current discourse on art music in the country.

During the Stalinist era, the Union directed composers to prefer mass songs, cantatas and opera, as in these genres, the ideological content could be easily conveyed and connections

⁶⁶ Bugalová, “Hudobné inštitúcie na Slovensku.” p. 25

⁶⁷ Hubená, “Odras politické situace v kultúre Československa v letech 1948 – 1960.” p. 18-19

⁶⁸ Hubená. p. 20-21

⁶⁹ Elschek and Burlas, *A History of Slovak Music*. p. 324

⁷⁰ Burlas, *Slovenská Hudobná Moderna*. p. 35

⁷¹ Hubená, “Odras politické situace v kultúre Československa v letech 1948 – 1960.” p. 16

with the proletariat secured.⁷² Examples of such works include *Song on the Union of Workers and Farmers* by E. F. Burian or *Machines, Hands, Sirens* by J. E. Zelinka. The director of the Czechoslovak Union, Václav Dobiáš, noted that whereas cantatas could have been, because of their orientation on quantitative production, allowed to be of lower quality; the same could not apply to opera, that obliged the composer to follow the strictest artistic standards. After 1956, restrictions on genres less ideologically aligned were lifted, particularly as cantatas faced criticism for their low quality.⁷³ The Union also organised courses to help members navigate ideological argument. Marxist-Leninist perspectives on history, crises in avantgarde, socialist realism and partisan critique were, among other, the content of such courses.⁷⁴ Acting as a censoring body, the Union evaluated works on both professional and ideological grounds, deciding which pieces would be promoted and granting them “harmless” labels.⁷⁵ Composers who displayed professionalism as well as conformed to the ideology were often showcased as representatives of the prevailing direction in Czechoslovak art music.

The mythification of such composers did not proceed similarly to Verdi or Puccini- the regime, in line with socialist realism, avoided creating celebrities that would seem detached from the general populace. Biographies of Slovak composers like Suchoň, Cikker and Alexander Moyzes or compendiums of post-war music, published in the 1950s, typically began by criticizing pre-Communist Slovak composers and describing Slovakia’s previous musical life as ‘poor.’ These accounts then celebrated these composers as the ‘establishing generation of Slovak art music’s new tradition.’⁷⁶ Composers in this generation received a spotlight for their ‘approach to realism,’ ‘correct understanding of folk nationality,’ but of course under the ‘presumption of greatest artistic mastery.’⁷⁷ They have ‘formed a new compositional programme’, in contrast with the western European trends.⁷⁸ Public enthusiasm for their works would be often, on top of authentic enthusiasm, fictitiously staged in the media and propaganda channels. This contributed towards a change of opera’s perception in the society.⁷⁹

In 1958, a Conference on Opera at Slovak National Theatre was held. At its opening, the chief director of opera Šimon Jurovský delivered a lengthy, ideologically loaded speech, describing opera as

“the leading, most democratic and regarding the opportunities it provides, the richest music genre; performed to further the culture of an individual and the entire nation, to elevate it’s self-esteem and socialistic patriotism... This theatre has therefore, as a public institute, its political importance... it is a reflection of certain political as well as societal, cultural and social discourses

⁷² Jiráček, “Kulturní politika svazu Československých skladatelů v období socialistického realismu perspektivou Václava Dobiáše.” p. 154

⁷³ Jiráček. p. 152

⁷⁴ Jiráček. p. 144

⁷⁵ Jiráček. p. 145

⁷⁶ Zavorský, *Eugen Suchoň: Profil Skladatele*. p. 9

⁷⁷ Zavorský. p. 10

⁷⁸ Burlas, *Slovenská Hudobná Moderna*. p. 67

⁷⁹ Zvara, “Hľadanie zmyslu opery.”

and vice versa, it influences these discourses, it helps to disseminate, deepen and consolidate them in the audience.”⁸⁰

Jurovský emphasised the necessity of broadening the repertoire, as, after the theatre has transformed to operating on a daily basis, the dramaturgy was lacking ‘attractive, artistically valuable and adorable’ works. Subsidising the further creation of original repertoire in Slovak language would secure this requirement.⁸¹ Although seasons often featured Western classics like *Nabucco*, *Tosca* or *Die Zauberflöte*, these were layered with premieres, innovative productions or ‘rare finds.’ Musicologist Vladimír Zvara wryly observed that ‘Communist functionaries were burghers as well and their wives needed to flaunt their gowns and coats.’ The Soviets did not criticise historical opera and ballet works thoroughly, as they kept associating them with harmless divertissement, opulence and beauty.⁸² Nevertheless, the dramaturgy would be curated rather than based on popular demand. Referring to Jurovský’s speech, this included works of political nature as well.

The tickets were kept at low prices and available broadly. Industry plants and organisations would buy out large proportions of theatre tickets and give them away to workers as perks. No records were kept of the attendance, only of the sales- the fact that box offices were sold out by 100 per cent did not automatically reflect itself in the auditorium. With the advancement of television and diversification of offered entertainment, the opera faced an attendance crisis in the 1960s, to which the Ministry of Culture responded with ordering a research. This research’s results reported discrepancies between visitors coming from different classes, with above 80 per cent of labourers stating that they attended opera rarely, compared to 21 per cent in workers in education or 13 per cent in healthcare workers. The main obstacles mentioned were low musical standard, poor marketing, too much ‘modern music’ and insufficient arts education of children and youth.⁸³

Between 1948-1958, the government invested significantly in culture, along with using artists’ input to further its ideological stance. This era laid the groundwork for institutionalised art music and made culture- framed as ‘nourishment for the soul’ -accessible and affordable to wider population. Opera experienced unprecedented activity that even surpassed its demand, highlighting the fact that it was centrally planned and supported, as the administration sought to intertwine it with its political agenda.

3.2 Cases

This thesis examines the broader issue of censorship in opera and the culture field through a multiple case study approach, focusing on the operas of Eugen Suchoň and Ján Cikker. The chosen works, *Svätopluk* and *Vzkriesenie*, were composed following the artists’ personal experiences with explicit state-imposed repressive censorship. By analysing these operas in

⁸⁰ Jurovský, “Súčasný stav Opery ND v Bratislave.” p. 343, transl. JŠ

⁸¹ Jurovský. p. 347

⁸² Zvara, “Hľadanie zmyslu opery.”

⁸³ Zvara. Citing the research carried out by Michal Hruškovic et al., *Návštevnosť Opery SND v Bratislave*.

conjunction with the context provided in earlier chapters, this study aims to evaluate whether and how censorship influenced the composers, their works, and the cultural field as a whole.

Concerning the composers, their personal background will be introduced first, followed by their experience with censorship in relation to works *Krútnava* and *Mister Scrooge*. Attention to discrepancies between pre- and post-Communist sources may reveal presence of ideological conditioning. In the respective chapters on the case works, their context and background leading to their composition will be introduced first, followed by concise studies of libretti and musical content, paying close attention to potential points of conflict with the ideological framework of the Communist Party.

3.2.1 Eugen Suchoň

Eugen Suchoň is stereotypically known in Slovakia as the composer of first nationalist opera. Previously mentioned composers such as Bella, Rosinský or Holoubek have all tried to write one ever since the National Theatre was established in Bratislava. But, in relation to previously cited article by Philipp Ther, after considering nationalisation of plots, singing language and opera ensemble,⁸⁴ and perhaps a with little bit of communist propaganda, Suchoň's *Krútnava* (*The Whirlpool*), premiered in 1949, achieved this distinction. This work is agreed to be masterful and unprecedented in its musical language as well as drama, however, its circumstances caused great ordeals to Suchoň. To understand how these experiences shaped his later work, particularly *Svätopluk*, it is necessary to explore both his formative influences and the circumstances surrounding *Krútnava*.

Eugen was born in 1908 to parents actively involved in church music- at various points of his childhood, both his father, Ladislav, and mother, Serafína, served as organists, choir leaders and/or church orchestra conductors. It is important to note that the only widespread and publicly accessible institutional musical life of Slovak background before 1918 was kept up by the church.⁸⁵ Suchoň grew up immersed in this environment and attended the Catholic Piarist Gymnasium in Svätý Jur before enrolling in 1920 at the newly founded Music School in Bratislava, where he initially studied piano part-time. Recognizing his growing interest in composition, his mother encouraged him to pursue music full-time. He continued his studies at the Academy of Music and Drama in Bratislava under Frico Kafenda (composition) and Josef Vincourek (conducting). Between 1931 and 1933, he furthered his education at the Master School of the Prague Conservatory with Vítězslav Novák. Following his studies, he began teaching in Bratislava.⁸⁶

Historians divide his creative life into five periods. The first between 1923 and 1928 was influenced by impressionism and mainstream European traditions. He later disowned all of his approx. 50 compositions from this period, permitting their publication only after 1975. The second period was marked by engagement with dodecaphonic techniques inspired by

⁸⁴ Ther, "The Genre of National Opera in a European Comparative Perspective."

⁸⁵ Zavorský, *Eugen Suchoň: Profil Skladateľa*. p. 11-13

⁸⁶ Martináková, "Suchoň, Eugen."

Schoenberg, modernism of Hindemith and late romanticism, as well as the orientation towards creation of 'Slovak style' in art music, correlating with the following period dominated by folk music.⁸⁷ Similarly to Bartók, tetrachords, diatonicism and modality became the centrepiece of his creativity. This was the longest period, stretching from 1934 to 1955, and encompassed the creation of *Krútnava*. It is at this point that research published before 1989 starts to include overt ideological content on top of presenting historical and musicological facts. In a portrait published in 1978, we can read about previous influence of various⁸⁸ European 'isms' on the new generation of composers, who 'however in 1930s started perceiving the reality correctly- issues of nation through socialism,' with a perspective different from the previously predominant bourgeoisie.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the glorificative language proposes such phrases as (new generation of composers') 'updated focus on the subject: the people, which need to be liberated from the oppression of exploitation' and 'Suchoň's love towards the people bordered worship'⁹⁰ to seemingly portray the composers were on the side of the party. Authors supply cases to base their argument- in *Krútnava*, a 'simple folksong' wakes up the conscience of a murderer which as a result, goes on to turn himself in. Or, in *Svätopluk*, court musician tells the king: (the people's) 'songs tell the truth, my King' and with 'truth' coincides clear E major chord in the orchestra- which, as the musicologist shares, Suchoň considered as a symbol of 'peak of enthusiasm stemming from beauty.'⁹¹ Such presentation admits that there was a preferred or 'correct' way to interpret Suchoň's music, which nevertheless, is objectively seen as rich in symbolism and extra-musical influences.

Opera *Svätopluk* was written during Suchoň's fourth creative period (1955-1968). He has undergone profound crisis after series of illnesses, quarrels with the representatives of the regime and the death of his mother. This crisis surfaced in doubting all of his previous career. He turned compositionally towards serialism and dodecaphony and its synthesis with modality and tonality.⁹² This is reflected or, perhaps, excused in the communist biography as a natural progress of 'searching for new means of expression,' as he would not be able to 'copy himself.' Dodecaphony and serialism is, of course, not mentioned as a trend or Western music in general, but rather, as the composer transforming himself, as him 'deepening the nationalist contours in his work.'⁹³ Then, theoretical grounds on Suchoň's own theory on dodecaphony follows- he developed 'his own original solutions' without 'basing it on the work of other authors.'⁹⁴ This theory is based on use of such dodecaphony that combines both triadic chords and chromaticism. His 'synthetic chord'- a stack of alternating major and minor thirds that extends until all 12 tones are employed, was the basis for his generation of harmonies- he would isolate

⁸⁷ Martináková.

⁸⁸ In Slovak, use of the word 'various' – 'rôzny' in some contexts subtextually insinuates mockery, belittling or othering of subjects that are considered undesirable

⁸⁹ Kresánek and Vajda, *Národný umelec Eugen Suchoň*. p. 43 and 45, bourgeoisie would in the totalitarian time often translate to somewhat mocking term 'malomeštiacky-' lit. 'small town-ish'

⁹⁰ Kresánek and Vajda. p. 44. Transl. JŠ

⁹¹ Kresánek and Vajda. p.44

⁹² Martináková, "Suchoň, Eugen."

⁹³ Kresánek and Vajda, *Národný umelec Eugen Suchoň*. p. 121-122

⁹⁴ Kresánek and Vajda. p. 123

tones, different intervals or triads from this chord to be used locally. The textbook however then goes to mention Schoenberg and makes sure to include Suchoň's critique of it-

“prioritising the horizontal thinking in dodecaphonists with no regard for vertical result of coinciding shapes was never of interest to me. What I minded even more was the negation of tonal centres, which I regard as main structural points of musical composition.”⁹⁵

The fact therefore remains, that Suchoň was interested in keeping up with the trends that were known to him from his early studies in the interwar period, however, his preference, and perhaps, the regime's own as well, remained strictly for 'unnatural' and 'untraditional' dissonance. Suchoň found a way of combining local triadic harmony with overall dodecaphonic structures dominating the harmonic language of his works.

Suchoň continuously gained respect and prominence that perhaps finally allowed him to experiment with dodecaphony. After 1970s, with the climate of so-called Normalisation (the period of repressive policies that followed the 1968 occupation of Czechoslovakia), he served in multiple political positions- as a member of parliament, chairman of Slovak Composer's Union, member of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Composers Unions Confederation, a member of the Central Committee of the National Front, or chaired the Slovak copyright Institution. He was awarded prizes such as the National Artist prize, The Order of Labour and honorary doctorate of the Comenius University.⁹⁶

His final compositional period starting in the 1970s until his death in 1993, was dominated by duties stemming from his public office, which demanded a lot of his time. All of the previous styles distilled and synthesised in somewhat postmodernist simplification.⁹⁷ His abandonment of dodecaphony in 1971 signals a new wave of repression that was underway after the occupation, and perhaps hints at him conforming to the current situation.

3.2.2 Repression after *Krútňava*

The composition process of *Krútňava* took eight years, beginning when Suchoň first read Milo Urban's novella *Za vyšným mlynom* (*Behind the Upper Mill*). The opera premiered in 1949 and, with a few censorious interventions- or, as historical texts stipulate, "redactions"- it became the nationalistic opera, a brilliant example of socialist realism deemed worthy of export. Paradoxically, this work represents the intersection of two ideologies from two dictatorial regimes. Milo Urban was an outspoken supporter of the clerico-fascist Nazi-puppet Slovak state and its propagandist, for which the communist regime deprived him of the right to publish. Understandably, after *Krútňava* premiered, Suchoň was summoned to a meeting of the Culture Commission of the Delegates' Office for Education, Science and Arts in Bratislava to hear the party policymakers' feedback. The only notes from this meeting are those Suchoň jotted down on the invitation letter. At the meeting, the commission chair began by

⁹⁵ Kresánek and Vajda. p. 125, transl. JŠ

⁹⁶ Kresánek and Vajda.

⁹⁷ Martináková, "Suchoň, Eugen."

congratulating Suchoň on his music but then expressed deep dissatisfaction with the libretto, describing its topic as ‘the most idiotic in all Slovak literature.’⁹⁸

Described as meek and devoutly catholic, Suchoň chose the plot because he personally related to its central idea: forgiveness. The morals of the opera would be slammed as ‘Christian pseudo-humanism.’ The main character, Katrena, entangled in a love triangle, ultimately forgives Ondrej, the wealthy murderer of her lover, the poor Jano. Katrena, in the meantime, has married Ondrej and is expecting his child. Haunted by his conscience, Ondrej admits to the murder and receives forgiveness from the entire village community. The plot was also enhanced by the presence of the onstage characters of the ‘Poet’ and his alter ego, the ‘Doppelgänger.’ These roles, described by contemporary theatre directors as somewhat Brechtian *Verfremdung* characters,⁹⁹ metaphorically depicted the battle of good and evil. The Culture Commission mocked these characters as ‘mystical fumes,’ confiscated the score, and proceeded to strike them out along with all references to the composer’s religion.¹⁰⁰

Ferdinand Klinda, a close friend of Suchoň, mentions this incident as the first case of censorship of an artwork in communist totalitarian Slovakia.¹⁰¹ This version was performed a few times but was then discontinued. Suchoň was invited to rewrite the ending, where the murderer would receive due punishment for his crime, as forgiveness was seen as a weakness. The opera changed to a detective story. The murderer confesses under the weight of evidence, and Jano, the victim, is posthumously vindicated as the father of Katrena’s child, even though this makes her an adulteress.¹⁰² Suchoň was initially reluctant to make these changes, but after his colleague and biographer Ernest Zavorský was fired and another close colleague, Jozef Šamko, was imprisoned, he reconsidered. Concerned for the opera’s future and aware that his position did not yet grant him immunity, he submitted to the regime’s demands.¹⁰³ After these alterations, *Krútnava* became a model work of socialist realism that toured the Eastern Bloc and the West. Klinda recalls that the censorship of *Krútnava* remained a recurring topic in his discussions with Suchoň, who suffered from feelings of being misunderstood and from constant remorse over agreeing to the changes,¹⁰⁴ which he saw as a betrayal of his own values.

Sources from the communist period acknowledge the modifications to the opera but provide their ideological justifications. Regarding the removal of the Poet and the Doppelgänger, musicologist Juraj Kresánek states: ‘why voice ideas, if they might be highlighted more intensively and convincingly? Therefore, Suchoň decided to drop this [the Poet and the Doppelgänger presence onstage] solution.’¹⁰⁵ Suchoň’s colleague and biographer, Ernest Zavorský, used the metaphor of ‘foggy glasses’ to describe the cautious responses to the premiere.¹⁰⁶ In a journal article for a musicological periodical, Igor Vajda also refers to the plot

⁹⁸ Mojžišová, “Zápas o dušu slovenskej opery.” p. 217, Mojžišová cites Suchoň

⁹⁹ Mojžišová cites director Martin Bendik, *Krútnava včera a dnes*, in *Hudobný život* 40, 2008, no.8

¹⁰⁰ Mojžišová, “Zápas o dušu slovenskej opery.”

¹⁰¹ Klinda, “Neberte nám básnika!”

¹⁰² Klinda.

¹⁰³ Klinda.

¹⁰⁴ Klinda.

¹⁰⁵ Kresánek and Vajda, *Národný umelec Eugen Suchoň*. p. 69

¹⁰⁶ Zavorský, *Eugen Suchoň: Profil Skladateľa*.

changes, calling them "redactions" that made Krútňava 'viable, to which the international success as the most played Slovak language opera attests.' Vajda later highlights that Krútňava's music is a synthesis of all prior European developments, with the exception of the Second Viennese School.¹⁰⁷

During the course of Stalinism, Suchoň tried to stand his ground and failed. This experience undoubtedly prepared him—and perhaps the regime—for what to expect when he got involved with another opera project.

3.2.3 *Svätopluk*

To discern whether explicit repression achieved its purpose of shaping Suchoň's work to align with the prevailing ideological hegemony, we will examine *Svätopluk*, Suchoň's second opera. Premiered in 1961, one of its intended purposes was to provide a monumental, representative, and nationalistic opera suitable for nationwide observances or significant events—a Slovak equivalent of Smetana's *Libuše*. Suchoň had previously engaged with this story; during the interwar period, he composed stage music for Ivan Stodola's play *King Svätopluk*, from which he reused thematic material for his opera. In relation to *Svätopluk*, no significant records of censorship exist following its premiere. The work became the grandiose spectacle the ruling class desired, frequently performed in lavish productions at venues like Bratislava Castle or the Devín Castle Amphitheatre, which overlooked the barbed wires of the Iron Curtain. However, even though the harshest period of Stalinist repression had passed, this did not mean Suchoň was entirely free to compose as he wished. As Helen Freshwater observes, 'censorship's success is indicated by its apparent abolition.'¹⁰⁸

The libretto was a collaborative effort by Suchoň, the aforementioned writer Ivan Stodola and dramaturg/opera singer Jela Krčméry. It narrates the interconnectedness of personal failures and larger-scale events that led to the collapse 9th century Great Moravia, a Central European polity that the Slovak Republic loosely regards as its predecessor. In Slovak schools today, the wise ruler Svätopluk and his three quarrelsome sons are presented as a parable of collaboration's necessity, epitomized by the fable of three rods: individually breakable, yet unyielding when bound together in fasces. Suchoň himself recalled being inspired by this myth as a youth.¹⁰⁹ In contrast to the classroom myth, Svätopluk of the opera is characterised by cunning, selfish and respect-and-power-driven behaviour that even sanctifies betraying his closest people and family. This portrayal draws upon historical sources, and in blending factual history with myth, *Svätopluk* departs from romantic nationalist works like *Libuše*, where characters are predominantly mythic and elevated above historical processes.¹¹⁰ Musicologist Jozef Kresánek goes so far as to describe this an 'anti-romantic' stance, offering the artist a realistic conception.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Vajda, "Dramatik Eugen Suchoň." p. 132

¹⁰⁸ Freshwater, "Towards a Redefinition of Censorship." p. 231

¹⁰⁹ Kresánek and Vajda, *Národný umelec Eugen Suchoň*. p. 103

¹¹⁰ Blahynka, "História a mytológia v Suchoňovom Svätoplukovi." p. 73

¹¹¹ Kresánek and Vajda, *Národný umelec Eugen Suchoň*. p. 107

Set in 894, near the end of Svätopluk's life, we see his health dwindle- a prelude to a campaign for power by his potential successors: his sons Mojmir and Svätopluk Jr., joined by the operatic stereotype of a behind-the-scenes plotting noblewoman, Lutomira. Amid this power struggle unfolds a multifaceted social conflict centred on religiosity: the clash between Paganism and Christianity. The king is supported by Dragomir, the court master, and Zabo, an *igrac* (Slavic troubadour) who harbours unrequited love for Lutomira. The second act features a pagan sacrificial ritual, introduces a pagan slave Blagota with her daughter Milena who is to be sacrificed. Characters of Pagan Priests and Magicians, pagan magnate Bogat, and most importantly, 'The People' complement the act. The third act is split in two parts- first taking place in an encampment, the second on Devín Castle. Svätopluk's third son, monk Predslav, is introduced. Devastated by the attempted patricide by Svätopluk Jr. and further infighting between the brothers, the moment of king's passing is hardly noticeable in a scene dominated by purpose-built chaos. These final moments highlight the breakdown of familial and political unity.

A notable aspect of the opera is its focus on Christianisation. Paganism is depicted as an archaic order destined to be superseded. Within Christianity itself are confessional troubles between the followers of Byzantine rite preferred by the common people (spread to the area through the work of Cyril and Methodius from Thessaloniki) and the Catholic rite preferred by the Frankish priests and Svätopluk himself. Igor Vajda expands on Svätopluk's reasons in a 1975 paper:

'Svätopluk represented... a kind of nobility with which the Frankish preaching was compliant, as it allowed slavery... He could not make peace with Christianity as embodied by the Thessaloniki brothers, who stressed the equality of all people'¹¹²

In the opera, the conflict is personified by sons Mojmir and Svätopluk Jr, respectively representing Eastern and Latin rites. Mojmir is depicted as honest and impeccable, whereas Svätopluk Jr as treasonous, able to align with the Frankish enemies to depose his father, utilising the ideological battle to further his interests.

Even though the libretto is based on Stodola's play, there are substantial differences, which, as the pre-Revolution musicologists attributed to a desire to incorporate findings of new historical research. In a 1961 paper, Mária J. Terrayová notes:

'the composer's approach to musical realisation of this work as well as its structure and the musical expression of the composer are outspokenly contemporary. So is the seizure of the historical material, which the composer with the authors of the libretto approach from the position of Marxian historical science.'¹¹³

¹¹² Vajda, "Dramatik Eugen Suchoň." p. 139 transl. JŠ

¹¹³ Terrayová, "Tri Inscenácie Suchoňovho Svätopluka." p. 374, transl. JŠ

Musicologists Igor Vajda and Jozef Kresánek concur, praising that the characters are ‘drawn in more detail and greater historical accuracy than in Stodola’s drama,’¹¹⁴ that actions of characters in Stodola’s drama ‘did not always satisfyingly reflect the class structure of Great Moravian Empire’¹¹⁵ and that ‘correct interpretation of hitherto known sources... led to the composers most grandiose work.’¹¹⁶ Therefore, the musicologists emphasised that revisions of the 1931 play were necessary- quite understandably, as the opera was written for a different, socialist audience. Before looking into details of these revisions, we detour to clarify what the Marxian historiography’s issues concerning Greater Moravian social structures were, as well as the differences in interpreting the opera’s ethical message pre- and post-1989.

Similar policies lined out above in relation to musical/operatic culture have influenced the work of historians in Czechoslovakia after the war. The issue of nationalisation and equating ‘our ancestors’ to the ones of the Western societies have been of interest to the ruling class, hoping to elevate the significance of countries across the Eastern Bloc. In Czechoslovakia, a discourse was put in motion as to whether the social structure in 9th century Great Moravia was based on feudalism, similarly to the Frankish Empire.¹¹⁷ With feudal society comes the idea of a state that is able to exert sovereign power over its borders through dominance and violence, as well as enforce loyalty from its subjects. In a 2015 paper, historian David Kalhous concludes, that in the case of Great Moravia, veritable sources are lacking to clearly assume the social structure, but remains sceptical over the Marxian vision, suggesting that territory of Svätopluk and his dynasty asserted local, soft power based on self-identification of elites rather than central military and economic power.¹¹⁸ Thus, the construct of Svätopluk’s Empire in this opera as an established state equal to its adversary the Frankish Empire can be seen as an artistic appropriation and cultural dissemination of the Marxian historians’ perspective.

The opera has never been ‘revised’ in a similar way *Krútňava* was, but with the 1989 revolution as a breaking point that allowed greater freedoms, the interpretations on its content, especially the Christianisation, vary. During the totalitarian regime, the musicologists have considered the central ethical message of this work the discrepancies of social classes (citing among others that Suchoň ‘did not betray his concern for social issues’¹¹⁹), the frictions between the proponents of the old and the new order, and societal rupture stemming from infighting and power usurpation. In a 2010 article, musicologist Miloslav Blahynka argues that even if Suchoň strived for synthesising Stodola’s drama and recent factual discoveries; in comparison to contemporaneous historical operas, in *Svätopluk*, he sees ‘diversion from historicism and, in parts, realism... for the sake of existentially based topics, at times even surrealist topics or topics influenced by absurd theatre.’¹²⁰ He names the central ethical message of this work the issue of application of principles of Christian ethics on the life of individual as well as on the construction of the state. With consideration for the work’s context, he suggests the possibility

¹¹⁴ Vajda, “Svätopluk.”

¹¹⁵ Vajda, “Dramatik Eugen Suchoň.” p. 138

¹¹⁶ Vajda. p. 138

¹¹⁷ Kalhous, “Some Observations on the Social Structure of Great Moravia.” p. 40

¹¹⁸ Kalhous. p. 46

¹¹⁹ Kresánek and Vajda, *Národný umelec Eugen Suchoň*. p. 104

¹²⁰ Blahynka, “História a mytológia v Suchoňovom Svätoplukovi.” p. 74

of the Pagan and Christian conflict serving as a parable to the Christianity and atheism of the communist-totalitarian society; or the Pagan sacrifice from act two as relating to the atmosphere of political purges accompanied with justice murders that went underway in Czechoslovakia during the 50s.¹²¹ Blahynka formulates a thought important for assessment of censorship's presence: 'each epoch has interpreted this message [the message of Svätopluk's myth] according to the current political situation.'¹²²

With the above in mind, a comparison between the 1931 play and the opera libretto allows us to argue whether the composer and the libretto team sought to appease the censors prior to the work's production- as it is certain that text-authorising structures were put in place in Czechoslovakia. Suchoň did not strictly adhere to the play in creating the libretto- in particular, the second act draws from other literary sources. Nevertheless, it is still strongly rooted in the play, often with whole passages of dialogue carried into the opera. Svätopluk is a character largely consistent across both works, depicted as a contradictory figure: an opportunistic, aggressive, and usurping leader but also a loving and forgiving father in moments of personal tenderness.

Greater differences appear in the portrayal of his sons. In the play they both lust for power; in the opera, this trait is confined to Svätopluk Jr only, meanwhile Mojmir becomes the proponent of the political independence from the 'West' and its Frankish priests. He is 'determined to... elevate the social standing of the feudal subjects and slaves.'¹²³ The third son, whose role is central in the play, is significantly reduced in the opera, where his actions are subsumed into Mojmir's character.

The renaming of Lutomíra (formerly Gertrude) offers an intriguing case. In the play, Gertrude is a German character. Pre-1989 musicologists argued that Gertrude would have been 'hardly tolerated' on Svätopluk's court as a German. This may reflect the librettists' intent to historical logic,¹²⁴ as noted by Vajda. Alternatively, it may reflect Cold War-era attempts to diminish the German cultural influence in Slovak society. Regardless, Gertrude and Lutomíra serve similar narrative purposes as internal enemies.

The slaves Blagota and her daughter Milena are an addition of the librettists. Together with the Pagan functionaries in the sacrifice, they symbolise a vanishing social order. Milena is saved from sacrifice by Mojmir and elevated from being a slave to his wife, representing the progressive ideals of the opera. The inclusion of 'The People' as passive commentators also marks a departure from the play. Another noteworthy alteration concerns the character of Záboj, who represents 'The People' by singing songs that 'tell the truth.' The corresponding character, jester Paučo, has the same plot development- he is in love with Gertrude, who uses him to spy on the king, he becomes a part of the king's court and his confidante after giving him medicine. He personalises the victory of morale against lustful vanity- after learning of Gertrude's contempt for him and his role in her subversion, he kills her. However, missing in the opera is his secret paganism. In the play, Paučo and Svätopluk, also secretly pagan, swear a

¹²¹ Blahynka. p. 75

¹²² Blahynka. p. 77

¹²³ Vajda, "Dramatik Eugen Suchoň." p. 142

¹²⁴ Vajda. p. 140

blood oath. After king's death, Paučo commits ritual suicide. In its stead, Záboj of the opera utters a wish (or a prophecy) for people's independence from the curse of centuries long slavery that the king has casted on the progeny of his sons amid rage at their inability to keep truce. These closing lines were criticised by Terrayová, addressed as an 'inconsistent appendix.'¹²⁵ She also notes a curious case from the Košice State Theatre's 1960 production, where this prophecy was delivered by a common person from among 'The People.'

Concerning the musical expressive tools that Suchoň's chose to employ in this work, musicologists reflect on his extreme concentration on the subject and the suitable musical style, the use of leitmotifs, and appropriation. Suchoň creates a musical landscape tied with the development of the plot, characters, and situations; meticulously adhering to form delineated by these developments. In turn, the shared labour of dramatic charges of situations or emotional states and music acts as the main propeller of the plot. For example, the musicality of Lutomíra is not allowed to develop; it stalls to underline the passivity of her dramatic axis. In contrast, Mojmir is a character whose vocal musicality or orchestral accompaniment oscillates between underlining his 'noble highness, the firmness of a ruler as well as his Slavic softness,' offering 'figurations full of excitement' or ones 'overflowing with heaped measures of emotion.'¹²⁶

Blahynka agrees in 2010 with Vajda's paper from 1974 that Suchoň uses leitmotifs in a way that does not tie them to individual characters but rather to emotional state which they happen to find themselves. Vajda notes that similar motifs accompany the paternal love of the king toward his sons as well as the maternal love of Blagota towards Milena.¹²⁷ In 1978, Kresánek made an effort to differentiate Suchoň's aforementioned use of leitmotif from Wagner's, also adding that '[i]t is not just a symphonic poem in orchestra and mere declamation onstage,'¹²⁸ but Suchoň makes the characters' musical material echo through the orchestra in a symbiosis.

The technique of appropriation is seen as a tool that allows Suchoň to induce a notion of historicity. Whereas the musicologists stress that the music is contemporary, they also elaborate on Suchoň's ability to synthesise his language with older styles. Vajda notes that the eligibility of used expression takes precedence over novelty.¹²⁹ For example, in composing choral parts in scenes with Pagan rituals, Suchoň studied early musical sources of the area. Similarly, in the case of Frankish priests, the use of Latin language as well as recitative declamation on one tone, similar to plainchant, is evident. Regarding Mojmir's accompaniment, his phrases often end with grandiose and ancient-sounding open fifth. This might be seen as preference for consonances occurring together with certain characters in order to affect the perception of them.

In a 1959 libretto book intended for the public and printed before the premiere, a text by Vajda was attached to offer greater insight to audiences. Vajda reused this text in a 1974 article for a theatrolgical periodical, albeit with some redactions, such as extending it with

¹²⁵ Terrayová, "Tri Inscenácie Suchoňovho Svätopluka." p. 372

¹²⁶ Vajda, "Dramatik Eugen Suchoň." p. 142

¹²⁷ Vajda. p. 142

¹²⁸ Kresánek and Vajda, *Národný umelec Eugen Suchoň*. p. 108

¹²⁹ Vajda, "Dramatik Eugen Suchoň." p. 144

perspectives on harmony. He mentions that even the most striking dissonances have its order, where Suchoň works with morphing and/or juxtaposing material existing elsewhere. He also suggests that the overall framework for harmony is derived from two tritones a minor second apart. In his own way, Suchoň uses set class theory to govern the work globally, allowing him to abandon functional harmonies and tonal centres while working with consonances more locally. This individual approach to harmony on the grand scale is not mentioned in the book intended for the audience. Instead, it focuses on the musical properties of characters and historically conditioned harmonies, such as the chromatic *mezzo-tetrachord*- a tetrachord of Slavic provenience mixing the Dorian and Lydian tetrachords.¹³⁰ The use of such sources is presented as fulfilling the requirement for the opera to sound ‘nationalist,’ in comparison to *Krútnava* with its citations of folk songs. The libretto book concludes with the following text: ‘[w]e believe, that it [(opera Svätopluk)] will soon win the hearts of our nation and all people of Czechoslovakia, and we believe, that it will successfully document the great power of socialist art abroad as well.’¹³¹ This text is missing in the teatrological publication.

According to the above, strict differentiation from, as well as paradoxical appropriation of, trends in art music, especially the Western side of Europe, can be noted. Even if there are no serious clues pointing to repressive censorship, comments were raised by the critics, questioning the ‘passive treatment of folk masses’ and slamming it as mere ‘palace drama with certain hints of societal drama.’ The use of historicising language was denounced as a deviation from ‘cultural growth in socialism’ and corresponding to the ‘declining bourgeoisie understanding of the question.’¹³² Thus, ideological concerns were raised in relation to *Svätopluk* regardless of the composer’s and librettists’ efforts to present ideologically viable work, as well as the systems of ideological supervision put in place by the regime.

3.2.4 Ján Cikker

Ján Cikker was a prolific opera composer, completing a total of nine operas. Cikker’s perception in today’s Slovak society is less prominent than that of Suchoň, likely due to the influence of Suchoň’s opera *Krútnava*. Unlike Suchoň, Cikker never joined the Communist Party, but he participated in the Slovak National Uprising against the clerico-fascist regime, which the communists have idealised. Hence, Cikker posed a suitable subject to be glorified as a hero, regardless of his own views on the matter.

Cikker was born in Banská Bystrica in 1911. After his father František, a languages teacher, fell on the battlefield in 1915, he was raised by his mother Mária, a pianist and music teacher. He began studying harmony and composition in his early teens. During his school years in Banská Bystrica, a city with a rather provincial music scene, he and his classmates organised events featuring Händel’s *Creation*, Shakespeare’s *Midsummer’s Night Dream* with Mendelssohn’s stage music, and even Smetana’s opera *The Bartered Bride*.

¹³⁰ Vajda, “Svätopluk Eugena Suchoňa.” p. 123

¹³¹ Vajda. p. 138

¹³² Blahynka, “História a mytológia v Suchoňovom Svätoplukovi.” p. 82. Blahynka citing theatre critic Ivan Vojtěch and linguist Ján Stanislav

In 1930, he began studying composition, conducting and organ at the Prague Conservatory while simultaneously studying musicology at the university and supporting himself as a night club musician. After completing his studies, he became a student of Vítězslav Novák and later spent a year in Vienna, where he acquainted himself with the techniques of the Second Viennese School. In 1939, he began teaching at the Academy of Music and Drama in Bratislava and conducted the Slovak Philharmonic, which was still an amateur ensemble. In 1944, he presented in the antifascist resistance radio. After the war ended, Cikker became the programme officer of the Slovak National Theatre's Opera. However, after the February 1948 coup, he was dismissed due to the ideological incompatibility of his cadre profile dossier.¹³³ As a practising Catholic, he was considered an enemy of the state.¹³⁴ Additionally, as a non-partisan, he was coerced into composing ideologically loaded works,¹³⁵ such as the cantata *A Greeting to Stalin* (1949). According to his 1955 biography, this work allowed him to 'sing out' his 'hymnically honest and by nothing disputed joy over the new life... as a manifestation of heartfelt thanks for the heroism of the Soviet people and for the liberation of our homeland.'¹³⁶ For this composition, he was awarded the Czechoslovak Peace Prize. The 1955 biographical publication also described Cikker as a 'man of sensible heart,' 'people and nature lover' or noted the 'nice' attitude to his teaching duties.¹³⁷

Despite the paradoxicalities of Cikker's life lined out above, musicologist Vladimír Zvara names his international success as a *Literaturopern* composer as no paradox, and puts him in the company of Gottfried von Einem, Hans Werner Henze or Sándor Szokolay in relation to this genre. Following his first two opera projects *Juro Jánošík* (1954) and *Beg Bajazid* (Prince Bayezid, 1957), he began writing libretti for his operas himself. His subsequent 10 projects (two out of which were unfinished) were his appropriations of pre-existing literature, but often, he would collaborate closely with writers. One such silent collaborator was West German editor and musicologist Fritz Oeser, who visited Bratislava in search of talent. Impressed by *Beg Bajazid*, he acquainted Cikker and later promoted his works.¹³⁸ They exchanged numerous letters concerning the upcoming projects of Cikker's, including the work on *Vzkriesenie*.

Zvara describes Cikker's musical practice as continuous learning and integration of new techniques into his previously established style. His expression was considered mature as early as the start of his career in Bratislava, a period often referred to as his 'Slovak period.'¹³⁹ This phase surprised audiences with its spontaneous musicality and vitality in expressing subjective emotion, contrasting with Suchon's seriousness and lyricism.¹⁴⁰ Starting in 1957, after the pressures of Stalinism eased, Cikker began thinking more linearly, developing a unique modality akin to tone rows and favouring intervals such as minor seconds, major sevenths and fourths; which became the main structural and organisational subjects. To this period saw the

¹³³ Mojžišová, "Zápas o dušu slovenskej opery." p. 223

¹³⁴ Zvara, "He Has Lifted the Iron Curtain." and Mojžišová.

¹³⁵ Zvara, "Cikker, Ján."

¹³⁶ Šamko, *Ján Cikker: Profil skladateľa*. p. 21

¹³⁷ Šamko. p. 25-27

¹³⁸ Zvara, "He Has Lifted the Iron Curtain." 'He Has Lifted the Iron Curtain.' p. 348

¹³⁹ Zvara, *Ján Cikker: Vzkriesenie*. p. 37-39, Zvara cites Kresánek and Burlas

¹⁴⁰ Elschek and Burlas, *A History of Slovak Music*. p. 311

creation of *Mister Scrooge* and *Vzkriesenie*. Locally, his works remained to imply expectable tonal progressions, which he however rarely confirmed. But when he did, the resolutive effect would be underlined by its prolonged expectation.¹⁴¹ Toward the end of this period, Cikker's health staggered and he underwent long periods of treatments outside Bratislava. In the subsequent phase, he abandoned tonal centres, synthesized his modality with dodecaphony, and transformed polyphony into poly-linearity.¹⁴² A notable is the work from this period is *Coriolanus* (1974), based on Shakespeare's play. The opera, which can be interpreted as Cikker's critique of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, tells the story of ancient Romans resisting an oppressive ruling class. Although produced abroad three times, its Slovak premiere did not occur until 2011- such politically charged theatre would not be allowed onstage.¹⁴³

Cikker's final period was marked by simplification, retrospection, and a touch of humour, as seen in operas such as *Obliehanie Bystrice* (The Siege of Bystrica, 1983) and *Zo Života Hmyzu* (From the Life of Insects, 1987).

Cikker received numerous accolades, including the National Artist Prize, the Herder Prize and the UNESCO Prize for Music. His conflicts with the ruling class were more pronounced than Suchoň's, but so was his international success. For instance, *Vzkriesenie* received 22 productions and was performed 24 times in a single season in Wuppertal. The total number of productions of all his operas across Europe is at least 59. His facsimile signature appeared alongside those of Beethoven and Mozart on the posters for the 1969 Münchner Festspiele.¹⁴⁴

3.2.5 Repression after *Mister Scrooge*

Mister Scrooge, the first Literaturoper work of Cikker, is described in a 1971 musicological paper as a 'compositional-technical and ideological breaking point in Cikker's opera oeuvre.'¹⁴⁵ Cikker never returned to nationalistic topics in his later operas; adopting Literaturoper framework was perhaps a choice, offering multiple outcomes in terms of artistic independence. The previously employed (and government-prescribed) local themes, Slovak myths and folkloristic sources as musical foundations would have clashed absurdly with the plot of Charles Dickens' novella *The Christmas Carol*, which served as the basis for this work.

Cikker's new chromatic and expressive musical language in *Mister Scrooge*- featuring the aforementioned intervallic composition and his original modality- was not well received by musicians. One of them voiced concerns to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia. An officer who did not even read the novella nor the libretto ordered the immediate halt to the rehearsal process. The Delegate for Education and Culture, Vasil' Bilak attempted to console Cikker. In his memoirs, we find this reflection: 'luckily, comrade Cikker did not turn bitter, got convinced that he needs to wait, and a couple years later, opera was staged under

¹⁴¹ Zvara, *Ján Cikker: Vzkriesenie*. p. 40-41

¹⁴² Zvara, "Cikker, Ján."

¹⁴³ Mojžišová, "Zápas o dušu slovenskej opery." p. 226

¹⁴⁴ Zvara, "He Has Lifted the Iron Curtain." p. 350

¹⁴⁵ Hrušovský, "K charakteristike Cikkerovej opernej tvorby." p. 286

the name *Mistr Skruž.*¹⁴⁶ A starkly contrasting account of Cikker's reaction appears in the personal recollections of his pupil, Igor Berger:

“The same way Cikker hid his ties to the Second Viennese School he hid his belief in infernal forces. In *Scrooge*, he let them fully surface. The blow that followed marked him with cautiousness, timidity and total distrust. I sense a spiritual and personal breaking point in his work here. He never found the courage to re-realise the honesty inside of him. Cikker heralded the ways of compromise and docility. I am convinced that in a free climate, his compositional progress would be different. The humanist of his format suffered the eternal conflict of conscience against violence. This fight etched and eroded him tragically.¹⁴⁷

After the opera's cancellation, the 1st general convention of the Union of Slovak Composers delivered an ideological critique of Cikker's output. His compositions were banned from performances across the country for the duration of two years. Cikker was profoundly shaken by the social and artistic isolation that followed.¹⁴⁸

In a 1975 article, musicologist Igor Vajda refers to two alternate names for the opera and vaguely alludes to Cikker 'changing his motivation and the opera's ending[.]',¹⁴⁹ in which Scrooge revises his last will before dying. His assets are evenly distributed between his nephew and his clerk. These libretto revisions, Bilak's eventual change of heart and his 'personal patronage over Cikker and his work'¹⁵⁰ might have secured clearance from Dilia and its 1963 premiere in Kassel. Vajda reasons Cikker's musical expression in *Mister Scrooge* as 'composer reaching a new qualitative level, enriching it with new chords and consonances of untraditional makeup.' He also notes that the expressivity, chromaticism and polytonality are only an extension of tonal possibilities. 'Triadic chords are mainly present where compassion, love, and tenderness are presented...'¹⁵¹

The narrative consistent throughout the literature is that *Mister Scrooge* naturally led to Cikker's magnum opus, *Vzkriesenie*; either by considering the development of his musical language or the two years he had to spare thanks to the enforced ban.

3.2.6 *Vzkriesenie*

Between 1959 and 1961, Cikker's letters addressed to his friends in West Germany, Karl Vötterle (head of Bärenreiter) and Fritz Oeser (head of Alkor Edition) attest to the great support these friendships have been to Cikker in the time of depression following the ban. Their efforts to popularise Cikker resulted in German premieres of six of his operas, with *Vzkriesenie* being the most performed- produced 13 times in both German states and once in

¹⁴⁶ Mojžišová, "Zápas o dušu slovenskej opery." p. 223, citing from the memories of Vasil' Bilak, transl. JŠ

¹⁴⁷ Mojžišová, p. 224 Mojžišová cites Igor Berger, transl. JŠ

¹⁴⁸ Zvara, *Ján Cikker: Vzkriesenie*. p. 123

¹⁴⁹ Vajda, "Slovenská operná tvorba po roku 1945." p. 448

¹⁵⁰ Mojžišová, "Zápas o dušu slovenskej opery." p. 223

¹⁵¹ Vajda, "Slovenská operná tvorba po roku 1945." p. 448

Switzerland, the Netherlands and Sweden as well.¹⁵² Oeser's Alkor Edition exported works in Dilia's catalogue across the Iron Curtain, and *Vzkriesenie* must have received ideological clearance in order to be included in the catalogue.

Vzkriesenie is Cikker's second Literaturoper, based on Leo Tolstoy's novel of the same name. Cikker's choice of a Russian classic, containing messages of social justice, spiritual maturation, redemption, and moral responsibility, may be regarded as a 'playing it safe' approach, especially after a ban on an opera based on the work of an English writer. On Cikker's motives, Igor Vajda notes in 1975 that Tolstoy's novel inspired Cikker with its 'emotional refinement and unusual moral strength.'¹⁵³ Vladimír Zvara mentions in a 2000 book that this work has been known to Cikker already in his teenage years at high school in Banská Bystrica, as well as suggested by his publicist friend as a promising work for opera adaptation.¹⁵⁴

The original *Resurrection* is seen as a panoramic view across Russian society downwards from the top, a portrayal of legal injustice and a critique of the hypocrisy of the institutional church- for which the Orthodox church has excommunicated Tolstoy amid efforts to censor the novel. The libretto transforms and simplifies the plot of the novel thoroughly to suit the requirements of musical drama. Cikker constructed the work in six scenes and three intermezzi; alternating in a sandwich fashion within three acts of identical structure, consisting of scene – intermezzo – scene. Regarding the formal organisation of events, Cikker changed Tolstoy's storytelling based on recollections of the main character and transformed it to chronological events.¹⁵⁵ Here comes the first possibility to speculate on Cikker's formal inclination towards realism- Cikker abstracted the 'individualist' approach of Tolstoy which consists of author's contemplations and commentaries on ideological and religious matters, as well as focusing on telling the story through the eyes of a single character, Count Nekhlyudov. In its stead, Cikker presents events as they unfold, simultaneously following both characters of Nekhlyudov and Katyusha on their individual journeys to redemption. The veritable tragedy of these characters effectively communicates the same ethical messages Tolstoy stipulated.

If in Tolstoy's novel the events are presented as recollections in a storytelling manner, such approach may be similar in the way Cikker conceived the intermezzi- Katyusha and Nekhlyudov narratively present the events that have passed or their internal states. The intermezzi are a solution that allows a quicker progression of the plot. The story of Cikker's *Vzkriesenie* begins with an Easter holiday scene at the countryside estate of the Nekhlyudov family where Katyusha works as a ward. Young count Dimitry seduces her, misusing her affection for him. During the first intermezzo, Katyusha, in a feverish dream, recounts giving birth, the child's death, and her being kicked out of her aunt's home. The second scene is set in a brothel, where Katyusha ended up to sustain herself, and ends with her accidentally killing Smelkov, a rich tradesman amid a robbery plot of her co-workers. Third scene presents a courtroom where Katyusha and her co-workers are tried. She is sentenced to eight years of mandatory labour in Siberia by a jury that includes Nekhlyudov. He recognises her but does

¹⁵² Zvara, "He Has Lifted the Iron Curtain." p. 347

¹⁵³ Vajda, "Slovenská operná tvorba po roku 1945." p. 449

¹⁵⁴ Zvara, *Ján Cikker: Vzkriesenie*. p. 123

¹⁵⁵ Zvara. p. 20

not interfere. The second intermezzo, sung by Nekhlyudov, communicates his decision to change based on his bad conscience. In the fourth scene, he visits Katyusha in prison, asks for her forgiveness, and proposes marriage. She is now a different woman and dismisses him in an outrage that spirals to the fellow inmates, who treat the Count with humiliating remarks. The third act opens with Nekhlyudov attempting to propose once again. Katyusha rejects, even though she has changed after an illness she recovered from recently. She found her love for the count again but does agree with him giving his life away for her. He concedes after learning Katyusha is engaged to inmate Simonson. The voices of Katyusha and Nekhlyudov overlap in the third intermezzo. Katyusha bids farewell to Nekhlyudov as she senses her near death. The Count's rebirth is finalised- having distributed his wealth, he wants to help Katyusha and the other in need. In the final scene, Katyusha suffers from fainting and cannot keep up with the convoy of prisoners traversing the Siberian steppe. She is left behind with Simonson when Nekhlyudov brings imperial pardons for both of them. She confesses her love for him, happily accepts his offer, and dies.

With the question of whether the opera treats Tolstoy's plot in line with the prescriptions of socialist realism, outlining the plot was important- especially regarding the intermezzi. Even though they are dream-like scenes bridging longer timespans between the scenes and therefore surreal, their power lies in their alternation with the scenes, contrasting them and thus underlining their realistic nature. However, Zvara notes cases of productions where the mysticism of the intermezzi dominated the whole artistic planning and leaked out into the scenes.¹⁵⁶

The main striking difference between the opera and the novel is the conclusion of the story. Tolstoy's Katyusha falls in love Simonson and rejects Nekhlyudov, who regardless of her decision, joins the convoy of prisoners and seeks redemption. In contrast, Cikker's and Oeser's Katyusha dies- a choice interpreted in various ways across academia and by critics. Zvara notes that Tolstoy avoided the topic of death as to demystify the Christian perception of Resurrection and to present his own, Enlightened version.¹⁵⁷ He then notes:

“What became central in the opera is Katyusha's journey from the status of original purity-naïve, morally unconscious- to alternative one, resulting from (hard-earned) understanding and conscious acceptance of greater moral principle; resting firmly, though with no overt religiosity, within the Christian value horizon.”¹⁵⁸

Supplementing further arguments, he defends the choice of Cikker and Oeser to lead Katyusha's story to a tragic end, among others through categorising *Vzkriesenie* as a Christian-idealist tragedy- as argued by Ludwig Marcuse. Marcuse's two typical tragedies are the *tragedy proper*, e.g. antic Greek or Shakespearean, or *Christian-idealist tragedy*, a tragedy based on belief in Redemption, greater order and justice. Such tragedy was prominent in 19th century opera

¹⁵⁶ Zvara, “He Has Lifted the Iron Curtain.” p. 357

¹⁵⁷ Zvara, *Ján Cikker: Vzkriesenie*. p. 22

¹⁵⁸ Zvara. p. 23

tradition, with Wagner being a notable exemption.¹⁵⁹ The prevalence of this type of tragedy in generic opera became a justification for Igor Vajda in 1975 as well, noting that

‘opera cannot talk in between the lines; therefore, she needs to admit to her love. Indeed, hardly any regular circumstances would lead to it, therefore she admits only in deadly agony, when her words are dictated by her deepest inner voice’¹⁶⁰

Operatic conventions, such as mystical hallucinations toward the end of the tragic character’s life are, present in *Vzkriesenie* as well. This has been criticised mostly in Western bloc as artistically implausible. The decline in the popularity of *Vzkriesenie* and other works by Cikker in the West is documented by Zvara in his 2018 paper and is attributed to a changing taste in the audience.¹⁶¹ The humanist worldview of Cikker and the sentimentality that resembled *La Bohème* or *La Traviata* were considered dated.

Critics, both west and east of the Iron Curtain, slammed the ideological unconvincingness of the ending, with critics in West Germany noting that ‘the major issue of guilt and atonement, of compassion for those who are trampled underfoot, trickles away in a touching idyll.’¹⁶² Czech musicologist Jiří Bajer, coming from a Marxist standpoint, expressed deep dissatisfaction with the ending, as well as the choice to focus the libretto on the main characters:

“This ending devalues the dramatist’s striving for a true depiction of the great human fight for justice and happiness. The meaning and the progressive value of Tolstoy’s novel was in the way how he, apart from the destiny of both protagonists, described and strongly condemned the severe methods of the tsarist regime. That was why Lenin... Chekhov and many others esteemed him. ...What good is it that we admire the composer’s warm affection for the humiliated and tortured Katyusha and for the whole humanity? This love, this humanism are like a flower which, as we know, will bring no fruit, and it is these fruits which represent the purpose of arts. Cikker has created a work of artistic power equal to the literary model, but on the other hand – I am sorry to say that – he is intellectually falling below Tolstoy.”¹⁶³

On the contrary, in the aforementioned 1975 paper, Vajda outlines that Cikker analysed the societal implications of Tolstoy’s novel, and through his use of hyperbole, deliberately portrays certain characters in accordance with their respective class. The Count’s snobbism is portrayed in the first scene, through a conflict with the butler Sergei, where Nekhlyudov shouts at him after the old man accidentally walks into him; or in the second intermezzo, where Nekhlyudov accuses his own class, using the line ‘why do the weak need to pay the price for the transgressions of the powerful?’ Or most importantly, Katyusha engulfed in rage in the fourth image (triggering the inmates to offend the count on the pretext of his

¹⁵⁹ Zvara. p. 28

¹⁶⁰ Vajda, “Slovenská operná tvorba po roku 1945.” p. 450

¹⁶¹ Zvara, “He Has Lifted the Iron Curtain.” p. 355

¹⁶² Zvara. p. 355. Zvara cites Alfred Mayerhofer

¹⁶³ Zvara. p. 356 Citing Jiří Bajer

societal standing) is nothing alike Katyusha of the novel, who is humble and never acts as resolutely.¹⁶⁴

Considering all of the above, it is clear that, even though the choice of topic and its treatment was influenced by the communist regime and socialist realism, the composer has managed to synthesize it with his own preferred concept for the storyline in opposition to Marxian ideology and presented it without contest from the repressive institutions. Zvara mentions three cases in East Germany where directors ordered the convoy of prisoners to stay on stage and witness Katyusha's death, or even instructed the chorus to repeat its resting song from the beginning of the scene after the concluding consonant chord.¹⁶⁵

Vajda regards the musical expression in the opera as continuously developing from *Mister Scrooge*, where the dominance of intervals at the expense of tonality remains the composer's framework for creating vertical and horizontal harmony. These intervals include the minor second, major seventh and minor ninth, tritone and a perfect fourth.¹⁶⁶ The overall atonality does not mean Cikker abandons functional harmony- as noted in the above chapters, he combines it with intervallic harmony to employ the contrast between the two in underpinning dramatic discourse. The effect of using consonances was described by Zvara as grounded in *verfremdung*, creating a caricature effect or an association with 'light' music (i.e. during the cancan scene in the brothel.)¹⁶⁷

The leitmotif composition in *Vzkriesenie* is by Zvara described as bridging the gap between Schoenberg, Berg and their roots in romanticism.¹⁶⁸ The symphonic approach to the orchestral part in the intermezzi complements the two dramaturgical lines of Katyusha and Nekhlyudov. Their characters' vocal lines are based on free leitmotif technique and are freely modulated throughout the work in a form of variation fantasy.

Cikker received a copy of Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* from his friend Oeser, and its influence on *Vzkriesenie* is evident. The brothel scene resembles the pub scene, and the prisoner's boredom chorus resembles the sleeping scene.¹⁶⁹ The use of *sprechgesang* heightens the local dramatic charge and serves as a framework for the compositional process, e.g. in the mentioned boredom song in the scene 4, where rhythm is fixed but the pitch is defined only approximately. If the previous chapter noted that Cikker was keen on hiding his affinity for the Second Viennese School, then the forthcoming of *Vzkriesenie* attests to his continuing engagement with some of its aesthetics.

Vzkriesenie embodies the intersection of artistic ambition and ideological constraint. While partial adherence to the dogmas of socialist realism is evident, Cikker imbues the opera with his personal values and aesthetic preferences; concerning both music, the libretto and its ethical message.

¹⁶⁴ Vajda, "Slovenská operná tvorba po roku 1945." p. 450

¹⁶⁵ Zvara, "He Has Lifted the Iron Curtain." p. 356

¹⁶⁶ Vajda, "Slovenská operná tvorba po roku 1945." p. 452

¹⁶⁷ Zvara, *Ján Cikker: Vzkriesenie*. p. 40-41

¹⁶⁸ Zvara. p. 68

¹⁶⁹ Zvara, "He Has Lifted the Iron Curtain." p. 357-359

4 Censorship as Red Thread- Discussion and Summary

The findings presented above reveal that censorship significantly influenced the creation of operatic works in 20th-century Slovakia. Within the socio-political atmosphere between 1948 and 1989, even the top-tier composers could not entirely evade ideological control, highlighting the lack of artistic freedom during this era. Paradoxically, the regime also provided unprecedented opportunities for artists, offering generous subsidies for opera, music, and culture. Drawing on arguments from New Censorship Theory, censorship emerges not only as a repressive force but also as a productive phenomenon that shaped operatic creation in complex ways.

Explicit censorship is exemplified in the cases of *Krútňava* and *Mister Scrooge* where composers' works were deeply impacted by ideological clashes. The personal implications for Suchoň and Cikker were reminisced by people close to them as radical and consequential. Mojžišová's article *Censorship in Slovak Opera* served as a valuable source for documenting repressive, direct and explicit censorship these operas triggered. However, by applying New Censorship Theory and further context lined out in the findings, the cases *Svätopluk* and *Vzkriesenie* reveal more subtle forms of external censorship. In line with Judith Butler's hypothesis on the shortcomings of explicit censorship (the regime having to repeat what it does not want to be stated), when considering the latter operas, the censors relied less on overt and reparatory state intervention and more on nuanced pressures to align the creatives' visions with ideological expectations. Thus, even though there are no substantial findings confirming overt censorship, this paper revealed that it did not automatically mean that no censorious behaviour took place.

Positioning Marxian idea of censorship against our findings in opera and culture sector in Czechoslovakia, it is possible to assume that enforcement of censorship was justified by its agents as means of delivering greater social justice. The critiques of *Krútňava*, *Svätopluk*, *Mister Scrooge* or *Vzkriesenie* all attest to prevalent perception of opera as medium that can and should communicate ethical messages, moral values and propagate ideas of new social order; while its negative tone is a proof of regime's imperfect oversight over the composers and librettists.

The powers vested onto the Composer's Union follow the Althusserian reading of Marxism, where state and civil society collaborate on the administration. Suchoň himself acted as a high official in the Union as well as a parliamentarian and shaped the policies in art music. The Union, as an Ideological State Apparatus, enforced structural censorship, created hegemony and strived for qualitative mastery in new operatic works.

In the case of Suchoň and *Svätopluk*, engagement with historical sources necessitated significant self-regulation, since the libretto of the opera circled around religiosity. The directive to regulate and distil from the sources to make a plausible libretto is particularly evident from Mária J. Terrayová's analysis of *Svätopluk*, where the term 'Marxian historical science' is presented as the authoritative framework for historical interpretation. The

differences between the Stodola play and the opera libretto are understandable as the genres and artforms are different, yet, while portions of the play were used in the opera unchanged, it is safe to say that some changes were motivated by mitigating potential clashes with the ideology of the party. If the ideological authority of Marxist-Leninist interpretation dominated the historical sources used in *Svätopluk*, it fell short with the librettists choosing to underline the significance of Christian ethics and morals which Blahynka identified as ones central to the opera.

For Cikker, the criticism of “modernist-sounding” music in *Mister Scrooge*, which incorporated dodecaphonic techniques, marked a transgression against socialist realism. Interestingly, both pre- and post-1989 musicologists agree that *Mister Scrooge* and *Vzkriesenie* share similarities in musical language. Additionally, if *Mister Scrooge*'s censor studied the opera only superficially, the choice of basing *Vzkriesenie* on a novella by Tolstoy may have been important, since both works are concerned with their characters developing under the pressure of Christian morals. After a 2-year long ban, Cikker must have felt secure, perhaps thanks to his friends in Federal Germany, to use the same musical expression and reframe Tolstoy to his liking. The prevalence of Christian ethics and morals in *Vzkriesenie* directly questions the efficiency of censors. Alternatively, this phenomenon evidences Cikker's and Oeser's creativity to circumvent official ideological hegemony without obviously challenging it. The story of *Vzkriesenie*, with its contradictions and paradoxes, can be regarded in line with Foucault's hypothesis of censorship's productive power.

Greatest challenge Suchoň and Cikker seem to have faced was the compromise they had to strike to meet the regime's preferred ideology as well as its aesthetic preferences in art music, delineated by tenets of socialist realism. If we consider that both of the composers grew up in Christian environments and 'ideologically conditioned' by a society organised in democratic capitalist order, the conflicts that included their identities in relation to their music were, as evidenced, causing continuous rupture. The regime's demands for accessible art, the structural expectations for professional approach to music, implicit pressure to keep up with art music discourse and trends in the West and East, these composers had to navigate complicated situations; whose outcomes could pose detrimental implications on future artistic work or ability to keep working as a composer. Especially, the system of personal reports created a climate of fear that conditioned individuals to consider the implications on their possibility to work in areas which were in any influencing the ideological discourse. If we consider Foucault's *Panopticon*, the system of personal reports was an excellent way of creating the notion of constant surveillance, with the prison guards being the fellow citizens, colleagues or employers. In the case of Composer's Union, the personal report system, in combination with structural censorship, was intended to maximise the oversight over delivering the objectives of the party for art music production.

With considering the directives of socialist realism, we learned that individual values, expression or even artistic merit was disregarded if it did not align with the state ideology. The composers' stance in this situation was complicated and perhaps a bit paradoxical. The state

enforced its ideology, but its officials needed to consider lightening the pressures on composers as well- in Slovak-language exclusive culture of approx. 4-5 million speakers with hardly any institutional history of art music, every individual with prior schooling in composition was of strategic importance in fulfilling the objectives of the party. Therefore, even if there was a centrally enforced state ideology to which the composers did conform in the most obvious and superficial cases, the findings above attest to a somewhat lax approach in enforcing it fully and equally on each individual. Thus, it is not relevant to attempt to estimate the position of composers in the power hierarchies exactly and rigidly, but rather to approach it as a discourse that changed from case to case. For example, the change of *Vzkriesenie*'s ending can be seen as vindication for Cikker, if we consider his Christian background. His motivations were anchored in Christian-idealism and humanism, quite opposite to Tolstoy and the preferences of the critics in the West and the East, Liberal or Marxist-Leninist. Combined with the fact that Vasil' Biľak, the Delegator for Culture became a supporter of the composer- in spite of Cikker's dossier stating 'enemy of the state-' it is safe to assume that Cikker's skills were indispensable and helped him climb the hierarchies upwards.

Suchoň's and Cikker's cases, and especially their biographies from the 1950s, attest to the appropriation of Verdian or Puccinian types of personality cult in Slovakia, but of course, updated for Sovietized society. Even though the composer's individual personalities were not paraded in the press as sensation, the lines of 'hymnically honest joy' reflecting Cikker's cantata *A greeting to Stalin* or the 'nice' relationship to his teaching duties in these biographies seem quite absurd or tendential. Critics, academics and musicologists actively participated in the system that propelled socialist art music and opera forward.

The analysis of language used in scholarly discourse pre-1989 reveals an attempt to mask the existence of censorship. Terms such as "redactions," "edits," or "multiple versions" were employed, yet these euphemisms attest to the modifications made to align with the regime's ideological preferences. Combined with personal recollections of composers and their acquaintances released post-1989, it becomes evident that these changes aimed to suit the enforced ideology. Key concepts emphasized in this period included class consciousness, socialist patriotism, alignment with party objectives, and criticism of bourgeois or Western influences. Non-critical engagement with local histories was similarly scrutinized.

The findings demonstrate that the regime stimulated nationalism, in terms of qualitative catching-up, othering as well as appropriation throughout cultural and historiographical fields and possibly beyond. The project of creating repertoire in the Slovak language suits all three of the abovementioned objectives. *Krútnava* and *Svätopluk*, but also early operas of Cikker draw from musical sources exclusive to Slovakia. Cikker's adoption of Literaturoper framework freed him from this requirement. The composers were urged to follow socialist realism methodology. For instance, when discussing the artistic development of a 'new generation of composers,' a 1978 source characterizes them as having 'started perceiving the reality correctly- issues of nation through socialism.' This phrasing reveals how artistic development was mandatorily framed through a socialist lens- employing nationalism to bridge gaps between social classes. Vaughan James and Kresánek's analyses both agree on how

nationalism became a necessary, albeit strategic, part of art in Sovietized countries, while Cikker's ingenuity allowed him to diminish its impact.

The generalizability of the research is, due to restricted pool of composers in Slovakia, very limited. However, as these composers represented the pinnacle of art music in Slovakia and their works were one of the most performed, the lion's share of contemporary opera discourse revolved around them. Moreover, if central agencies for oversight and agencies for export of artworks such as Dilia also scrutinised film and theatre plays, aspects of this research might apply to these artforms as well.

It is important to admit that despite repression that greatly marked the lives of Suchoň, Cikker and many other composers and artists in the period, art music and opera has significantly developed during the totalitarian regime. Ideological discourse employed agents across multiple frontlines of this conflict in shaping the culture of Czechoslovakia, resulting in quantitative and qualitative progress at an unprecedented pace. Valuable operatic works were written and performed, allowing us to for hypotheses that it happened also thanks to censorship in its many forms: to an extent, explicit- as a negative motivator- from the side of state officials, agencies and critics; implicit- among the composers and librettists- in form of self-censorship, through ideological conditioning; and structural censorship, with institutional constraints and hegemonies prevalent in them. The findings validate the central challenge of the New Censorship Theory- the polar view of censorship positioned against free speech is too simplistic, and the lack of direct censorship does not mean its total absence.

Opera has in this case proven yet again valuable to those in power, as well as confirming that it is dependent on the support of the rulers. The overarching project of (re-)building the identity of the Slovak nation through the perspective of Marxism-Leninism conditioned culture and opera in Slovakia into specific position, where composers managed to negotiate different and often conflicting expectations. It is irrelevant to speculate, what the situation could have been if the communist coup did not proceed as it did in the 1948. Censorship was, according to the above paragraphs, the 'red thread' accompanying opera in 20th century Slovakia. Thanks to its adverse as well as productive power the artform was cultivated and stimulated.

Bibliography

- Althusser, Louis, and Ben Brewster, eds. *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*. London: NLB, 1971.
- Blahynka, Miloslav. "História a mytológia v Suchoňovom Svätoplukovi." *Slovenské Divadlo* 58, no. 2 (2010): 73–82.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, John B. Thompson, and Gino Raymond. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Reprinted. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2003.
- Bugalová, Edita. "Hudobné inštitúcie na Slovensku." Bratislava: Slovenská muzikologická asociácia, Slovenské národné múzeum- Hudobné múzeum, 2012.
- Bunn, Matthew. "Reimagining Repression: New Censorship Theory and After." *History and Theory* 54, no. 1 (February 2015): 25–44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.10739>.
- Burlas, Ladislav. *Slovenská Hudobná Moderna*. Bratislava: Obzor, Socialistická Akadémia SSR, 1983.
- Butler, Judith. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1997.
- Elschek, Oskár, and Ladislav Burlas, eds. *A History of Slovak Music: From the Earliest Times to the Present*. 1st ed. Bratislava: VEDA, 2003.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981–82*. Edited by Frédéric Gros, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2005. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-09483-4>.
- Freshwater, Helen. "Towards a Redefinition of Censorship." Edited by Beate Müller. *Censorship & Cultural Regulation in the Modern Age*, Critical Studies, 22 (n.d.): 225–45. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401200950_010.
- Gonda, Peter, and Peter Zajac. *Socializmus: realita namiesto mýtov*. Bratislava: Konzervatívny inštitút M. R. Štefánika, 2020.
- Hrušovský, Ivan. "K charakteristike Cikkerovej opernej tvorby." *Slovenské Divadlo* 19, no. 3 (1971): 281–93.
- Hubená, Magdalena. "Odraz politické situace v kultuře Československa v letech 1948 – 1960." Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci, 2009.
- Hunt, Lynn, and Aletta Biersack, eds. *The New Cultural History*. Nachdr. Studies on the History of Society and Culture 6. Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 1989.

- Jiráček, Jiří. “Kulturní politika svazu Československých skladatelů v období socialistického realismu perspektivou Václava Dobiáše,” 2020.
- Jurovský, Šimon. “Súčasný stav Opery ND v Bratislave.” Bratislava: Slovenská Akadémia Vied, 1958.
- Kalhous, David. “Some Observations on the Social Structure of Great Moravia.” Edited by Pavel Kouřil. *The Cyril and Methodius Mission and Europe*, 2015.
- Kallio, Alexis Anja. “Navigating (Un)Popular Music in the Classroom: Censure and Censorship in an Inclusive, Democratic Music Education,” no. The Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki (2015).
- Klinda, Ferdinand. “Neberte nám básnika!” *Hudobný život*, 1997.
- Kresánek, Jozef, and Jozef Vajda. *Národný umelec Eugen Suchoň*. Bratislava: OPUS, 1978.
- Lajcha, Ladislav. “Zrod Slovenského národného divadla: Paradoxy budovy, divadla, mesta,” September 27, 2015. <http://www.musicologica.eu/zrod-slovenskeho-narodneho-divadla-paradoxy-budovy-divadla-mesta/>.
- Martináková, Zuzana. “Suchoň, Eugen.” In *Grove Music Online*. Vol. 1. Oxford University Press, 2001. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.27072>.
- Mojžišová, Michaela. “Zápas o dušu slovenskej opery.” *Cenzura v literatúre a umění střední Evropy*, 2014, 215–27.
- Nedbal, Karel. *Půl století s českou operou*. Prague: Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury, hudby a umění, 1959.
- Novák, Ladislav. *Oskar Nedbal v Mých Vzpomínkách*. Prague: Světový literární klub, 1941. <https://ndk.cz/uuid/uuid:0d4458c7-4b98-48fd-8297-a6eb4a1684e9>.
- Šamko, Jozef. *Ján Cikker: Profil skladateľa*. Bratislava: Slovenské vydavateľstvo krásnej literatúry, 1955.
- Snowman, Daniel. *The Gilded Stage: A Social History of Opera*. London: Atlantic Books, 2009.
- Tallián, Tibor. “Opera ako symbol statusu. Maďarská kráľovská opera v rokoch 1884–1920,” September 27, 2015. <http://www.musicologica.eu/opera-ako-symbol-statusu-madarska-kralovska-opera-v-rokoch-1884-1920/>.
- Terrayová, Mária Jana. “Tri Inscenácie Suchoňovho Svätopluka.” *Slovenské Divadlo* 9, no. 3 (1961): 365–84.

- Ther, Philipp. "The Genre of National Opera in a European Comparative Perspective." In *The Oxford Handbook of the New Cultural History of Music*, edited by Jane F. Fulcher, 0. Oxford University Press, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195341867.013.0008>.
- Ther, Philipp, and Charlotte Hughes-Kreutzmuller. *Center Stage: Operatic Culture and Nation Building in Nineteenth-Century Central Europe*. Central European Studies. West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2014.
- Tomášek, Dušan. *Pozor, cenzurováno! Aneb ze života soudružky cenzury*. Vyd. 1. Praha: Vydavatelství a Nakl. MV ČR, 1994.
- Vajda, Igor. "Dramatik Eugen Suchoň." *Slovenské Divadlo* 22, no. 1 (1974): 128–124.
- . "Slovenská operná tvorba po roku 1945 (Slovak opera after liberation)." *Slovenské Divadlo* 23, no. 4 (1975): 441–69.
- . "Svätopluk." In *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, 2002. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.O904834>.
- . "Svätopluk Eugena Suchoňa." In *Eugen Suchoň- Svätopluk*, 143. Operné Libretá. Bratislava: Slovenské vydavateľstvo krásnej literatúry, 1959.
- Vaughan James, Caradog. *Soviet Socialist Realism: Origins and Theory*. London and Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press Ltd, 1973.
- Wilmer, S. E., ed. *National Theatres in a Changing Europe*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230582910>.
- Wilson, Alexandra. *The Puccini Problem: Opera, Nationalism and Modernity*. Cambridge Studies in Opera. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Zavarský, Ernest. *Eugen Suchoň: Profil Skladateľa*. Bratislava: Slovenské vydavateľstvo krásnej literatúry, 1955.
- Zvara, Vladimír. "Cikker, Ján." In *Grove Music Online*. Vol. 1. Oxford University Press, 2001. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.05779>.
- . "'He Has Lifted the Iron Curtain': Reflections on Ján Cikker's Literaturopern and Their Reception." *Studia Musicologica* 59, no. 3–4 (2018): 345–64. <https://doi.org/10.1556/6.2018.59.3-4.6>.
- . "Hľadanie zmyslu opery: Osudy „nemŕtveho“ umeleckého druhu v Bratislave." *Musicologica*, September 27, 2015. <http://www.musicologica.eu/hladanie-zmyslu-opery-osudy-nemrtveho-umeleckeho-druhu-v-bratislave/>.
- . *Ján Cikker: Vzkriesenie*. Bratislava: VEDA, 2000.