

SOCIALIST REALISM AND SUBVERSION: Alfred Schnittke's *Life with an Idiot* (*Zhizn's idiotom*, 1991)

Andrei Rogatchevski

University of Glasgow / Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama

Based on the eponymous short story by Viktor Erofeev (b. 1947),¹ who also penned the libretto,² this opera by Alfred Schnittke (1934-98)³ was finished shortly before the collapse of the Soviet Union, first performed in 1992 in Amsterdam and since then staged in Austria, Italy, Russia and Great Britain. It tells the deliberately implausible story of a married educated couple, who are forced by the authorities to take in an idiot of their choice from a lunatic

¹ See V. Erofeev, *Izbrannoe, ili Karmannyi apokalipsis*, Moscow-Paris-New York 1993, pp. 178-94 (hereafter referred to in the text of the article as *Short Story*). For an insightful analysis of the story, see, for instance, P. Hesse, *Pri-otsutstvie sub'ekta: Zhizn' s idiotom Viktora Erofeeva*, „Russian Literature”, LI-III, 1 April 2002, pp. 261-72. On Erofeev see, for example, Andrew Reynolds's entry in: *Reference Guide to Russian Literature*, ed. N. Cornwell, London-Chicago 1998, pp. 285-87; and Larissa Rudova's and Tatiana Spektor's entry in: *Russian Writers since 1980*, eds. M. Balina and M. Lipovetsky, Detroit-New York-San Diego etc. 2004, pp. 82-88.

² For its text, with parallel translations into English, German and French, see A. Schnittke, *Life with an Idiot* [the libretto booklet accompanying the Sony live recording of the opera's 1992 world premiere in Amsterdam, S2K 52495], hereafter referred to in the text of the article as *Libretto*. As librettos go, this one is reasonably faithful to the original, although the short story is obviously more detailed. As my focus is on the opera, I shall be mostly quoting from the libretto, making use of the short story only when it helps to provide an elucidating comment on the operatic version.

³ On him see, for example, A. Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke*, London 1996; *A Schnittke Reader*, ed. A. Ivashkin, Bloomington, IN 2002; V. Kholopova, *Kompozitor Alfred Shnitke*, Cheliabinsk 2003; Erik Levi's entry in: *Censorship: A World Encyclopedia*, ed. D. Jones, London-Chicago 2001, p. 2158.

asylum as a punishment for an unknown crime (perhaps merely for being intellectual).⁴ At first the Idiot settles in quietly and the couple begin to think that they have got off lightly. Soon, however, the Idiot's behaviour deteriorates. He throws food on the floor. He rips up the couple's books and flushes the torn-out pages down the toilet. He cuts his toe-nails with a pair of secateurs and slashes furniture with a knife. He farts, masturbates, urinates in the fridge, defecates on the carpet and smears excrement on the walls. One fine day he even beats up the Husband and rapes the Wife. Notwithstanding this, the Wife falls in love with the Idiot and becomes pregnant, but then, for reasons that are never fully explained, decides that she does not want to keep the child, and has an abortion. The Idiot feels betrayed and turns his attention to the Husband. The Husband cannot resist the Idiot's peculiar charms either and allows himself to be seduced. The jealous Wife attempts to win the Idiot back by exhibiting the already familiar signs of madness, such as ripping up books and the Husband's old letters to her, as well as defecating on the carpet. This does not impress the Idiot much. As a last resort, she promises to bear the Idiot a son. In response, the Idiot, who presumably feels that he cannot trust her any longer and wishes to put paid to her advances once and for all, cuts her head off with the secateurs, throws her body in the rubbish chute and escapes, whereas the Husband, who now claims to be the Idiot's (spiritual?) son, has to go back to the asylum to take the Idiot's place there.

As one comes to expect from such a synopsis, the opera is full of rather graphic scenes of physical and sexual violence, with acts of gross indecency, for example, committed with a grotesquely oversized member. These and other scenes may and often do cause visible offence to the audience, and yet, as one critic puts it, 'the offence is of course derisory compared to that caused by 80 years of tyranny in Russia'.⁵ It is Soviet tyranny that appears to be the subject of this abusively extravagant but often hilariously funny parable.

⁴ In the Husband's own words (Act One, Scene One, Figure 3), 'I was punished [...] for my lack of compassion' (*Libretto*, p. 54; transl. by A. Reynolds).

⁵ R. Miles, 'Life with an Idiot', *The Times* of 1 April 1995. Cf. also the following assertion: 'It is, on one level, a story straight from the absurd school of Soviet everyday life: consider what cruel and unusual punishments the Communist system imposed on intellectuals, and being given an idiot to look after seems eminently reasonable' (A. McElvoy, *Idiots of East and West*, *The Times* of 29 March 1995).

The Idiot's name is Vova, a diminutive of Vladimir (which is Lenin's given name).⁶ Lenin's surname – a pseudonym apparently derived from the name of a Siberian river⁷ – is obliquely referred to in the Husband's words: 'I'm a millionaire from the gold-fields of the Lena river' (*Libretto*, p. 140). Some Vova-related parts of the libretto imitate Lenin's writing style, with his penchant for the prefix *arkhi-* (supra- or arch-), repetitive variations and insulting rhetoric (e.g., 'a supra-nonsensical string of vulgar banality, a supra-vulgar assortment of nonsense' (*arkhivzdornyi nabor poshlosti, arkhishopshlyi assortiment vzdora*; *Libretto*, p. 84)).⁸ Descriptions of Vova pacing up and down the couple's flat (*piat' shagov vpered, p'iat' shagov nazad*, or 'five steps forward, five [steps] back', *Libretto*, pp. 94 and 106) are reminiscent of the title of Lenin's book *Shag vpered, dva shaga nazad: (Krizis v nashei partii)* (*One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: The Crisis in Our Party*, 1904). The title of yet another well-known work by Lenin, *Detskaia bolezn' levizny v kommunizme* ('*Left-wing Communism*' – *an Infantile Disorder*, 1920), is alluded to in the Husband's statement that his wife died of a 'childhood disease' (*ot detskoi bolezni*; *Short Story*, p. 193; this wording is absent from the libretto, which retains only a mention of scarlet fever; see *Libretto*, p. 58). The information that Vova crushes the couple's telephone as part of his violent antics (*Libretto*, p. 106) is supplied in the context of declaring a martial law and mounting barricades, which provides an ironic parallel to Lenin's article *Sovety postoronnego* (*Advice of an Onlooker*, 1917) on how to organise an armed rebellion, in which taking control of the telephone exchange is listed as a top priority.⁹ Just like Lenin, who suffered, during his terminal illness, from the 'loss of speech, as the motor speech area of his brain had been damaged due to

⁶ Yet another diminutive of Vladimir, Vovochka, has been attached to the hero of a popular cycle of Russian jokes (see A. Belousov, *Vovochka*, in: *Anti-mir russkoi kul'tury: lazyk, fol'klor, literatura*, ed. N. Bogomolov, Moscow 1996, pp. 165-86). Vovochka frequently comes across as a hygienically challenged and mentally retarded individual, who is preoccupied with sex and enjoys destroying various social and cultural conventions. In people's collective memory, Vovochka is often associated with a parodied image of Lenin.

⁷ For other versions of the origins of this pseudonym, see M. G. Shtein, *Ul'ianovy i Leniny: Tainy rodoslovnoi i psevdonima*, St Petersburg 1997, pp. 176-91.

⁸ See B. Kazansky, *Rech' Lenina: (Opyt ritoricheskogo analiza)*, „LEF”, 1924, No. 1, pp. 114, 117, 130; B. Eikhensbaum, *Osnovnye stilevye tendentsii v rechi Lenina*, „LEF”, 1924, No. 1, p. 63.

⁹ See V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Moscow 1962, vol. 34, p. 383.

the thrombosis of blood vessels'¹⁰, Vova of *Zhizn's idiotom* is not particularly talkative. In fact, he can say only one word, *ekh*, an interjection that could be loaded with various emotions, depending on the circumstances.¹¹ In such a context, it becomes obvious that lines 'you will never die, Vova!' and 'Can he really be dead? Tell me where is his grave...' (*Libretto*, p. 164), sung by the Husband and the Wife in the finale, hint at the posthumous cult of Lenin, whose standard propaganda characterization was 'more alive than any living being' (*zhivee vsekh zhivvykh*),¹² and his Mausoleum. Vova's physical appearance also contains features traditionally associated with those of Lenin, such as *vypuklyi lob* (prominent forehead; *Libretto*, p. 84) and *sokratovskii cherep* (the skull of a Socrates; *ibidem*), both apparently derived from Maksim Gorky's idiom 'sokratovskii lob' used in his 1924 memoir piece *V. I. Lenin*.¹³ *Uzkie shcheli glaz* (slit eyes; *Libretto*, p. 96) are also worth mentioning, as this well-known facial feature of Lenin has given rise to the yet unsubstantiated claim that his great-grandfather was a baptised Kalmyk (a Mongolian people practising Buddhism and populating the lower Volga area).¹⁴ Moreover, in all the productions of the opera that are known to me, including the latest at the Novosibirsk Opera Theatre (directed by Henryk Baranowski and awarded a Golden Mask for the best Russian operatic show of the

¹⁰ Iu. M. Lopukhin, *Bolezn', smert' i bal'zamirovanie V. I. Lenina: Pravda i mify*, Moscow 1997, p. 16.

¹¹ This might have been derived from the exclamation *Ekh, Raseia! (Oh Russia...)* uttered by Lenin repeatedly to his nurse M. M. Petrasheva. When Lenin's speech disorder worsened, he could reportedly pronounce only one word at will, *vot*, a demonstrative pronoun that can also be used as a sign of agreement (see Iu. M. Lopukhin, *op. cit.*, pp. 157, 165, 170).

¹² Apparently borrowed from Mayakovsky's poem *Vladimir Il'ich Lenin* (1924), see his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Moscow 1957, vol. 6, p. 233. It is curious that a state inspection examining the condition of Lenin's embalmed body in 1942, established enthusiastically that 'his face looked absolutely extraordinary, as if it was enlivened', and noted 'a remarkable flexibility in the shoulder and elbow joints' (Iu. M. Lopukhin, *op. cit.*, p. 122).

¹³ M. Gorky, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, Moscow 1974, vol. 20, p. 9.

¹⁴ For more details on Lenin's alleged Kalmyk connection, see, for instance, V. A. Mogil'nikov, *Predki V. I. Ul'ianova-Lenina*, Perm' 1995, p. 9; M. G. Shtein, *op. cit.*, pp. 152-57; O. Abramova, G. Borodulina and T. Koloskova, *Mezhdru pravdoi i istinoi (Ob istorii spekulatsii vokrug rodosloviia V. I. Lenina)*, Moscow 1998, pp. 70-90. It is curious that the Wife, true to the peculiar Russian habit of painting all Asian nations with the same brush, calls Vova 'a Bashkir' (Turkic people practising Islam and living in the Southern Urals; *Libretto*, p. 84).

2003 season), the Idiot always appears on stage as a Lenin look-alike, with a bald cranium and a beard. When a black singer was invited to perform Vova's part at the world premiere at De Nederlandse Opera, he was given a Lenin mask to wear.¹⁵ On the part of those responsible for stage versions, a consistent and conscious attempt is in evidence to achieve some physical resemblance to a leader of the Russian revolution, so that everyone could understand who and what exactly Vova represents.¹⁶

In such a context, the love triangle in both the short story and the opera lends itself to the following possible interpretation: Lenin violates Russia first and seduces the West next, Russia being epitomized by the Wife (*Rossiiia* in Russian is a feminine noun), and the West, by the Husband (*Zapad* is a masculine noun), who is simply referred to throughout as 'I'. This reading can be additionally supported by the fact that after a stint in the lunatic asylum the Husband is adopted by one Craig Benson who the Husband himself calls *fal'shivyi inostranets* (a spurious foreigner; see *Short Story*, p. 194, as well as pp. 180 and 182; this character is missing from the libretto).¹⁷

An expert on Erofeev warns against 'one-dimensional' analyses of the story and the opera as an allegory of Russian society under communism. According to him,

the work's wider message [...] is that every individual and nation has his or her idiot(s), describable in political, existential or psychological terms. It parodies the Russian idealization of the holy fool, both as embodied in particular texts (especially Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*) and in the culture as a whole. [...] [It] also investigates the similar idealization of culture implicated in the failure of 20th-century civilization to resist barbarism and tyranny.¹⁸

¹⁵ See Ia. Kolesinskaiia, *Viktor Erofeev pleva v litso Leninu*, www.nnews.ru/2003/5/15/culture/960.php3

¹⁶ Cf.: 'The idiot resembles in his physical appearance former Russian revolutionaries, leaders of the socialist Utopia, and in particular Vladimir Ilich Lenin, with his Socratic skull, his Bashkir-like appearance, his particular fondness for walking back and forth' (S. Roll, *Re-surfacing: The Shades of Violence in Viktor Yerofeyev's Short Stories*, „Australian Slavonic and East European Studies”, vol. 9, No. 2, 1995, p. 43).

¹⁷ A different interpretation of the gender divide in Erofeev's work suggests that 'the female represents nature and the male articulates culture' (S. Roll, *op. cit.*, p. 44).

¹⁸ A. Reynolds, *op. cit.*, p. 286. On the concept of holy fool see, for example, E. M. Thompson, *Understanding Russia: The Holy Fool in Russian Culture*, Lanham-London 1987, and *The Holy Fool in Byzantium and Russia*, ed. I. Lunde, Bergen 1995.

This point of view seems to be partially corroborated by Schnittke's remark, made in a conversation with the cellist Alexander Ivashkin, that if Vova is portrayed only as Lenin, 'it will kill everything',¹⁹ and by Erofeev's opinion, given in his interview to the journalist Anne McElvoy, that his anti-hero was 'an international idiot'.²⁰ In the same interview, however, Erofeev admits that the short story, written in March 1980,²¹ 'was inspired by the celebrations marking Lenin's [110th] birthday'. As for Schnittke, in the same conversation with Ivashkin he speaks of his desire to fill the opera with what he calls a 'soundtrack (*fonogramma*) of Soviet life', i.e. street noises and flatmates' rows reminding the listener of an 'idiotic Soviet milieu'.²² Boris Pokrovsky, the opera's first director, was not happy about the idea of drawing a parallel between Vova and Lenin, foisted on him by the Dutch producers (he found this a bit crass), but he still understood the story as a peculiarly Soviet drama, first and foremost. In Amsterdam, Pokrovsky 'introduced some 'clichés' from the specific official style of the Bolshoi Theatre, which represented the style of Communist ceremonies'.²³ For the 1993 Moscow production, Pokrovsky went even further and sent his props assistants to scour rubbish dumps for a typically Soviet monster of a fridge and a revoltingly rusty bathtub, and instructed his set designers to recreate the atmosphere of a Soviet communal flat.²⁴ Hence the purely Soviet components of the story and the opera should not be underestimated, in compliance with Paul Driver's shrewd observation that Schnittke's disturbing satire is 'grimly Soviet rather than fundamentally human'.²⁵

¹⁹ A. Ivashkin, *Besedy s Al'fredom Shnitke*, Moscow 1994, p. 186. Cf. also: '[Vova] should be both a Lenin and a wise man from Laos' (ibidem).

²⁰ A. McElvoy, op. cit. Cf., however: 'the image of the idiot becomes [...] an allegory of that phoney Russian intellectualism which endlessly perpetuates itself' (S. Roll, op. cit., p. 42).

²¹ This date was given in what appears to be the short story's first publication (see *Zolotoi vek*, 1, 1991, p. 12).

²² See A. McElvoy, op. cit. (incidentally, the journalist emphasises that Vova is 'none of your civilised idiot-savant, still less the upright holy fool of Russian lore'); and A. Ivashkin, *Besedy...*, op. cit., p. 186.

²³ A. Ivashkin, *Alfred Schnittke...*, op. cit., p. 206.

²⁴ See B. Pokrovsky, *Doveritel'nyi razgovor*, in: *Al'fredu Schnittke posviashchaetsia*, Moscow 2001, vol. 2, pp. 183-86; E. Sysoeva, *Iz istorii sozdaniia opery A. Schnittke Zhizn' s idiotom*, in: *Al'fredu Schnittke posviashchaetsia*, Moscow 2003, vol. 3, pp. 179-80.

²⁵ P. Driver, *Not So Dumb Show*, „The Sunday Times” of 9 April 1995.

In this essay I would like to focus on the paradoxical fact that, despite his obvious anti-Communist viewpoint, Schnittke does, in his own way, adopt the recommended Soviet approach to reality as it was supposed to be reflected in art in the 1930s-80s, namely Socialist realism. To summarize crudely the (often inconsistent) demands that the Soviet authorities imposed on the operatic genre, it had to:

- a) be easy to listen to, i.e. accessible to the masses (to achieve this, folk tunes were expected to be the composer's preferred model), and
- b) teach the masses an ideologically and educationally valuable lesson, whether it was the subject of a revolutionary movement, the building of socialism, the Russian Civil or the Great Patriotic War, or, if the worst came to the worst and the composer did not feel inspired by any of the above, an adaptation of a folk tale or a 19th century classic.²⁶

As for the subject of *Zhizn' s idiotom*, it is described by Erofeev as 'the swan song of my revolution', and this line is duly sung by 'I' in the opera's final scene.²⁷ Moreover, as we have already established, a lookalike of one of the world's most famous revolutionaries, Lenin, occupies the stage almost constantly. His actions (or a narrative about them) are often presented within the frame of a $\frac{3}{4}$ time signature (see, for example, his aria in Act One, Scene Two, bars 425-45; or the trio that he sings together with 'I' and his Wife in the Intermezzo between Acts One and Two; *Vocal Score*, pp. 71-72, 79-81), or within that of related beats, divisible by three, such as $\frac{3}{2}$, $\frac{3}{8}$, $\frac{6}{8}$ and $\frac{9}{8}$ (see, for instance, the love-making scene between Vova and 'I's wife, Act Two,

²⁶ This summary has been made on the basis of numerous sources, such as: A. Werth, *Musical Uproar in Moscow*, London 1949; M. Kulikovich, *Sovetskaia opera na sluzhbe partii i pravitel'stva*, Munich 1955; *Sovetskie opery: Kratkoe sodержanie*, ed. A. M. Gol'tsman, Moscow 1982; S. Neef, *Handbuch der russischen und sowjetischen Oper*, Berlin 1985; M. Maximovitch, *L'opéra russe: 1731-1935*, Lausanne 1987; A. Bogdanova, *Muzyka i vlast' (Poststalinskii period)*, Moscow 1995; A. Baeva, *Russkaia liriko-psikhologicheskaia opera: 60-80-e gody XX veka*, Moscow 1996; B. Menzel, *Vse bel'kanto trudiashchimsia, ili Opera stalinskoi epokhi*, in: *Sotsrealisticheskii kanon*, eds. H. Günther and E. Dobrenko, St Petersburg 2000, pp. 980-98; N. Edmunds and Hon-Lun Yang, *Socialist Realism and Music in the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China*, „Blok”, 2003, No. 2, pp. 70-89; and others.

²⁷ See A. Schnittke, *Leben mit einem Idioten: Oper in 2 Akten von Viktor Jerofejew*, Hamburg 1992, p. 205 (hereafter referred to as *Vocal Score*).

Scene Two, bars 257-76; *Vocal Score*, pp. 144-45). Vova even dances a waltz in the short intermezzo between Scenes One and Two of Act Two (see *Libretto*, p. 114; the music for this waltz is missing from the published version of the *Vocal Score*). In addition, the composer's directions 'Tempo di Valse'/'Valse'/'Valse lento' feature four times in Act One, once in the Intermezzo between Acts One and Two, and five times in Act Two (*Vocal Score*, pp. 18, 24, 26, 54, 79, 98, 133, 135-36, 173).²⁸ Statistically, even excluding the three intermezzos (two of which have been composed with the musical form of waltz in mind), there is a preponderance of 'waltzy' time signatures in the Prologue and Scene One of Act One (298 bars out of the total of 478). Such time signatures also constitute almost a half of Scene Two in Act Two (529 out of 1100). As if this was not enough, Schnittke sometimes resorts to the 'tripletization' of a 4/4 beat which also gives the music a waltz-like feel – see, for instance, Vova's, 'I's and his Wife's parts, as well as the orchestral accompaniment, in the rape scene, Act Two, Scene One, bars 415-20, 427-30, 435-36, 441-45 and 450-61 (*Vocal Score*, pp. 118-24, 126-28).

Why did the waltz and waltz-like beats play such an important role in *Zhizn' s idiotom*? The German verb *walzen* that describes whirling or revolving movements typical of this dance form, relates to the Latin *volvere*, which means, among other things, 'to turn round'. The same Latin verb is of course at the root of the noun 'revolution'.²⁹ Thus Schnittke appropriately depicts Vova's

²⁸ For comparison, the directions 'Tempo di Tango', on the one hand, and 'Marsch langsam'/'Marsch – Tempo', on the other, representing two more musical forms that are recurrent in *Zhizn' s idiotom*, appear only five and three times respectively (see *Vocal Score*, pp. 34, 100, 103, 137, 190, 192, 195; and the tango in the intermezzo between Scenes One and Two of Act One, the music for which is missing from the published version of the *Vocal Score*). The special status of tango can be explained by the fact that it usually explores themes of homosexuality and marital infidelity, with the man in the tango culture often trying to shed the image of an 'innocent fool', and the woman assuming the role of 'either the Madonna, or a whore' (P. Kukkonen, *Tango Nostalgia: The Language of Love and Longing*, Helsinki 1996, pp. 33, 45-47). All these motifs feature prominently in *Life with an Idiot*.

²⁹ It is remarkable that, throughout the centuries, waltz (or its predecessor known under the name of *volte*) met with moralists' disapproval because of its boisterousness. It was referred to as a 'lewd and unchaste dance' which brings about 'innumerable murders and miscarriages', and was prohibited in Reformation Germany, as well as in parts of Swabia and Switzerland in the early 19th century (see E. Reeser, *The History of the Waltz*, London 1949, pp. 3-4, 6-12, 18-19).

revolutionary actions (i.e. overthrowing the old order, preached and practised by 'I' and his Wife, and establishing a new one in their family, which of course epitomizes society in miniature) by musical means as a waltz. The composer therefore quite literally adheres to the second principle of Socialist Realist operatic art (the representation of a 'revolutionary movement'), as outlined above. Needless to say, this adherence is merely superficial, as the significance of Vova's mini-revolution is rather undermined by the fact that he himself is portrayed as a mentally handicapped bisexual who makes a big mess in an apartment and sodomises its owners, one after another.³⁰ (Incidentally, the wife's pregnancy thus becomes a travesty of the immaculate conception,³¹ and her decision to get rid of the unborn child perhaps symbolises the ultimate failure of Lenin's ideas to bear fruit on Russian soil.³² To develop the matter further, the Husband's claim that he is Vova's son – in a spiritual sense, one assumes,

³⁰ Although both the short story and the opera might appear fairly homophobic, it is worth reminding the reader/listener that before the *perestroika*, references to homosexuality alone would have made Erofeev's and Schnittke's works inadmissible to Soviet censors, as sexual relationships between men, regardless of the issue of their age and consent, had been outlawed in Russia until 1994. To punctuate subtly the homosexual theme, Marcel Proust (a subject of Dr Erofeev's academic pursuits; see the 'Prust i Tolstoi' essay in his *V labirinte proklyatykh voprosov*, Moscow 1990, pp. 421-40), mentioned in the short story as the Wife's favourite writer, makes several surprising personal appearances on stage, breaks into a dance and sings a few lines. Another explanation for this unanticipated occurrence stems not from Proust's sexual orientation but from his reputation as a master of inner monologues, underlining the seeming inability of the characters in the opera to communicate directly with each other (see A. I v a s h k i n, *Zhizn' s idiotom polna neozhidannostei*, „Moskovskie novosti” of 21 June 1992, p. 23). Yet another explanation links *Zhizn' s idiotom* to the title of Proust's multi-volume *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913-27), as 'the only sense of time left in [the opera] is a sense of time remembered' (G. M c B u r n e y, *Schnittke: Life and his 'Idiot*, „Opera”, 1995, vol. 46, No. 4, p. 385). Yet another, treats Proust as a 'symbol of European culture' and an 'anti-thesis to the Idiot' (F. L e m e r, *Zagovor v Amsterdame*, „Moskovskie novosti” of 3 May 1992, p. 22).

³¹ Cf. her monologue from Act Two, Scene Two (figure 9): 'It's uncanny that I've got pregnant. The thing is that Vova has his own proclivities. I respected them and, I won't deny it, bent over backwards to meet them... But pregnancy, you see, was totally out of the question!' (*Libretto*, p. 122).

³² According to one opinion, resistance to totalitarianism can only succeed if the 'body of totalitarianism' is damaged or destroyed. The Wife's abortion, therefore, may be considered an attempt at resistance to Vova's totalitarian oppression (see P. H e s s e, *op. cit.*, p. 264).

rather than literally – might imply that the West, where left-wing sympathisers often tend to idealise the Lenin brand of communism, as opposed to the Stalin one, has proved to be more susceptible to Leninism than Russia.)

The first principle of Socialist Realist operatic art also seems to have influenced Schnittke. His meaningful choice of the universally popular Russian folk song *Vo pole bereza stoiala* (*A Birch-tree Stood in the Field*) as a *leitmotif* for *Zhizn' s idiotom* (*Vocal Score*, pp. 60-61, 63, 200-01, 205-06), prompted by Eroveef's short story (see *Short Story*, pp. 184, 194), has been additionally strengthened by quotations from the Marxist anthem *The International* (*Vocal Score*, pp. 35, 67), the young pioneers' song *Skvortsy prileteli* (*Starlings Have Arrived*, music by Maxim Dunaevsky, words by Mikhail Matusovsky; *Vocal Score*, pp. 133-34, 139-40) and the well-known Russian revolutionary songs *Smelo, tovarishchi, v nogu* (*March on Boldly, Comrades* by Leonid Radin, 1898; *Vocal Score*, pp. 76, 185) and *Varshavianka* (*The Warsaw Song*, originally a 1863-64 Polish uprising anthem, re-worded by Gleb Krzhizhanovsky in 1897; *Vocal Score*, pp. 85-86, 170-71).³³ These tunes are repeated at least twice each and, on average, are fairly evenly spread throughout the opera, now played by the orchestra alone, now sung by the choir and/or soloists, either accompanied or *a capella* (*The International* features only in Act One, bars 408-10 of Scene One, as well as bars 373-74 of Scene Two; *Skvortsy prileteli* and *Varshavianka*, only in Act Two, bars 72-73 of Scene One, as well as bars 55-66, 176-80 and 608-11 of Scene Two; and *Smelo, tovarishchi, v nogu* and *Vo pole bereza stoiala*, both in Acts One and Two).

On the list of these well-known Russian/Soviet songs, *Vo pole bereza stoiala* is perhaps the most significant, as it already has an impressive history of being used by classical composers (e.g. in Balakirev's *Overture on Three Russian Themes* (1858) and in the finale of Tchaikovsky's *Fourth Symphony*, 1878). The importance of this folk song for Schnittke was so great that even at the stage where much of *Zhizn' s idiotom* was still in the matrix, he knew that he would finish the opera with it.³⁴ It is precisely *Vo pole bereza stoiala* that is referred to as 'the swan song of my revolution' in the opera's closing bars. There is every

³³ To the list of revolutionary songs quoted in the opera, Gerard McBurney adds '*The Red Flag* and [...] the 19th-century prisoners' song *Listen!*, famous from its similarly despairing appearance in the first movement of Shostakovich's 11th Symphony' (G. McBurney, op. cit., p. 382).

³⁴ See A. Ivashkin, *Besedy...*, op. cit., p. 188.

reason to believe that in his own rendition of *Vo pole bereza stoiala* Schnittke engages with Tchaikovsky's surprisingly cheerful interpretation of this minor-key song. According to the programme of the *Fourth Symphony*, outlined by Tchaikovsky in February 1878 in a letter to Nadezhda von Meck (to whom the piece was dedicated), the main theme of the first movement represents the inescapable and invincible Fate (*fatum*), which 'prevents the impulse towards happiness from achieving its aim' and brings about a 'desolate and hopeless feeling'.³⁵ In the fourth and final movement, however, the same theme is juxtaposed to a jovial rustic holiday scene, recreated with the help of the adapted *Vo pole bereza stoiala*.³⁶ Tchaikovsky explains the meaning of the scene as follows:

If you cannot find reasons for joy within yourself, look at others. Go among the common people (*stupai v narod*). See what a good time they have abandoning themselves entirely to feelings of joy. [...] Oh, what a lovely time they're having! How lucky they are that all their emotions are direct and uncomplicated. Blame yourself [for your despair] and don't say that everything in the world is sad. [...] Rejoice in the rejoicing of others. A living is still possible.³⁷

Tchaikovsky's attitude to the 'common people', as it is manifested in the above-quoted passage, seems to be partly influenced by Russian Populism (*narodnichestvo*), which came into prominence in the early to middle 1870s. Members of this movement – mostly intellectuals – strongly believed in 'going to the people' (*khozhdenie v narod*) in search of the spiritual purity and integrity that Populists felt they themselves lacked. (The Populists' ultimate goal was, of course, to stage a revolution in order to emancipate the people.) Ignoring the fact that Tchaikovsky's concept of *fatum* in the 'symphony of Fate', as it is sometimes called, was intensely personal rather than political and social,³⁸ some Soviet musicologists were keen to develop a Marxist angle on the *Fourth's*

³⁵ *To My Best Friend': Correspondence between Tchaikovsky and Nadezhda von Meck, 1876-1878*, eds. E. Garden and N. Gotteri, Oxford 1993, p. 185.

³⁶ To the original tune, used for the finale's second theme, 'Tchaikovsky added a pair of "spurious" beats (decorative interjections rather than any addition to the melody itself) at the end of each phrase, thereby regularising the meter' (H. Zajaczkowski, *Tchaikovsky's Musical Style*, Ann Arbor-London 1987, p. 230).

³⁷ *To My Best Friend'...*, op. cit., p. 187.

³⁸ Late Soviet studies of the *Fourth* symphony tend to link its message to Tchaikovsky's attempts to come to terms with his homosexuality after his unsuccessful marriage to

finale, turning Tchaikovsky into something of a collectivist who sided with the masses and criticised individualism, as the following reading demonstrates: 'What is disastrous for a solitary hero is not dangerous for the people. From the masses (*v narode*) an individual may draw the strength to resist even the highest manifestation of evil, i.e. militant annihilation'.³⁹

It is possible that Schnittke pitted his arrangement of *Vo pole bereza stoiala* not so much against Tchaikovsky himself but against the Socialist Realist interpretation of the last movement of his *Fourth symphony*, which makes such a heavy use of the song. If Tchaikovsky apparently tried to turn *Vo pole bereza stoiala* into a positive symbol in music,⁴⁰ Schnittke's version of the song – sung in the opera twice, by a young madman in the lunatic asylum near the end of Act One, and by the Husband at the end of Act Two – re-emphasises its minor key, and, moreover, openly mocks the tune by moving some notes in it either a half-tone up or a half-tone down and/ or adding an orchestral accompaniment that weaves dissonance into the song's harmony – which makes it look as if it is performed off key (see Act One, Scene Two, bars 253-67 and 283-94; as well as Act Two, Scene Two, bars 998-1009, 1020-25 and 1082-93).⁴¹ The composer appears to be saying to the Soviet establishment: you want folk tunes in the opera, you'll get your folk tunes. However, the effect that Schnittke seems to be achieving by the deliberate de-harmonization of *Vo pole bereza stoiala* is quite the opposite to what the Soviet establishment would prescribe and approve of. As Serafima Roll puts it, in the opera the insane escape

Antonina Miliukova (see B. S. Nikitin, *Chaikovskii: Staroe i novoe*, Moscow 1990, pp. 48-50).

³⁹ A. Dolzhansky, *Simfonicheskaia muzyka Chaikovskogo: Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, Leningrad 1981, p. 99.

⁴⁰ Some connoisseurs were not impressed. Sergei Taneev, for example, communicated to Tchaikovsky: 'Knowing what you are able to make out of a Russian theme, I think your variations on 'Vo pole beryozinka [sic] stoyala' too slight and insufficiently interesting' (quoted from D. Brown, *Tchaikovsky: A Biographical and Critical Study*, vol. II, London 1982, p. 162).

⁴¹ In accordance with his standard creative practice described by the composer himself as follows: 'I set down a beautiful cord on paper – and suddenly it rusts' (quoted in A. Ross, *The Connoisseur of Chaos: Who is Alfred Schnittke and Why Is His Music So Popular?*, „The New Republic”, 1992, vol. 207, no. 14, p. 32).

into the Russian folk culture that glorifies a pastoral landscape typically adorned with birches and perpetually unperturbed scenery. [...] It is, of course, only in the narrator's thoughts that this silly folk tune [...] can be taken as a sign of deep intellectual thinking, profundity and sincerity of emotions.⁴²

In other words, Schnittke seems to be poking fun at the idealisation of the 'common people' by Russian/Soviet intelligentsia, which has been suffering from a guilt complex that makes it feel inferior to, and fight for the rights of, the ordinary 'man in the street' – which in Russian history, more often than not, has led to tragic consequences.

The verbal content of *Vo pole bereza stoiala* is rarely looked into. And yet, it is directly relevant to the short story and the opera because it describes a love triangle – a woman, her husband and her lover, who seem to be co-habiting in the same household (the woman, on behalf of whom the song is sung, wakes up both her husband and her lover in the same place, *novye seni*, a newly-built passage inside of a house, either leading from the front door to the living quarters or linking two separate buildings). The husband is cordially invited to wash his face with slops, to dry it with a bast mat, to comb his hair with a harrow, to wear bast sandals and a shabby fur coat and to pray before a spade, whereas water, a towel, a comb, shoes, a kaftan and an icon are reserved solely for the lover.⁴³ The song's irreverent attitude to the husband, whose figure traditionally represents authority, reveals yet another trait that *Vo pole bereza stoiala*, Erofeev's story and Schnittke's opera have in common, namely subversion.

It has already been noted that Schnittke's 'musical language has precise parallels with what Erofeev is doing in words'.⁴⁴ These parallels are not restricted merely to the abundance of references to diverse musical and literary sources that are characteristic of both the author and the composer⁴⁵ (sometimes this feature

⁴² S. Roll, op. cit., p. 44.

⁴³ For a full text, see *Russkie narodnye pesni*, ed. A. N. Rozov, Leningrad 1988, pp. 322-24.

⁴⁴ G. McBurney, op. cit., p. 381. For Schnittke's and Erofeev's printed appreciations of each other, see O. Leshchuk, *Reabilitatsiia eresi*, „Knizhnoe obozrenie” of 15 December 1989, p. 9 (Schnittke's opinion of Erofeev's 1989 collection *Telo Anny, ili Konets russkogo avangarda* [*Anna's Body, or the End of Russian Avant-Garde*] is cited extensively here); and V. Erofeev, *Strashnyi sud*, Moscow 1996, pp. 507-12.

⁴⁵ Thus, Erofeev (*Short Story*, pp. 181-84, 186) mentions a character from Dostoevsky's *Muzhik Marei* (*Peasant Marei*, 1876) and cites from Julius Fučík's *Reportáž psaná na oprátce* (*Report from the Gallows*, 1945), whereas Schnittke quotes from Mus-

is termed 'polystylism, or free-ranging play with quotations and allusions').⁴⁶ What is also remarkable is the similarity with which Erofeev and Schnittke transform these sources through a 'creative corrupting' of the original.⁴⁷ Thus, under Erofeev's pen, the last sentence of Nikolai Gogol's *Povest' o tom, kak possorilsia Ivan Ivanovich s Ivanom Nikiforovichem* (*The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarrelled with Ivan Nikiforovich*, 1834), *Skuchno na etom svete, gospoda!* (*This world is a boring place, gentlemen!*), is turned into *Strashno zhit' na belom svete, gospoda!* (*It is frightening to live in this world, gentlemen*; *Short Story*, p. 179). By the same token, cranberry juice as a farcical substitute for blood in Aleksandr Blok's *Balganchik* (*A Puppet Show*, 1906) changes into tomato juice (see *Short Story*, pp. 179-80, 193). As for Schnittke, I have already described what he does to *Vo pole bereza stoiala* (as an alternative to its arrangement in the finale of Tchaikovsky's *Fourth*). Such a disrespectful treatment of cultural icons is unquestionably subversive, especially by Russian/Soviet standards.

It also has to be said that Erofeev's libretto, although different from his own short story to a degree,⁴⁸ keeps one important aspect intact: the narration does not follow the chronological order. In the words of one reviewer, 'the crucial points to understand are that the story [...] is cyclical, is being told in flashback'.⁴⁹ Given the Socialist Realist dislike of complex experiments with the narrative (the Socialist Realist canon clearly prefers the narration to be straightforwardly linear, to smooth the process of its absorption by the reader), nothing seems to rule out the suggestion that inversion functions in the opera as a substitute for

sorgsky's *Boris Godunov*. Alban Berg and Dmitrii Shostakovich have also been named among those whose compositions provided inspiration for *Zhizn' s idiotom* the opera (see A. Ivashkin, *Zhizn' s idiotom...*, op. cit., p. 23; G. McBurney, op. cit., p. 384; P. Hesse, op. cit., pp. 263, 268-69).

⁴⁶ P. Driver, op. cit.

⁴⁷ This expression has been coined by Alex Ross, see A. Ross, op. cit., p. 32.

⁴⁸ On some discrepancies between the two, see A. Ivashkin, *Besedy...*, op. cit., p. 186; O. Dark, *Chem konchaetsia zhizn' s idiotom: Avtoru Pominok po sovetskoi literature – vmesto krestin*, „Nezavisimaia gazeta” of 14 October 1992, p. 7.

⁴⁹ M. Tummelty, *Life with an Idiot*, *Theatre Royal, Glasgow*, „The Herald” (Glasgow) of 12 May 1995. In addition, the critic mentions 'a continually shifting perspective. That is, one moment the husband will be in the thick of it, the next speaking objectively to the audience; the chorus – a huge role – will be in character, then voyeuristic, then functioning in the Greek style' (ibidem). This feature also corresponds with frequent flashbacks in the short story's narrative structure.

subversion – of the Socialist Realist formula, that is. Both the printed and the staged versions of *Zhizn' s idiotom* contain even more obvious examples of an anti-Socialist Realist stand. Thus, Erofeev's story has a paragraph that parodies certain clichés, typical of the Socialist Realist production novel.⁵⁰ It compares two fighting sparrows to two young hot-headed shop floor managers shouting at each other in the director's office at a metalworks:

'You're wrecking the plan for me!' – 'I don't have any intention of being kicked out of the Party because of you!' But the director, who has witnessed more than one such scene, will tap on the table with his pencil, and the representative of the Party's district committee, sitting by the window in an austere outfit, will burst out laughing in her splendid little male bass [...] Look: my former fellow students, the favourites and pride of our business are not pleased with themselves that they got so worked up over this issue. And so, urged on by their comrades, they rush to one another with embarrassed, shamed faces. A purple flush spreads across their cheeks, and now they are already coupled in embraces (*Libretto*, pp. 74, 76; cf. *Short Story*, pp. 180-81).

Of the clichés often used to define Socialist Realism, one – 'national in form, socialist in content' – is mockingly rephrased in the opera as 'national in both form and content' (*Libretto*, pp. 56 and 66). When these words are set to music (Act One, Scene One, bars 236-45 and 423-28), the pompous, majestic choir, and specially the pseudo-optimistic orchestral arrangement, give them a quasi-Socialist Realist touch (*Vocal Score*, pp. 21-22, 36). Schnittke might well have parodied the style of a grand Socialist Realist opera here. It is not by chance that *Voina i mir* (*War and Peace*, 1943) by Sergei Prokofiev has been mentioned in connection with *Zhizn' s idiotom*.⁵¹ The concept of a 'chamber opera on a big stage',⁵² which Schnittke had in mind when he worked on his piece, might be considered an exact opposite of the genre that Prokofiev was one of the most

⁵⁰ For more on this genre see, for instance, K. Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, Chicago-London 1981; T. Lahusen, *How Life Writes the Book: Real Socialism and Socialist Realism in Stalin's Russia*, Ithaca: NY 1997; and E. Dobrenko, *Blud truda: Ot romana s proizvodstvom k proizvodstvennomu romanu*, „Wiener Slawistischer Almanach”, Bd. 51, 2003, pp. 167-204.

⁵¹ See A. Ivashkin, *Zhizn' s idiotom...*, op. cit., p. 23.

⁵² A. Ivashkin, *Besedy...*, op. cit., p. 186.

impressive exponents of. Finally, the embarrassing image of Vova is undoubtedly juxtaposed to the 'official' portrayal of Lenin on the operatic stage as represented, for example, by Vano Muradeli's *Oktiabr'* (*October*, 1964), Iulii Meitus's *Brat'ia Ul'ianovy* (*The Ul'ianov Brothers*, 1967) and Mark Karminsky's *Desiat' dnei, kotorye potriasli mir* (*Ten Days That Shook the World*, 1970).

The lack of all this background knowledge, however, does not make Schnittke's message any less accessible. In Gerard McBurney's opinion,

even those who never experienced the old Soviet Union, would have no difficulty understanding the 'I'-narrator of the story and his 'Wife' as symbols of the Russian people as a whole, obscurely punished for reasons they themselves do not understand by being ordered to share their lives with an idiot.⁵³

Notwithstanding this accessibility, I myself saw dozens of music lovers leaving Theatre Royal in disgust amidst a performance of *Zhizn' s idiotom* in Glasgow in May 1995.⁵⁴ It seems that Schnittke, in fulfilment of the cliché 'if you can't beat them, join them', eagerly embraces the Socialist Realist operatic canon (unlike some other composers of similar calibre, such as Prokofiev and Shostakovich, who did so reluctantly and tried to achieve a reasonable compromise between the canon and their own artistic aspirations), only to make it implode from within by subverting it and thus stimulating people's aversion to it. Perhaps this is why the first director of *Zhizn' s idiotom*, Boris Pokrovsky, described it as 'the first – and last – Soviet opera'.⁵⁵

⁵³ G. McBurney, op. cit., p. 382. My own interpretation of the Wife and 'I' characters differs somewhat from that of McBurney's. As has been stated above, for me they symbolize Russia and the West respectively, and perhaps also the feminine and the masculine side of humanity as a whole.

⁵⁴ For an unapologetically negative review of the same production, first shown in London, see D. Murray, *Squalor Gives Way to Banal Squeaks*, „The Financial Times”, of 3 April 1995. According to Erofeev, the 1993 Moscow version of the opera provoked even a more violent reaction: 'Theatre-goers threw eggs and stones [onto the stage] and [accidentally] hit the head of a Mexican ambassador, [who just happened to be in the audience]. He was carried away on a stretcher. [...] The opera was suspended for the sake of public order' (Ia. Kolesinskaja, op. cit.)

⁵⁵ As quoted in P. Driver, op. cit. *Life with an Idiot* has also been called both 'the last Soviet opera' and 'the first opera of the post-Soviet epoch' (F. Lemer, op. cit.).

This definition of Schnittke's opera, paradoxical as it may seem, is deeply rooted in the structure of Socialist Realism, which is characterised by the following, virtually irreconcilable, inner contradiction:

Socialist (i.e. purposeful, religious) art cannot be produced by means of XIX-century literature, referred to as 'realism', whereas a genuinely truthful reproduction of life (including psychological details, as well as those of everyday existence, landscape, portrait, etc.) cannot be achieved by recourse to teleological speculations. [...] As soon as Socialist Realism loses its superfluous verisimilitude, it will be able to convey the grandiose and implausible meaning of our epoch.⁵⁶

Perhaps this is why Schnittke's opera, which is expected to combine an improbable plot with its matter-of-fact implementation on stage,⁵⁷ might well be that rare work of art that resolves the inherent contradiction of Socialist Realism successfully. Most other artists within the Socialist Realist sphere of influence do not seem to have achieved the same results, whether they wanted them or not.

In his recent article, Leonid Heller discusses a 'fluid' state of Socialist Realism, characterised, *inter alia*, by the presence of non-Socialist Realist components.⁵⁸ To this it can further be added that, in the long run, neither the subsistence nor the reputation of Socialist Realism appear to be affected much by the (peaceful or otherwise) nature of the co-existence between non-Socialist Realist and Socialist Realist components. Non- (and/or anti-) Socialist Realist components could often be found in specimens of pro-Soviet art,⁵⁹ just as a tangible presence of Socialist Realism could be detected in a-Soviet⁶⁰ and even anti-Soviet⁶¹ works. In some instances this

⁵⁶ [A. Siniavsky], *Fantasticheskii mir Abrama Tertsa*, [New York] 1967, p. 444.

⁵⁷ See E. Vasina, *Vozmozhna li Zhizn' s idiotom v Moskve?*, „Moskovskie novosti” of 3 May 1992, p. 22.

⁵⁸ See L. Heller, *La réalisme socialiste fut-il système? Quelques questions de méthodologie*, „Blok”, 2002, no. 1, pp. 17, 25-30.

⁵⁹ See, for example, E. Markstein, *Dom i Kotlovan, ili Mnimaia realizatsiia utopii*, in: *Andrei Platonov: Mir tvorchestva*, eds. N. V. Kornienko and E. D. Shubina, Moscow 1994, pp. 284-302 [on Platonov's *Kotlovan* (The Foundation Pit, 1930)]; V. Erofeev, *Semen, ty oblaskan partiei i narodom*, in: idem, *Strashnyi sud*, pp. 480-87 [on Semen Babaevskii's *Kavaler zolotoi zvezdy* (*Knight of the Golden Star*, 1948)].

⁶⁰ See A. Leong, *Socialist Realism in Tarkovsky's Andrei Rublev*, „Studies in Comparative Communism”, 1984-85, vol. XVII, No. 3-4, pp. 227-33.

⁶¹ See, for instance, M. Nicholson, Solzhenitsyn as 'Socialist Realist', in: *In the Party Spirit: Socialist Realism and Literary Practice in the Soviet Union, East Germany and*

phenomenon has led to an ambiguity in interpretation. Thus, Zoshchenko's *Rasskazy o Lenine* (*Stories about Lenin*, 1940) have been treated by some scholars as 'an example of Aesopian anti-authoritarian satire veiled as apologia',⁶² while others claim that they represent an 'attempt at secular hagiography'.⁶³ Sometimes even a mere re-jiggling of pure Socialist Realist components alone helps to smuggle in a message that sits uneasily with the official Party line and subtly undermines Communist ideology.⁶⁴

To conclude, the structure of Socialist Realism can, and often does, incorporate alien (and anti-) bodies. Some artists and scholars consider this a systemic flaw,⁶⁵ and an evidence that Socialist Realism as a valid entity has never existed.⁶⁶ In my opinion, however, the fact that subversion seems to be an integral part of Socialist Realism demonstrates rather how flexible, inclusive and resilient Socialist Realism is, as it provides room even for anti-Socialist realist

China, eds. H. Chung et al., Amsterdam, Atlanta 1996, pp. 55-68; and „Nezavisimaia gazeta's" review of Erofeev's *Russkaia krasavitsa* (*Russian Beauty*, 1990), described as 'a mixture of postmodernism and socialist realism' (as quoted in M. Nicholson, op. cit., p. 68).

⁶² L. Loseff, *On the Beneficence of Censorship: Aesopian Language in Modern Russian Culture*, Munich 1984, p. 202.

⁶³ L. Hart Scatton, *Mikhail Zoshchenko: Evolution of a Writer*, Cambridge 1993, p. 138; on the allegedly genuine didactic intent in *Rasskazy o Lenine*, see also L. Milne, *Zoshchenko and the Ilf-Petrov Partnership: How They Laughed*, Birmingham 2003, p. 93. Whatever the interpretation of this cycle of stories, it is not by chance that Zoshchenko (as well as Erofeev and Schnittke, for that matter) turned his attention to none other than Lenin. According to Boris Groys, 'the decisive move towards the portrayal of man [in the Socialist Realist tradition] was connected with the death of Lenin [...] It was to be the image of Lenin [...] that stood at the centre of Soviet art as the image of the ideal, the exemplar' (B. Groys, *The Birth of Socialist Realism from the Spirit of the Russian Avant-Garde*, in: *The Culture of the Stalin Period*, ed. H. Günther, London 1990, p. 142).

⁶⁴ See, for instance, K. Clark, *The Mutability of the Canon: Socialist Realism and Chingiz Aitmatov's I dol'she veka dlitsia den*, „Slavic Review", 1984, vol. 43, No. 4, pp. 573-87.

⁶⁵ Cf.: 'The [Socialist Realist] method disintegrated much earlier than is commonly assumed, and the very moment of the canon's crystallization coincided with its opening to dislocation and decay' (T. Lahusen, *Socialist Realism in Search of Its Shores: Some Historical Remarks on the 'Historically Open Aesthetic System of the Truthful Representation of Life'*, in: *Socialist Realism without Shores*, eds. T. Lahusen and E. Dobrenko, Durham and London 1997, p. 6).

⁶⁶ See E. Neizvestny, *Sotsrealizma ne sushchestvuet*, „Teatr", 1990, No. 11, pp. 123-28.

tendencies. It might well be that rumours about the death of Socialist Realism have been grossly exaggerated and Socialist Realism will keep reinventing itself and may still remain with us for years and years to come.

Socrealizm i wywrotowość: *Życie z idiotą* Alfreda Schnittke (1991)

Artykuł rozpoznaje socrealistyczne komponenty w operze Alfreda Schnittke *Życie z idiotą*, którą uważa się za „ostatnią radziecką operę”. Jako opera wykorzystuje socrealistyczne konwencje jedynie po to, aby podważyć je od wewnątrz. Problem artystycznej wywrotowości w ramach realizmu socjalistycznego jest analizowany w świetle koncepcji Borisa Groysa i Leonida Hellera, oraz w odniesieniu do Andrieja Płatonowa, Michaiła Zoszczenki, Czyngiza Ajtmatowa, Aleksandra Sołżenicyna i innych. Socrealizm uważa się jako wywrotowy z natury, a także wystarczająco elastyczny, aby włączyć nie- i antysocrealistyczne komponenty, co częściowo może tłumaczyć jego zmienność i długotrwałość.