

The Mannerist 'revolution', Dvořák and Soviet Art History

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Introduction

Max Dvořák is widely recognized as a key contributor to the tectonic change in the perception of Mannerism amongst art historians. Prior to Dvořák, Mannerism was commonly regarded as evidence of a decline even within the Vienna School of Art History, thus prompting only limited attention that came with rather acrid remarks. Dvořák drew an analogy between Mannerism and the Bolshevik revolution, defining it as an expression of the spiritual need of the masses to break free from the Renaissance tradition. He started to set forth his ideas in his lectures on Tintoretto and El Greco, and then initiated a lively scholarly discussion about the notion and the nature of Mannerism in his latest writings and among his last students.

Small wonder that Dvořák became interested in the problem of Mannerism, since it was an integral element of a complex issue of periodization in art history that his teacher Franz Wickhoff had engaged. Scholars have already noted this continuity.¹ Thus, Dvořák's interest in artistic crises like that of early Christian or Mannerist art exposes his concern for the underlying processes shaping the development of art history. When dealing with the crisis of a major style such as the Renaissance, one must inquire, 'what next?'. Should we follow Soviet Marxists who misinterpreted Hegel and regard the new style as an antithesis to its predecessor?²

Previously, art historians had proven multiple times that Dvořák's interpretation of art in crises can be broken down into two principal periods: in his early writings, he championed the autonomous character of style that evolved

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¹ Gert Schiff, 'Introduction', in: Gert Schiff (ed.), *German Essays on Art History: Winckelmann, Burckhardt, Panofsky, and Others*, New York: Continuum, 2004, LI; Matthew Rampley, *The Vienna School of Art History: Empire and the Politics of Scholarship 1847 – 1918*, Penn State Press, 2013, 45.

² As Gustav Mueller once pointed out 'The legend was spread by Karl Marx whose interpretation of Hegel is distorted. It is Marxism superimposed on Hegel'. Gustav E. Mueller, 'The Hegel Legend of "Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis"', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Jun., 1958), 413.

following its inner logic.³ For example, the transition from Renaissance to Mannerism, he argued, was a shift from a haptic to an optic vision just as Riegl had earlier suggested.⁴ The same shift was due to repeat later when Impressionism replaced academic art. Later in his life, Dvořák stated that early Christian or Mannerist art are genuine revolutions of the spirit, i.e. are the products of a spiritual crisis. He argued that Expressionism, which was replacing Impressionism, was also a product of such a revolution.⁵

At the same time, in Dvořák's last lectures one can discern the emergence of a new triad. As Hans Aurenhammer put it: 'There is first, the faithful mimetic representation of natural reality and second, an idealization that does not simply depict nature but abstracts its inner laws and leads them to formal perfection. In addition, a third possibility beyond "naturalism" and "objective idealism", he proposed a subjectivist "art of expression" that draws not from nature but solely from the "artist's inner life".⁶ Although Dvořák had his own reservations about the uninhibited subjectivity of Mannerism, his Soviet readers found little interest in anything that was not related to his championing of this style.⁷

Soviet scholars could not ignore this discussion, for Dvořák's writings became available to them very early, especially when compared with the other representatives of the Vienna School. Boris Vipper and then Viktor Grashchenkov, Viktor Lazarev and Mikhail Alpatov, and others commented extensively on the writings by Dvořák's and his disciples, making Mannerism one of the pivotal topics in Soviet and even Post-Soviet art theory.⁸ Having a profound connection with the

³ Hans Aurenhammer, 'Inventing "Mannerist Expressionism": Max Dvořák and the history of art as history of the spirit', in: Kimberley A. Smith (ed.), *The Expressionist Turn in Art History*, London: Routledge, 2014, 194; Matthew Rampley, 'Max Dvořák: art history and the crisis of modernity', *Art History*, Vol. 26, No. 2, April 2003, 220.

⁴ Michael Ann Holly, *Panofsky and the Foundations of Art History*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985, 73.

⁵ Andrew Hopkins, 'Riegl Renaissances', in: Alois Riegl, *The Origins of Baroque art in Rome*, Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2010, 64.

⁶ Hans Aurenhammer, 'Inventing "Mannerist Expressionism": Max Dvořák and the history of art as history of the spirit', 197.

⁷ Hans Aurenhammer, 'Inventing "Mannerist Expressionism": Max Dvořák and the history of art as history of the spirit', 200.

⁸ Mikhail Alpatov (1902 – 1986) was a Soviet theorist and historian of art. See more in: Stefaniia Demchuk, 'The Influence of the Vienna School of Art History on Soviet and post-Soviet historiography: Bruegel's case, in: *Journal of Art Historiography*', Number 23 (December 2020), p. 7 – 8.

<https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/demchuk.pdf>

Boris Vipper (1888 – 1967) was a Russian, Latvian and Soviet historian of art and museum professional. Alumni and *Privatdozent* of the Moscow Imperial University he was forced to immigrate in Latvia in 1922. From 1922 until 1941 he taught history and theory of art at the Latvian Academy of Arts, and later at the University of Latvia. He returned to Moscow in 1943, where he was appointed the Chair of Art History at the Moscow State University and the deputy director of The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts. After leaving the University in 1954, he continued working for the Pushkin Museum and the Institute for Art History and for the Research Institute for Theory and History of Art. Vipper advocated historical study

debate on Expressionist art, Mannerism inevitably became the subject of ideological confrontation.

In this paper, I trace the impact of Dvořák's writings on Mannerism in Italian and Northern art on generations of Soviet scholars, who had been working on Renaissance/Baroque topics and methodological issues. My aim is twofold: firstly, to reconstruct how Soviet scholars met, discussed, adopted or rejected ideas of Dvořák and his followers and, secondly, to uncover the hidden connections between the discourses on Mannerism and Expressionism in Soviet art history.

Dvořák in translation and his first reviewers (1930s)

The first translation of Dvořák's writing was published in 1934 and it also prepared the ground for the methodological dispute between Soviet scholars and their Austrian counterparts. As the Russian art historian, Alexey Lepork, aptly noted in his afterword to the modern translation of *Kunstgeschichte als Geistesgeschichte* of 2001: 'Its emergence in Russian was quite understandable. M. Dvořák was considered as a counterbalance to Wölfflin's formalism...'.⁹

In other words, at the beginning of the 1930s Soviet art history was looking for a method: vulgar sociology had already been condemned by that time together with its supporters – the early enthusiasts of Marxist art history, and art historians had to look for an alternative. This was the main justification for this turn to 'bourgeois' science for 'inspiration'.

Thus the collection of Dvořák's writings was published with a foreword, 'Max Dvořák and the history of feudal art', by Ivan Mácza, and comments by Alexey Sidorov.¹⁰ This was not a conventional translation into Russian of 'The

of arts and wrote extensively on the questions of struggles between styles and the development of realism in Western European art.

Viktor Grashchenkov (1925 – 2005) was a Soviet and Russian historian of art, who specialised in art of Italian Renaissance. Graduated from the Faculty of History and Philology of the Moscow State University in 1954. In 1960, Grashchenkov defended his thesis on realistic tendencies in the Italian Renaissance drawings. In 1960 – 1985, he chaired the Department of Art History at the MSU. From 1988, he was the Chairman of the Commission for the culture of Renaissance at the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Viktor Lazarev (1897 – 1976) was a Soviet art critic and historian who specialized in medieval Byzantine and Russian religious art and art of Italian Renaissance. He studied at the Moscow State University and did his PhD at the Institute of Archaeology and Art History of Russian Association of the Research Institutes for Social Sciences. Since 1943, Lazarev was a member of the USSR Academy of Sciences. Co-founded the Institute of Art History in 1944. Lazarev taught history of art and architecture at the Moscow State University and Surikov Art Institute. In 1947 – 1948, he published 'The History of Byzantine Painting' in 2 volumes. Co-authored 'The History of Russian art' in 13 volumes.

⁹ Aleksei Lepork, 'Posleslovie' v: Maks Dvorzhak, *Istoriya iskusstva kak istorii dukha*, Sankt-Peterburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2001, 323-324. Unless otherwise indicated translations are the author's.

¹⁰ Maks Dvorzhak, *Ocherki po iskusstvu Srednevekovaya*, Moskva: Izogiz, 1934.

Ivan Mácza (1893 – 1974) was a Soviet art critic and historian of art and architecture of Hungarian descent. Emigrated from Hungary to the USSR in 1923. From 1928 taught at the

History of Art as the History of Ideas'. First, the book was christened with a new ideologically neutral title 'Essays in medieval art'. Second, the collection was stripped of two lectures: on Dürer's Apocalypse and 'El Greco and Mannerism'. Other lectures were published in an abridged version. The nature of those abridgements can be best revealed by two examples from the essay on Pieter Bruegel's art.

In the first case, Dvořák was writing about Bruegel's *Adoration of the Magi*. The editors deleted the last half of the sentence where the scholar was describing the baby Christ lying on Mary's knees: 'he is the hope of humanity for the future and the poetic centre of the image, he radiates with reverential humility, which penetrates all present'.¹¹

The other example is Dvořák's analysis of Bruegel's *Parable of the Blind*. Here a whole paragraph was trimmed:

These humans are godlike, however, this is nothing comparison with the supernatural, transcendental forces which set insurmountable boundaries for the people's struggle. This is a tragedy of humankind *sub specie aeternitatis*. This is an eschatological vision, timeless and shown in the universe's infinity, on that side of any mundane determined situation; corporeality developed in a kind of major artistic force, yet this vision transforms into other-worldly revelation in a flash-like metaphysical flow, in the spherical infinity of the natural law.¹²

It is easy to identify the logic underlying the editorial cuts: Mácza and Sidorov removed the passages that they considered too 'spiritualistic', 'visionary' or 'expressive'. In order to bring Dvořák into line with their perception of reality they emasculated his approach, bringing it into a full accord with the Marxist theory of 'reflection' to a formula that a work of art mirrored the social, political and psychological reality. Although it contradicted Dvořák's initial intention to analyse artistic form through the painter's perspective, this lacklustre, materialist approach prevailed in Soviet art history.

Mácza's aim, laid down in the foreword, had been achieved since he aspired to twist Dvořák's observations into the mould adopted by Soviet art history. He argued that the Austrian scholar's most valuable idea was to treat different periods

Moscow State University. There he began collecting valuable documents of artistic activities from the time of the Soviet avant-garde. Some of these holdings became the property of the State Archives for Literature in Moscow. From 1928 to 1932 Mácza was a member of the October artist group. He was the bearer of the Order of the Red Banner of Labour. Alexey Sidorov (1891 – 1978) was a Soviet art historian and collector, specialised in history of book printing and draughtsmanship. Graduated from the Moscow State University in 1913. In 1927 – 1964, worked at the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts. For almost thirty years, from 1921 until 1950, Sidorov taught at the Department of Art History at the Moscow State University. Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences of the Soviet Union (1946).

¹¹ Maks Dvorzhak, 'Piter Breigel Starshii' v: Maks Dvorzhak, *Istoriya iskusstva kak istorii dukha*, Sankt-Peterburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2001, 282.

¹² Maks Dvorzhak, 'Piter Breigel Starshii', 288.

in art history as deeply interrelated in contrast with the beliefs of previous generations of scholars who used to study them separately breaking them down by race and 'cultural biases'.¹³

Of course, the implied criticism that manifested itself through cuts or the remarks about the necessity of refuting Dvořák's 'idealism', were not enough to justify adoption of his ideas. That is why critical remarks also emerged in Sidorov's comments, the primary purpose of which was to clarify purely artistic notions. He could not help providing his own observations. Let us illustrate it by taking one of his comments on the essay on Bruegel. Sidorov firmly dismisses Dvořák's interpretation of the 'Blind' as completely 'detached from the reality'; according to him, Dvořák was unable understand that this painting was a mere visual 'anecdote' and ascribed his own emotions to the painter and his work:

It provokes a protest even more, for in reconciling Bruegel's 'Blind' and Dostoevsky, and in making the painting an illustration of the obligatory faith of all 'blinded' humankind, we see an expression of the deeply decadent mood of the German post-war bourgeoisie, which has chosen Expressionism, with its elevated pessimism, as its signature style and replaced every pattern with individualistic arbitrariness.¹⁴

Although the Soviet reviewer sought to criticize the influence of Expressionism on Dvořák's writings on Mannerism, it hit the bull's eye: the parallels between Expressionism and Mannerism would become commonplace in both Soviet and Western art historiographies.

'Dialectical Mannerism' and the 'Battle for Renaissance' (the 1940s – 1960s)

In the post-war period up to Stalin's death (1946 – 1953) Soviet art history, as Anastasia Morozova aptly put it, was confined to the role of a weapon in the Cold War.¹⁵ Thus, aesthetic or theoretical issues were brought into the ideological context. Soviet science dwelled on dialectical Materialism (a Marxist adaptation of the Hegelian historical dynamics with emphasis on real-world conditions), which was proclaimed as the official methodology. Therefore, scholarly discourse had to be structured as a triad of thesis, antithesis and synthesis.¹⁶ Soviet Scholars focused on the first two elements identified with classical and anti-classical art gradually drifting towards the previously criticized binary oppositions of Wölfflin.

However, Soviet Scholars went much further than Wölfflin in their analysis of classical and anticlassical tendencies. Using Marx's terminology, they introduced

¹³ Igor Mácza, 'M. Dvorzhak i istoriya feodal'nogo iskusstva' v: Maks Dvorzhak, *Ocherki po iskusstvu Srednevekoviya*, Moskva: Izogiz, 1934, 11.

¹⁴ Aleksandr Sidorov, 'Primechaniya k statye 5' v: Maks Dvorzhak, *Ocherki po iskusstvu Srednevekoviya*, Moskva: Izogiz, 1934, 270.

¹⁵ Anastasiya Morozova, 'Ispanistika v otechestvennom iskusstvedenii v 1950-e -1960-e gody', *Vestnik Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta*, Ser. 2, Vyp. 4, 2011, 44.

¹⁶ Gustav E. Mueller, 'The Hegel Legend of "Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis"', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Jun., 1958), 413.

the notion of 'struggle' into the art historical process. This notion described the relations between oppositions that merged into a synthesis. Of course, the principal struggle was between classes, and its impact was traced in art. Soviet art historians praised Renaissance art as democratic, secular and humanistic (in the modern rather than the Renaissance meaning), and branded Mannerist art as reactionary, Catholic, feudal and anti-humanistic.

Therefore, the absence of studies focusing on the notion of Mannerism or Mannerist painters during this period of Soviet art historiography is no surprise. Rare references to the subject can be found solely in studies of Italian or Northern Renaissance art.

'Sixteenth-century Netherlandish art' (1949) by Elena Fekhner is a good example of the art historical scholarship of this period, dominated as it was by a dialectical approach to art and criticism of anti-classical features. The first chapter 'Progressive and conservative tendencies in Sixteenth-century art' unequivocally exposes the author's binary thinking.¹⁷ While describing Quentin Massys's paintings, Fekhner recognises the focus on the inner, emotional or intellectual life of his sitters as a progressive feature¹⁸ and the elaboration of distinctive motives, local colours, constrained postures¹⁹ and 'abstract religiosity' as conservative ones.²⁰ His ties with Gothic art, she argues, are to be replaced soon with the enhanced presentation of human emotions.²¹ In this view, 'progressive art' brings the subject down to earth and humanizes it.

Fekhner defines Mannerism in early Sixteenth century Antwerp art as a product of the crisis of Netherlandish culture, in an attempt to reconsider the religious art that was doomed from the very beginning.²² She argued that the whole artistic output of the Antwerp Mannerists was nothing more than consumer goods, lacking in any innovation.²³

However, the austere criticism of this 'decadent' style, the antithesis to the Renaissance reflecting some sort of a crisis, was not the only notion adopted by Soviet Scholars. A new trend emerged in Soviet scholarship in the 1950s: I call it 'the battle for the Renaissance', a derivative from the words of Mikhail Alpatov that 'The outcome of the battle for the Renaissance is crucial for the artistic heritage of our growing socialist culture'.²⁴ Soviet art historians started to accuse their Western

¹⁷ Elena Fekhner, *Niderlandskaya zhivopis XVI veka*, Leningrad: Izdatelstvo Gosudarstvennogo Ehrmitazha, 1949, 20.

¹⁸ Elena Fekhner, *Niderlandskaya zhivopis XVI veka*, 26.

¹⁹ Elena Fekhner, *Niderlandskaya zhivopis XVI veka*, 24.

²⁰ Elena Fekhner, *Niderlandskaya zhivopis XVI veka*, 22.

²¹ Elena Fekhner, *Niderlandskaya zhivopis XVI veka*, 22.

²² Elena Fekhner, *Niderlandskaya zhivopis XVI veka*, 34.

²³ Elena Fekhner, *Niderlandskaya zhivopis XVI veka*, 36.

²⁴ 'Iskhod borby za Vozrozhdenie sushchestvenno vazhen dlya otnosheniya k khudozhestvennomu naslediyu vsei nashei rastushchei sotsialisticheskoi kultury'. Mikhail Alpatov, 'V zashchitu Vozrozhdeniya (protiv teorii burzhuaznogo iskusstvoznaniya)', v: I.E. Grabar, V. S. Kemenov, red. *Protiv burzhuaznogo iskusstva i iskusstvoznaniya*. Moskva: Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1951, 154.

counterparts of plotting to 'falsify' the Renaissance and to promote Mannerism as a precursor of Modern art.

A 1951 selection of essays christened rather blatantly 'Confronting Bourgeois Art History' revealed several important conflicts between social realist art history and its Western counterpart.²⁵ Two of the six essays offered a broad overview of contemporary American and European historiography related to the Renaissance. Viktor Lazarev scrutinized the blurry succession from the Middle Ages into the Renaissance, while Mikhail Alpatov focused on the second watershed separating the Renaissance and Mannerism. The periodization of Renaissance, thus, was regarded as a critical issue. It was of prime importance to Soviet art historians to prove that the Renaissance was a 'revolutionary' and 'progressive' movement; a rupture with the medieval culture confirmed the Renaissance's secular character and its separation from Mannerism indicated the new attack of the 'forces of reaction', which fitted perfectly into the paradigm of class struggle.

Alpatov blamed Western art historians for their attempts to merge together medieval and Renaissance cultures and for confining the latter to the 'classical style', depriving it of its universal character.²⁶ They also tried, in Alpatov's opinion, to question the very existence of a pure Renaissance art. And here he refers to Josef Strzygowski, who found baroque traits in the art of Raphael.²⁷ Soviet art historians champion the stylistic homogeneity of the Renaissance while attacking, in its turn, Mannerism as a homogenous style. He even asks a daring question, whether Mannerism is not the fruit of a morbid imagination.²⁸ Although Alpatov did maintain that Mannerism was not a totally artificial style, he considered it to be a mere spinoff of late Renaissance art.²⁹

Western art historians, he insists, hugely exaggerate the importance of Mannerism. The reason behind this deliberate contortion is two-fold. First, Mannerism is praised as a precursor of 'decadent contemporary art'.³⁰ 'Indeed', Alpatov sarcastically states, 'one does not need to be particularly sharp-sighted to see how Mannerists with their elongated, twisted bodies resemble formalist artists, how much the ecstasism of Beccafumi has in common with contemporary Expressionism'.³¹ And here, at the end of his essay, he mentions for the first time Dvořák: 'Art historians similar to Dvořák, who were amongst the first to understand the importance of the Sixteenth-century masters, believed that they really paved new ways with their art. But their hopes were not justified. [...] Before our eyes, realism became the art of revolutionary people, who took power in their own

²⁵ On the notion of socialist realist art history. .E. Grabar, V. S. Kemenov, red. *Protiv burzhuaznogo iskusstva i iskusstvoznaniya*, Moskva: Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1951.

²⁶ Mikhail Alpatov, 'V zashchitu Vozrozhdeniya', 130.

²⁷ Mikhail Alpatov, 'V zashchitu Vozrozhdeniya', 131.

²⁸ Mikhail Alpatov, 'V zashchitu Vozrozhdeniya', 135.

²⁹ Mikhail Alpatov, 'V zashchitu Vozrozhdeniya', 143.

³⁰ Mikhail Alpatov, 'V zashchitu Vozrozhdeniya', 151.

³¹ 'Deistvitelno, ne trebuetsya osoboi zorkosti, kak pokhozhi mnogie maneristy s ikh vytyanutymi, deformirovannymi telami na khudozhnikov-formalistov, kak mnogo obshchego mezhdru ehkstatizmom Beccafumi i sovremennym ekspressionizmom'. Mikhail Alpatov, 'V zashchitu Vozrozhdeniya', 151

hands'.³² It is remarkable how gently Alpatov commented on Dvořák's assertions about Mannerism: the Austrian art historian was spared the criticism expressed earlier and directed towards Antal, Hamann, Briganti or Michalsky. Alpatov stated that Dvořák was wrong as a prophet can be wrong in his prophecies, not as a scholar who deliberately distorts reality. Second, Western scholars, Alpatov argues, esteemed Mannerism because they tend to appreciate art for art's sake and seek opportunities to exercise their erudition and connoisseurship.³³ Alpatov concludes his essay with a passionate statement that 'The defence of the Renaissance is far from being a purely academic issue', for, 'The outcome of the battle for the Renaissance is crucial for the artistic heritage of our growing socialist culture'.³⁴ It meant that the success of the socialist realist art project depended heavily on the status of Renaissance art. Socialist realist art could be praised only in a world where the Renaissance surpasses such dubious styles as Mannerism.

Boris Vipper's monograph 'The struggle of movements in Sixteenth-century Italian art' (1956) can be considered another important milestone.³⁵ The title already reveals the struggle between different art movements as the main idea of the book. From the first pages, one can easily comprehend that the struggle was being waged between 'realistic' and 'formalist' art, between the Renaissance and Mannerism.

Vipper begins his book with a long chapter on Michelangelo; just as Dvořák does, he considers Michelangelo's late work as a bifurcation point in Renaissance art.³⁶ The attitude towards late Michelangelo makes the difference between the two scholars: if Dvořák sees an elevated spirituality in elongated forms or *nonfinito*, Vipper treats the whole period as a shift away from realism. After he is done evaluating Michelangelo's artistic evolution, Vipper proceeds with the debate about Mannerism. He condemns his Western colleagues for their attempt to 'belittle, minimize its [the Renaissance's. – S.D.] importance' and claims that 'these attempts being extremely reactionary and unscientific, made from idealistic and metaphysical positions are carried in several distinct directions, but all of them testify to how alien ~~is~~ Renaissance art is to contemporary decadent bourgeois culture'.³⁷ After making these introductory remarks, Vipper proceeds with characterising two groups of scholars who in his opinion diminish or disparage the Renaissance: the first 'medievalizes' the Renaissance (Huizinga, Nordstrom, Lavedan), the second treats the Renaissance as a decline (Sarton, Thorndyke etc.).³⁸ Here Vipper relies on the already mentioned essay of Lazarev from 1951.

³² 'Iskusstvovedy vrode Dvorzhaka, kotorye v pervye stali podnimat znachenie masterov XVI v., verili, chto svoim tvorchestvom oni deistvitelno prolagali novye puti. No ikh ozhidaniya ne opravdalis. (...) Na glazakh nashego pokoleniya realizm stal iskusstvom revolyutsionnogo naroda, vzyavshego v svoi ruki vlast'. Mikhail Alpatov, 'V zashchitu Vozrozhdeniya', 151 – 152.

³³ Mikhail Alpatov, 'V zashchitu Vozrozhdeniya', 152.

³⁴ Mikhail Alpatov, 'V zashchitu Vozrozhdeniya', 154.

³⁵ Boris Vipper, *Borba techenii v italyanskom iskusstve XVI veka*, Moskva: Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1956. 369 c.

³⁶ Boris Vipper, *Borba techenii v italyanskom iskusstve XVI veka*, 51 – 52, 179 – 180.

³⁷ Boris Vipper, *Borba techenii v italyanskom iskusstve XVI veka*, 19.

³⁸ Boris Vipper, *Borba techenii v italyanskom iskusstve XVI veka*, 19.

Vipper does not mention Dvořák or his concept of Mannerism, but one can detect a reference to his work reading carefully between the lines:

This campaign of contemporary bourgeois scholars against the Renaissance is accompanied by the urge to praise the movement of Sixteenth-century Italian art, which was an expression of the feudal-Catholic reaction [Mannerism – S.D.] and in which decadent Western art history sees a precursor of tendencies that triumphed in Western contemporary formalist art.³⁹

Since Hauser's work was still to be published, Vipper could only have meant Dvořák. At the same time, Vipper could not resist speculating in much the same manner as his Austrian colleague: he explained the expression in Mannerist art by mentioning the 'troubled times' after the death of Lorenzo the Magnificent, stopping just short of mentioning the 'spirit of the age'.⁴⁰

The same battle for realism – this time modern – was present in the essays of Vladimir Kemenov, 'Stalin's Falcon'.⁴¹ Even though he did not write about Mannerism, for he specialized in contemporary art, it is in his works that we can grasp how ambivalent the position of formalist art became in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Stalin's death ended an era of persecution, and the attitude towards Western art changed so much that two exhibitions of contemporary Western art were held in Moscow (in 1957 and 1959), where the works of both 'formalist' and 'realist' painters were exhibited.⁴²

Nevertheless, the criticism of formalist art was not muted. In 1969 Kemenov published a collection of essays (with the earliest written in 1959), where he berated contemporary Western art for its 'deformity' and 'ugliness'.⁴³ In his review of the exhibition of American art in Moscow, Kemenov wrote the following about Jack Levin's painting 'Welcome home' (1946): 'The painting was made under a strong influence of 1920s German Expressionism; deformity of nature and grotesque exaggerations reduce its artistic value'⁴⁴. We see that in the 1960s the latter was still equated with realism.

Expressionism did come close to rehabilitation in the 1960s when the Institute of Art History headed by Vladimir Kruzhkov (1905 – 1991) (Kemenov was the deputy director) organized a conference on German Expressionism. The conference was intended as a gesture of goodwill from the Soviet Union towards bourgeois art. But on the very first day lecturers and the audience got too enthusiastic about Expressionism, and functionaries in high places became worried

³⁹ Boris Vipper, *Borba techenii v italyanskom iskusstve XVI veka*, 19.

⁴⁰ Boris Vipper, *Borba techenii v italyanskom iskusstve XVI veka*, 181.

⁴¹ Sergei Fofanov, 'Grinberg vs. Kemenov. Irrelevantnost dvukh kultur', *Iskusstvoznanie*, No. 4, 2016, 166.

⁴² Anastasiya Morozova, 'Ispanistika v otechestvennom iskusstvovedenii v 1950-e – 1960-e gody', *Vestnik Sankt-Peterburgskogo universiteta*, Ser. 2, Vyp. 4, 2011, 44.

⁴³ Vladimir Kemenov, *Protiv abstraktsionizma. V sporakh o realizme: sbornik statei*, Moskva: Khudozhnik RSFSR, 1969.

⁴⁴ Vladimir Kemenov, *Protiv abstraktsionizma. V sporakh o realizme: sbornik statei*, 62.

that they had made a mistake in authorizing the gathering. When the conference ended, Kruzhkov was forced to debrief all participants, and, of course, the collection of essays never appeared.⁴⁵

The rehabilitation of Mannerism, too, was uneven and took a while. At the beginning of the 1960s Soviet art historians had started writing about Mannerist masters avoiding, however, highlighting their mysticism or expressionism and focusing on the realist traits in their art⁴⁶. Mikhail Alpatov's 'étude' on El Greco (1963) is one of the examples of this limited rehabilitation. Alpatov dealt very carefully with this previously taboo painter, who had been excluded in the 1930s from the Russian translation of Dvořák. Alpatov mentioned the ties between El Greco and Mannerism only once: moreover, he called him 'a Renaissance genius' who enriched medieval art lost in scientifically grounded works of other Renaissance masters.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, he considered El Greco to be a part of the Renaissance, even though the master dared to 'reshape nature, step aside from reality and use exaggeration'.⁴⁸

Thus, in the 1940s – 1960s Mannerism remained an antipode of the 'progressive' and 'democratic' Renaissance, which came into focus only within the 'battle for the Renaissance' paradigm. The first effort to rehabilitate Expressionism, whose traits in common with Mannerism were seen even by Soviet scholars, was unsuccessful and caused a kind of rebound. As before, the opposition of realism and formalism structured Soviet discourse and the political agenda enforced the appropriate vocabulary.

'Dvořák Revival': discussions of Mannerism in the 1970s – 1990s

Dvořák's heritage was 'revived' in the 1970s, in the period of 'Stagnation'. This was not only because his lectures on Italian Renaissance art were translated into Russian in 1978, accompanied by a quite apologetic foreword by the renowned Soviet art historian Ewsei Rotenberg. The other driver of Dvořák's revival was the publication of Arnold Hauser's book on Mannerism in 1964 (*Der Manierismus. Die Krise der Renaissance und der Ursprung der modernen Kunst*), where he went even further than his Austrian predecessor. As Jesse M. Locker aptly noted, Hauser declared Mannerism 'an autonomous philosophical phenomenon that was not bound to a single period or medium and was just as likely to appear in nineteenth-century poetry as sixteenth-century art'.⁴⁹ Soviet commentators could not avoid Hauser's work and, unsurprisingly enough, he became a target in place of Dvořák, who was praised.

⁴⁵ Remarkably, I could not find any other mention of the conference in question apart from Sergei Khmelnitzkii's account that was published online: <http://gefeter.ru/archive/20005>

⁴⁶ Anastasiya Morozova, 'Ispanistika v otechestvennom iskusstvedenii v 1950-e — 1960-e gody', 45.

⁴⁷ Mikhail Alpatov, 'El Greco, v: Mikhail Alpatov, *Etyudy po istorii zapadnoevropeiskogo iskusstva*, Moskva: Izdatelstvo Akademii Khudozhestv, 1963, 234.

⁴⁸ Mikhail Alpatov, 'El Greco', 234.

⁴⁹ Jesse M. Locker, *Art and Reform in the Late Renaissance: After Trent*, London: Routledge, 2018, 9.

In addition to Dvořák's 'Italian art', another book proved to be stimulating for Mannerist discourse in the Soviet Union. In the early 1970s, Otto Benesch's *The Art of the Renaissance in the Northern Europe* (1973) was translated into Russian and supplemented with a substantial foreword by Viktor Grashchenkov, who took a chance in making his point on Mannerist art.⁵⁰ Grashchenkov starts his foreword with a harmless epigraph taken from the work of his Austrian colleague: 'The leading painter, who shows new paths never stands out of the spiritual community of his time, and if we cannot see his ties to that community, our understanding of his art or of his times is not deep enough'.⁵¹ One should analyse art within the historical context – this imperative, which originated in the simplistic understanding of Dvořák's approach – never contradicted the officially approved Soviet methodology and was not a subject of heated discussions. 'The historical evolution of art as a reflection of society's spiritual life' – was how Grashchenkov summed up Dvořák's conception.⁵²

The biggest conflict between Dvořák's vision of Mannerism and that of Grashchenkov and other Soviet art historians can be explained through the notion of 'revolution'. As I have mentioned earlier, for Dvořák Mannerism was a result of a spiritual revolution and was a kind of revolution itself; while Grashchenkov, following Alpatov and Lazarev, considered the Renaissance a true revolution in art and mind.⁵³ He wrote: 'At the end of the day, it was the advance of the Renaissance that broke 'the spiritual dictatorship of the Church' (F. Engels), consolidated a humanistic worldview and led to revolutionary changes in ideology and culture'.⁵⁴ Furthermore, it was the incorrect understanding of the Renaissance (in the footsteps of Burckhardt or Wölflin) that initiated the erection of the 'fantastic building' of the period of Mannerism and inspired the 'false idea of its revolutionary character'.⁵⁵

Grashchenkov revolts against the efforts of Dvořák and Hauser to brand Mannerism as a precursor of Expressionism in particular and Modern art more generally. The Soviet scholar is especially harsh regarding Hauser, whose work he condemns as 'secondary', 'eclectic' and a mere repetition of Dvořák's concept introduced 'back in 1920 in the lecture on El Greco and Mannerism and in his essay on Bruegel from the same time and in his lectures about Italian art'.⁵⁶ He blames historical perturbations that shaped Dvořák's misunderstanding of Mannerism: 'Social calamities, the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian empire, the flourishing of the hostile-to-realism Expressionist movement in European art after the First World War – all this nurtured Dvořák's ideas about Mannerism'.⁵⁷ The

⁵⁰ Otto Benesch, *Iskusstvo Severnogo Vozrozhdeniya*. Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1973. 222 s.

⁵¹ Viktor Grashchenkov, 'Kniga O. Benesha i problemy Severnogo Vozrozhdeniya', v: Benesh O. *Iskusstvo Severnogo Vozrozhdeniya*. Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1973, 5 – 55.

⁵² Viktor Grashchenkov, 'Kniga O. Benesha i problemy Severnogo Vozrozhdeniya', 8.

⁵³ Viktor Lazarev, 'Protiv falsifikatsii istorii kultury Vozrozhdeniya', v: I.E. Grabar, V. S. Kemenov, red. *Protiv burzhuaznogo iskusstva i iskusstvoznaniya*. Moskva: Izd-vo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1951, 107.

⁵⁴ Viktor Grashchenkov, 'Kniga O. Benesha i problemy Severnogo Vozrozhdeniya', 47.

⁵⁵ Viktor Grashchenkov, 'Kniga O. Benesha i problemy Severnogo Vozrozhdeniya', 46.

⁵⁶ Viktor Grashchenkov, 'Kniga O. Benesha i problemy Severnogo Vozrozhdeniya', 44.

⁵⁷ Viktor Grashchenkov, 'Kniga O. Benesha i problemy Severnogo Vozrozhdeniya', 45.

direct connection between the historiographical process and its historical context remains a feature of all Dvořák-related studies.⁵⁸ Mannerism, as Grashchenkov sums up, cannot be compared with major styles as the Renaissance or the Baroque, for 'It is in Mannerism's very nature to be intermediate, transitional, sometimes artistically inferior and eclectic'.⁵⁹

Despite all its criticism, Grashchenkov's foreword initiated the process for Dvořák's rehabilitation. Moreover, even when the Soviet scholar disagreed with Dvořák, he made his point very differently from his colleagues a decade earlier: he tends to seek excuses for what he considers to be Dvořák's errors: the post-war trauma, the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire etc.

The essay 'Conceptions of Mannerism in 20th century Art History' which Aleksandr Anikst published in 1977 in the most prestigious Soviet journal about the theory and history of art was a first attempt to assess Mannerism without treating it as an appendix to the Renaissance.⁶⁰ It shows a dramatic shift in the evaluation of Dvořák's concept of Mannerism. He writes: 'Amongst works which played a critical role in the development of Mannerism as a concept in art history, one has to single out Max Dvořák's brilliant lecture "On El Greco and Mannerism"'.⁶¹ Without any reservations, Anikst supports Dvořák's assertion that one cannot explain Mannerism with purely artistic or psychological reasons, but one should look for its roots in the 'historical situation, in social and ideological shifts of the 16th century'.⁶²

Anikst's conclusions are another proof of the shift in the attitude towards Mannerism:

The crisis, which society experienced impacted dramatically the spiritual world and artworks of the masters from that period. Both the ideological significance and the artistic value of Mannerism are more and more appreciated. Scholarship and art criticism explore new aesthetical horizons in the evaluation of its achievements and play a positive role in the development of modern artistic culture.⁶³

Rotenberg's Afterword to Dvořák's *History of Renaissance art in Italy* (1978) secured Dvořák's new exceptional status in Soviet historiography and at the same time became a last large-scale effort to evaluate critically his concept of Mannerism and art history as a whole.⁶⁴

Despite his positive attitude towards Dvořák's book, Rotenberg rejects his vision of Mannerism as an all-encompassing style: for example, in Rotenberg's

⁵⁸ Matthew Rampley, 'Max Dvořák: art history and the crisis of modernity', 214.

⁵⁹ Viktor Grashchenkov, 'Kniga O. Benesha i problemy Severnogo Vozrozhdeniya', 49.

⁶⁰ Aleksandr Anikst, 'Kontsepsiya manerizma v iskusstvoznanii XX v.', *Sovetskoe iskusstvoznanie*, 1977. Vyp. 2, 225 – 248.

⁶¹ Aleksandr Anikst, 'Kontsepsiya manerizma v iskusstvoznanii XX v.', 228.

⁶² Aleksandr Anikst, 'Kontsepsiya manerizma v iskusstvoznanii XX v.', 230.

⁶³ Aleksandr Anikst, 'Kontsepsiya manerizma v iskusstvoznanii XX v.', 246.

⁶⁴ Evsei Rotenberg, 'Maks Dvorzhak i ego "Istoriya italyanskogo iskusstva v ehpokhu Vozrozhdeniya"', v: Maks Dvorzhak, *Istoriya italyanskogo iskusstva v ehpokhu Vozrozhdeniya*, T. 2. Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1978, 345 – 391.

opinion, Michelangelo's late work still shows the traits of Renaissance art, which remain a positive phenomenon even though it was experiencing a sort of crisis. Unlike Michelangelo, Rotenberg explains, Mannerist artists experience not only spiritual but an artistic crisis too.

If the late oeuvre of Michelangelo, while being a stunning expression of the tragic sides of reality, remains an epitome of his genius, the works of his Florentine or Roman contemporaries are marked by some aesthetic inferiority. Their art is mostly deprived of life and emotion; it bears the mark of sterility, and a lack of prospects.⁶⁵

Interestingly, Rotenberg, too, opposes Dvořák and his notion of Mannerism with these later interpretations. Like Grashchenkov, he supports Dvořák at the expense of his followers:

Dvořák, he argued, strove to highlight the best in Mannerism; sometimes he ascribed to [the Mannerist] masters some undeserved merits and wrongfully identified the greatest representatives of European culture with this art movement, in whom he wished to see a model of artistic achievement of the period under question. In contrast to Dvořák, the scholars of the next generations tended to praise in Mannerism the worst; however, it did not require great efforts or exaggerations.⁶⁶

Rotenberg especially revolted against putting 'on the pedestal' such traits of Mannerism as a rupture with the principles of Renaissance art or the thing he called a 'negative essence'.⁶⁷

Larisa Tananaeva's essay 'On concepts of Mannerism and the study of the Eastern European art from the end of the 16th and the 17th centuries' (1987) shows a more moderate attitude towards Mannerism: it lacks Rotenberg's polemic ardour, but surpasses him in the vastness of scope.⁶⁸ She takes into account not only Italian Mannerism, but also its regional versions. For example, she considers the debate on Mannerism without a discussion of Rudolphine Mannerism incomplete. She highlights its positive effect on Czech art: 'Mannerism...reconciled heterogeneous, non-uniform art traditions of this vast region'.⁶⁹ Moreover, in this case Mannerism

⁶⁵ Evsei Rotenberg, 'Maks Dvorzhak i ego "Istoriya italyanskogo iskusstva v ehpokhu Vozrozhdeniya"', 387.

⁶⁶ Evsei Rotenberg, 'Maks Dvorzhak i ego "Istoriya italyanskogo iskusstva v ehpokhu Vozrozhdeniya"', 389.

⁶⁷ Evsei Rotenberg, 'Maks Dvorzhak i ego "Istoriya italyanskogo iskusstva v ehpokhu Vozrozhdeniya"', 389.

⁶⁸ Lidiya Tananaeva, 'Nekotorye kontseptsii manerizma i izuchenie iskusstva Vostochnoi Evropy kontsa XVI i XVII veka', *Sovetskoe iskusstvoznanie*. Vyp. 22, 1987, 123 – 167.

⁶⁹ Lidiya Tananaeva, 'Nekotorye kontseptsii manerizma i izuchenie iskusstva Vostochnoi Evropy kontsa XVI i XVII veka', 159.

propagated principles of Renaissance art.⁷⁰ Tananaeva is as moderate when she evaluates Dvořák's impact on the study of Mannerism: leaving all controversies aside, she praises him for his unique sensibility to art as a phenomenon of spiritual life.⁷¹

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the dominance of the official methodology, Dvořák's approach became even more widespread and even less critically evaluated as his understanding of Mannerism becomes a basis for new research. An example of this tendency is Vera Dazhyna's essay 'Radical religious movements and Mannerism' (1997), where she describes how Sixteenth-century spiritualism informed artistic form.⁷²

As I have argued elsewhere, post-Soviet Renaissance studies remain much under the spell of Dvořák's and Benesch's work.⁷³ This situation is unique, especially when compared with their critical fate in Anglo-American historiography.

Conclusions

To sum up, one can distinguish three periods in the reception of Max Dvořák's ideas in Soviet art history. The first clash of methodologies occurred in the 1930s when an abridged collection of Dvořák's essays was translated into Russian. The beginning of the Cold War marked the second period (the 1940s – 1960s), with its enforcement of ideological boundaries and the use of specific vocabulary; and yet, this period was ambivalent – the first efforts at rehabilitation were followed by new outbreaks of dogmatic austerity. Lastly, I christened the third period, which lasted from the 1970s until the 1990s a 'Dvořák Revival' for it flourished with the new positive evaluations of his works and concepts. The changes in political climate finally allowed scholars to focus exclusively on art-historical issues and drop the political agenda. Of course, it did not signify the total acceptance of Dvořák's theoretical heritage, but it significantly reduced the amount of biased criticism.

How do these periods correlate with the Soviet debates about Mannerism? The first translation of Dvořák's essay in 1934 could not trigger such debate, for the most important lecture 'El Greco and Mannerism' was cut out from the collection and all the comments on mystical or eschatological sentiments were carefully eliminated from the other texts or harshly criticized by Sidorov or Mácza. They aimed at merging Dvořák's approach with historical materialism and at filling the 'methodological vacuum' (Lepork).

⁷⁰ Lidiya Tananaeva, 'Nekotorye kontseptsii manerizma i izuchenie iskusstva Vostochnoi Evropy kontsa XVI i XVII veka', 159.

⁷¹ Lidiya Tananaeva, 'Nekotorye kontseptsii manerizma i izuchenie iskusstva Vostochnoi Evropy kontsa XVI i XVII veka', 130.

⁷² Vera Dazhina, 'Radikalnye religioznye dvizheniya XVI v. i manyerizm', v: Lidiya Bragina, red., *Kultura Vozrozhdeniya i religioznaya zhizn ehpokhi*. Moskva: Nauka, 1997, 190 – 199.

⁷³ Stefaniia Demchuk, 'The Influence of the Vienna School of Art History on Soviet and post-Soviet historiography: Bruegel's case', in: *Journal of Art Historiography*, Number 23 (December 2020), 18 – 19.

In the post-war decade, Mannerism ceases to be a taboo topic and becomes a part of the 'battle for the Renaissance'. Soviet art historians accused the 'bourgeois' scholars of medievalising the Renaissance and belittling its achievements in favour of Mannerism. The Renaissance and Mannerism were presumed to reflect perfectly the differences between the Soviet and the 'bourgeois'; not only methodologies but the lifestyles too. The former is associated with the 'progressive' and 'democratic' Renaissance and the latter – with 'conservative' and 'reactionary' Mannerism. Soviet art historians never tired of highlighting the revolutionary character of the Renaissance, while for Dvořák Mannerism embodied the true spiritual revolution. Moreover, Soviet historiography did not even consider Mannerism as a distinctive style, describing it as a dead-end of the late Renaissance.

While reading the essays of Soviet art historians from the 1950s and 1960s, one cannot help but notice the similarities between Soviet discourses on Mannerism and Expressionism: both styles were condemned as 'formalist' and hostile to realism; both were described with identical vocabulary – anticlassical, anti-humanistic, reactionary, pessimistic, and tragic. Both were partly rehabilitated at that time through conferences or essays written with caution.

The third period, which started in the 1970s, in the era of 'Stagnation', put a new accent in the Soviet Mannerist discourse. It was not only changes in politics that initiated the more tolerant evaluations of Dvořák's oeuvre, but also the decades that now separated him from his critics: he stopped being a contemporary and started to become a classic, while other scholars like Arnold Hauser replaced him as a target of criticism. Gradually Mannerism strengthened its new status as a positive phenomenon in European art. In the 1990s, the critical attitude towards both Dvořák and Mannerism fades; and, together with Benesch, Dvořák gets canonized in post-Soviet art history.

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