

NEKRASOV'S TRAGIC SOCIAL LYRICISM

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In his popular 1856 publication, *Stikhotvoreniia (Verses)*, Nikolai Nekrasov compiled poems on themes that he had spent the last decade formulating, including a new *raznochinets* lyric subject. This persona (*raznochinets*) was marked by bitter self-incrimination. In poems such as “Ia za to gluboko preziraiu sebia” (“I despise myself deeply for,” 1846), the poet condemns himself for his individual limitations yet simultaneously insists that he cannot surmount them. This insurmountable self-limitation is the essence of tragedy in Nekrasov’s poetry, known for its dark and troubled muse.¹ The individual recognizes its insignificance but cannot connect to the whole for which it yearns. For Nekrasov, a poet well known for reflecting on the social ills of the day, this whole was society. “Society” as it appears in “V derevne” is at once an oppressive institution, whose center is serfdom, and the people who suffer under it—*narod*. Connecting to such a whole has a double meaning. Individuals may reluctantly recognize their implication in the suffering of others but simultaneously embrace such connection as an impetus for action, whose poetic form was a call to attention (in, e.g., the opening poem of *Stikhotvoreniia*, “Poet i grazhdanin” “Poet and Citizen”). Such calls were as much complaint as rallying cry: in them, the direness of the social situation, from the state of serfs to the ineffectualness of the educated elite, is emphasized over compensatory solutions.

During the period in which Nekrasov expressed the tragic limits of the individual, he also explored the possibilities of poetry as a collective endeavor. We are accustomed to studying the genre of the nineteenth-century novel, which was flourishing during Nekrasov’s time, as an attempt to conceptualize a modern social totality. Thus, by tracing the separate but concurrent lives of multiple characters, novels map and indeed make visible the otherwise abstract community that unites them.² In Nekrasov’s hands, lyric poetry makes

1. For an interpretation of Nekrasov’s poetic persona through the lens of the tragic, see Chukovskii. For a more detailed argument on this definition of Nekrasov’s tragic pathos, see Flaherty.

2. For example, see Anderson. See Kirill Ospovat in this cluster on the task to unify poet and social totality as central to nineteenth-century aesthetics.

a similar attempt to conceive of a society which, in mid-century Russia, was constituted by isolated estates and thus difficult to see as an interconnected whole, especially across the divide of the educated elite and the peasantry. Such an attempt is the task of “V derevne” which presents isolated voices but meditates on their commonalities. Like the lyric hero, a non-peasant, who begins the poem caught up in his own thoughts, readers are challenged to see past a division between the lyric hero and the peasant speaker. Instead, we catch glimpses of a network of relationships that binds them together and puts their personal preoccupations in dialogue, both as antagonistic interests and in the context of a shared malaise. As Nekrasov’s poetic personae make clear, the advantages of the educated elite (including *raznochintsy*) over the peasantry afford little contentment: to be divided, even with positive advantage, is to suffer the same structure that generates disadvantage. This solidarity was the philosophy behind even more liberal calls for serfdom reform in the 1850s. Only by abolishing serfdom, reformers argued, could elites begin to hope for their own right of law.³

“V derevne” uses lyric form not merely to depict these interconnections, which constitute the poem’s image of society, but also to imagine a form of social togetherness in the expressive and potentially dialogic capacities of poetry itself. Peasant and non-peasant are not magically reconciled in Nekrasov’s poem as a more Romantic vision of unity. Rather, by showing how each speaker stakes out their own individual claims, at times to the exclusion of the other (as when the lyric hero remarks of the peasant’s loss, “A mne chto za delo?” “But what do I care?”), “V derevne” stresses the commonality of these speakers in their very isolation. Their problems are, if not the same, an avenue for solidarity with one another. Were the speakers to acknowledge the possibility of uniting precisely in the free expression of their malaise and their frustrations—that is, by means of tragic rather than falsely optimistic tones, then the very idea of society could transform. From a distinct and foreboding totality that bears down on the speakers, society could become a dialogue in which each actually responds to the other. As it stands, however, only the poem itself, in bearing witness to the way the speakers miss one another, offers insight into what I would call a lyrical (participatory, dialogic, and expressive) form of the social whole.

The Social as the Supernatural

“V derevne” begins with a lyric hero contemplating a gathering of crows, who, as we know, are omens of death in Russian folklore (see Victoria Somoff in this cluster). In the two-part structure of the poem, the lyric hero overhears a peasant lamenting the loss of her son. The lament connects the

3. Classic accounts of reform philosophy include Field and Lincoln. Also see Richardson and Kingston-Mann.

hero to the tragedy of another which is outside his immediate experience but suggests to him the ways in which he might relate to it. The poem's closing lines return to the image of the crows, who are now hanging in the air like a net "mez h nebom i glazom" ("between the eye and the sky").⁴

This core image of the poem suggests a realm that is "beyond" the individual and in this way represents society. Through this image, we see the lyric hero situated in a larger and more mysterious world than his own individual reflections suggest, caught between apparent solitude and a network of relations that he does not yet grasp. As Mikhail Makeev in this cluster rightly suggests, the social cause of the poem's tragedy (Savushka's death) is unclear, which is unusual for Nekrasov's poetry. Kirill Ospovat also rightly points out how the effects of serfdom are, in fact, discernible as the structural cause of Savushka's death and its consequences for his mother, an impoverished serf already existing on the margins of survival. I would add to these claims—and in a sense, bring them together—by stressing that the social causes of the poem's tragedy are unclear because of the way society is imagined; namely, as an omnipresent force acting violently upon individuals and existing beyond their immediate purview. More than bemoaning specific injustices, then, the poem gets to the heart of what an alienated society really is. Added to this negative critique is a more positive definition of society as the poem itself. Reaching beyond the domain of the lyric hero and creating a social structure around him by introducing a peasant's voice, "V derevne" invites the individual to understand his connection to the whole. In doing so, the poem explores how to make lyric poetry itself (as represented by the hero) social.

Society in its current form—an omnipresent force impacting individuals from a distance—is symbolized by the poem's central image in several ways. Authors in this cluster interpret the description of the crows as both a "club" (*klub*) and a "squadron" (*eskadron*) in reference to elite connotations, but I would emphasize simply the social nature of the words.⁵ In the poem's first part, the gathering crows are never alone (even squeezing themselves together on the small tip of a post). The lyric hero who watches these emi-

4. Translations of "V derevne" are by Ainsley Morse.

5. Chukovskii suggests that Nekrasov's use of "squadron" here is a loose citation of Gogol's *Dead Souls*, which uses the word to describe flies: "[...] vozduzhnye eskadrony mukh, podniatye legkim vozdukhom, vletaiut smelo, kak polnye khoziaeva i ... obsypaiut lakomye kuski gde vrazbituiiu, gde gustymi kuchami" ("[...] airborne squadrons of flies, lifted by the light air, fly in boldly, like full masters, and ... bestrew the dainty morsels, here scatteredly, there in thick clusters"). The connection to Gogol helps explain the use of colloquial language and the way it is combined with social themes and tragic pathos in Nekrasov. The debate between formalist and socially-oriented readings made famous by Eikhenbaum's reading of Gogol's "Overcoat" is thus applicable to this poem. In my interpretation, I argue for a combined approach, wherein the play of language is shown as a way to comprehend society and is not, therefore, a warrant for the interpreter to ignore its social themes (Chukovskii 2: 147–48; trans. from Pevear and Volokhonsky 10).

nently social creatures seems himself to be alone but, in fact, he mimics their sociability by speaking as though already in conversation with others who, moreover, are familiar with his surroundings as congregates of “our church” (“nashego prikhoda”). The Russian word *prikhod* is etymologically close to the English “congregation,” the verb form of which is exactly what the crows are doing by arriving (*prikhodiat*) in a place to perform a social ritual. Of course, the crows are also an aggregate by simple natural fact, as the phrase that introduces them, “voron'ego roda” (crow genus), suggests. This *de facto* biological categorization is not voluntaristic in the way that social groupings such as a club are, but the crows’ social nature (their voluntarism, as it were) remains primary to their image. The primacy of the social over the biological, and more precisely, their interconnection, reappears in the second part of the poem: the lament for the peasant bear-hunter Savushka’s death. “Nature” is here presented as a commodity: “Shkuru s medvedia-to sodrali, prodali” (“The bear, it’s been skinned, already sold”). That “prodali” (sold) rhymes with “sodrali” (stripped) suggests the physical effect of the social organization of labor on the natural body, both the bear’s and Savushka’s.

What seems to belong exclusively to the natural world is thus simultaneously social. “Society versus nature” is the first oft-assumed distinction to fall. A second distinction between society and the supernatural follows. We see the blending of these apparent opposites take place, once again, in the poem’s central image. The crows come from distant lands (“Kazhetsia, s tselogo sveta vorony / Po vecheram priletaiut siuda” “It seems as though crows from all over the world / Every evening fly in right here”) and thus, it would seem, from another world. Victoria Somoff emphasizes this apparent otherworldly aspect to distinguish the poem’s themes from social preoccupations. However, the distant spaces that the crows introduce into the lyric hero’s immediate present can only be assumed to be of this world. Although the crows are not otherworldly, they are supernatural—if we take “supernatural” in its literal meaning; that is, as higher than nature. What is “higher than nature” are the social forces at work in the poem’s world of peasant poverty and antagonism across the social estates. The supernatural element of society thus lies in the fact that such realities as Savushka’s death are foretold as if by a source other than indifferent biological processes.

The ritual aspect of the genre of the lament used in the second part of the poem also speaks to the way in which folkloric tropes blend the social and the supernatural. In ritual, those who receive the decisions of higher powers attempt to make appeals and exert whatever force they have in response.⁶ The traditional lament helps usher the deceased into the other world, but, as Somoff points out, the lament in “V derevne” fails to acknowledge this ritual

6. For a description of the way that social relationships are encoded into folkloric genres, see Olson and Adonyeva.

by dwelling instead on *this* world; that is, the world of the mother who is left behind.⁷ The poem's lament, although emptied of its typical ritual content, remains connected to a folkloric world, and thus suggests how unnatural forces act on individual people as members of a society. Without the lament's usual content, however, there is no longer the sense that people can actively respond to what happens to them. The world created by "V derevne" is thus manipulated by supra-natural agents who exert their power from some distant place but nonetheless determine more immediate spheres. This world's inhabitants—including the peasant mother—are more passive than the traditional folk, since they forgo ritual as a way of directly intervening in the events that befall them.⁸ Thus, a third assumption is flipped, regarding the folk as more fatalistic than the modern individual. In Nekrasov's poem it is the latter who is modeled, as we shall see, not only by the lyric hero but also by the *non*-traditional peasant lamenter. Both take from the "supernatural" sense of their social world determination without empowerment.

Readings of "V derevne" criticizing the idea that there is no higher meaning at work in the poem are, I believe, correct, but they are wrong to assume that social realities exist on the level of empirical perception alone. It is a misreading of Russian realism's Natural School to suggest that social preoccupations are apprehended in this way—by descending from the sorts of concepts that art engages as an "ideal" realm. Vissarion Belinsky, whose philosophy of art was imbued with Hegelian dialectics, does not suggest that the social world has nothing conceptual at work within it.⁹ We have suggested the social and the natural intertwine in such a way that this hierarchy is reversed: rather than serving as a model for an easily comprehensible social order, nature is socialized. Society is thus demystified in some ways (it is divorced from metaphysical justifications for the social order) but acquires a new kind of mystery; namely, the "mystery" (or rather simply the abstraction) of ideology. This is why Nekrasov's lyric hero, who, as a leisurely hunter, is a member of the elite, can hardly grasp his role in the serf society wherein the peasant he overhears suffers, and why this peasant is herself a passive sufferer. Nekrasov uses folkloric elements not as an escape from modern society, as Romantic pastoralists, among others, had done, but rather to make it more intelligible. Folklore invokes the supernatural but is deprived of its own powers, resulting in a mystified society from which there is no otherworldly escape.

7. On the traditional form of the lament, see, for example, Vasil'ev and Danchenkova.

8. For a classic account of folklore's relative empowerment compared especially to modern religious practices, see Malinowski. As a response to James Frazer's paradigmatically condescending account (describing folk practices as "failed science") in *The Golden Bough*, Malinowski's argument is of interest to a trend of thought, important in nineteenth-century Russia, that would see in the folk potential for less alienated ways of social organization.

9. See Kirill Ospovat in this cluster for more on Belinsky's aesthetics in connection to this poem.

Together in Opposition

When the lyric hero, having overheard tragedies of peasant life, asks “A mne chto za delo?” (“But what do I care?”), he betrays awareness that he either has or should have some relationship to them. The structure of the poem as divided across two speakers suggests as much: two distinct voices, which do not themselves interact, are arranged side-by-side. The coexistence of these isolated social spheres invites us to consider how they in fact affect one another. Readers “listen in” alongside the lyric hero on the peasant’s lament and are similarly implicated in her story. Invoking ethical response from an audience whose contact with serfdom was either mediated or ignored constitutes a core purpose of Nekrasov’s poetry (e.g., “Razmyshleniia u paradnogo pod'ezda” (Thoughts at a Vestibule) and “Poet i grazhdanin”). “V derevne” explores how the distinct realms interconnect.

The first way in which this invisible mutual interdependence plays out is on the level of poetry itself. The lyric hero, as others have noted, sets out to his “work” both as a man of leisure (whose hunting is thus clearly distinct from Savushka’s) and, presumably, as a poet. But the lyric hero’s own poetry runs aground; he stops abruptly and turns to a nearby peasant so that the poem can in effect continue. We can see the reasons for this first poetic dead-end in a comparison to one of the poem’s central intertexts, Aleksandr Pushkin’s “Derevnia” (“Village,” 1819).

Pushkin’s “Derevnia” had established the countryside as a place where the harsh reality of serfdom poses a challenge to poetic ideals. In the pastoral tradition, the countryside affords the poet the perfect setting for undisturbed reflection, but “Derevnia” stresses the contrast between pastoralism and serfdom as two different realms that the countryside accommodates in one place. Pushkin describes, first, a realm that is distinct from the petty vanities of city life, where “oracles of the ages” can be summoned: “Ia *zdes'*, ot suetnykh okov osvobozhdennyi ... Orakuly vekov, *zdes'* voproshaiu vas!” (“*Here*, free from the shackles of vanity ... Oracles of the ages, *here* I have come to inquire of you!”) (emphasis added). But the countryside turns out to have shackles of its own: “*Zdes'* rabstvo toshchee vlachitsia po brazdam / Neumolimogo vladel'tsa” (*Here* gaunt slavery drags itself along the furrows / Of the implacable owner”).

In contrast to Pushkin’s poem, the lyric hero of “V derevne” has no recourse to ancient oracles but begins in an already mundane village reality. As a metaphor for society, the crows lock him into this world, forming, through themselves, its horizon: “Riadyshkom seli na kupol, na krest, / Na kolokol'ne, na blizhnei izbushke” (“Settling down on the cupola, cross, / Up on the steeple, and on the rooftops”). The very thing which seems to invoke a world “beyond” is also what exerts a pressure as if from above to hold everything below in its same place: “Kryl'iami mashut... Vse to zhe opiat', / Chto i vchera, posidiat, i v dorogu!” (“Flapping their wings... It is all quite the same / As yesterday... they will sit some, then go!”).

The lyric hero’s entrapment in a world he finds dull limits his ability to gen-

erate the kind of higher poetic meaning accessible through pastoral sights and sounds, which may have been perceived on a “stroll to the fields” (“prouidus' do polei”). The gloomy atmosphere impedes this “work,” and it is the peasant who must enter the picture to finish the poetic task, even though her atmosphere is no different; indeed, her lament is the very expression of this gloom. The lyric hero dimly perceives that his environment is filled with malaise, but only the peasant relates this malaise to her own life and thus weaves from it a new poetic word.

For the lyric hero, the countryside frustrates any escapist impulse even as it offers a window into the social whole that structures his own existence. For the peasant, this same sense of entrapment is, by contrast, used to generate poetic meaning as tragedy. By employing the traditional form of the lament, she makes an initial step toward developing a new lyric form. Her lyricism does not stress an ideal realm apart from society but still insists on a right to complain. Poetry finds its place in reality as a means not for ideal expression (where ideal is understood as nearly analogous to optimism or blissful ignorance), but for grief. Her lament reaches outward to make a plea for a real social effect, even as it reaches inward.

Subverting the conventions of the ritual lament, the peasant focuses on herself as an individual in a typically lyrical way, describing not how her son will pass into the afterlife, but rather how she will fare in this life, having been left behind:

Чуть я домой добрела.
Ветер шатает избенку убогую,
Весь развалился овин...
Словно шальная, пошла я дорогою:
Не попадется ли сын?

I barely dragged home from heartache.
Winds are convulsing the derelict cottage,
The old barn is long past repair...
Like a madwoman I took to the roadway
Maybe my son is out there?

In this individualistic rendering, the loss of Savushka becomes the loss of the peasant's own chance of survival, which emphasizes her transformation of the collective poetic form of the lament into a modern (i.e., individualist) lyric.

Despite this inward focus, however, several categories of implied social context frame the peasant's expressions. Most immediately, she speaks to another peasant. Secondly, the lyric hero listens. Finally, readers are privy to all three voices. By repeating the name of her interlocuter Kasyanovna, the peasant reminds herself and her listener(s) that they are in a dialogue. She also refuses to pass over a grief that has no end, and, rather than making a gesture of closure which would be appropriate to folk and modern cultures alike, she continues her cry as if indefinitely, mimicking in this way the “groan” (*ston*) of peasants' suffering that appears across Nekrasov's poetry (e.g., “Razмыш-

leniia u paradnogo pod'ezda" and "Komu na Rusi zhit' khorosho" ("Who in Russia Can Live Well").

This insistence on a loss that can be neither compensated nor accepted is thus a radical demand for social intervention, one which finds expression in the repetition of the word "umer" ("he died"). To those who, like Kasyanovna, expect the lamenter's grief to pass after some period of time so that society can continue to function, such a repetition is out of the ordinary ("Vse eshche plachesh' nikak?" "Your tears haven't dried yet, I see?"). The one-time event of Savushka's death is for his mother transformed into an ongoing state. In her refusal to move past her loss, she refuses to be silenced as a "pauper for good" ("Kto prigolubit starukhu bezrodnuiu? Vsia obnischchala vkonets!") ("Who will take care of a lonesome old woman? Now I'm a pauper for good!"). What makes her demand social is the fact that others must hear her cry. The lament invites this kind of participation through its rhythmic repetition in the three-foot dactyl meter characteristic of stylized folklore.¹⁰ Yet, the peasant's individualistic use of the genre also emphasizes her unique circumstance. The cry, "he's dead!", thus combines opposite extremes: communal experience and individual voice. In the first instance, the repeated phrase could easily enter into the listener's memory and thus, perhaps, provoke their empathy. But the constant repeating of a phrase could also cause it to lose its semantic meaning, making of it mere sounds which are only half-consciously understood for their sense. In this way, the emotional purchase of the refrain *umer* would fail to make an impression for what it really means—much as the lyric hero does not respect, although he does discern, the ominous quality of the crows. He hears in their cries only "half-witted cawing and barbarous moans" ("glupoe karkan'e, dikie stony"). (Note the use of the word *ston* as a trope of peasant grief, mentioned above). Just as the lyric hero fails to empathize with Savushka's loss, he fails to comprehend the omen he nevertheless perceives and, further, to connect his own mood to these realities.

Both speakers are close to understanding their shared world in the same way they are close to actually interacting with each other, but the failure of these connections is the tension that drives the poem. It explores physical lassitude—a result of disconnection—in each of its speakers' parts. The peasant laments, "Po miru sil net khodit'" ("I've no strength to go begging for alms") and the lyric hero makes a similar complaint: "Slabo moe iznurennoe telo" ("My body is weak, all worse for the wear"). Although a contrast to the peasant's son, Savushka, who is characterized by strength ("Vzial by toporik, beda

10. Chukovskii uses "V derevne" as an example of the musicality of Nekrasov's verse, a point he makes in response to arguments (cf. Tynianov) about its primarily prosaic quality. According to Chukovskii, a favored "musical" rhythm is the three-foot dactylic rhythm that is used in this poem and foreshadows its continued and intensified usage by Nekrasov in the 1860s. In a close analysis of the poem, he argues that what begins as a narrative quickly turns to song (Chukovskii 10: 365, 548).

popravimaia" "He'd take the axe up, there's naught he can't mend"), both speakers have their own kind of power. In a world without Savushka (i.e., strength) there are at least people who mourn him. The poem's power thus lies precisely in grief—which includes admissions of weakness—as a means of self-expression in the face of society's inexorable forces, including both peasant unfreedom and elite disempowerment.

Thus the two speakers are brought closer together despite their mutual alienation, the peasant approaching lyricism in the individualism of her lament and the lyric hero approaching a sense of social totality in his contemplation of the crows. If neither speaker can have direct impact on their world through their words, as was the case in magical spells and related folkloric poetic genres, they can at least insist on the losses which they cannot seem to recuperate. In that insistence lies at least the possibility of solidarity as a contrast to sympathy, which the poem clearly denies. The lyric hero's failed attempt at "work," understood as poetry, is linked with his failure to respond to people in pain. A new form of lyric must be able to make this connection—but not by means of the old sentimentalist paradigm of sympathy: "Chto i zhalet', koli nechem pomoch'?" (Why pity her when there's no help for her grief?). "V derevne" makes its would-be sympathetic spectator into a cynic.¹¹ Whereas sentimentalists imagine that emotional connection is possible despite (and even by virtue of) social alienation, the poem suggests that no amount of feeling or imagination overcomes social distance. Thus, however hard-hearted the lyric hero may appear, he is at least candid. It is this pessimism that in fact brings him close to the peasant's insistence on tragedy as on circumstances which she alone lacks the power to change. While offering no solution, the tragic view supersedes the sentimentalist paradigm by insisting on losses as opposed to compensating for them.

From Mourning to Melancholia

Lyric hero and peasant lamenter are brought together in the relationship between mourning and melancholia, where the former refers to ritualistic grieving of traditional society, and the latter a more protracted, vaguer, and un-ritualized mood of malaise which is a version of grief more appropriate to modern society as itself de-ritualized. The peasant lamenter's shift from mourning, as a means of moving on from grief, to melancholia, as a perpetual state that is fixed in the moment of loss which has become pervasive, contributes to the poem's emphasis on constricted space. We have no indication of a wider arc of time in which grief will be resolved. In mourning, the person who is lost seems to the mourner to have contained the world's meaning ("Tak opostylel mne svet!" "How the world's grown sick and gray!"), and

11. See Kirill Zubkov in this cluster on Nekrasov's sensitivity to peasant idealization as criticized by Pavel Annenkov and others.

without this person, life becomes at least momentarily meaningless, but this moment should eventually pass. Only in melancholia does the sense of meaninglessness continue past a prescribed mourning period and lose touch with the specific event that had caused grief to transform into a more diffuse ennui.

Despite producing weakness (“Slabo moe iznurennoe telo” “Po miru sil net khodit”), melancholia is given a radical edge in its very fixation on loss. For in every detail that the peasant narrates in her lament, she returns to the moment of loss, thus forcing her listeners to do the same: “ruka-to zheleznaia [...] umer, boleznaiia [...] beda popravimaia, umer, rodimaia” (“with arms strong as iron [...] he’s dead, my grieving one [...] there’s naught he can’t mend [...] he’s dead, my dear friend”). This story does not progress, but circles around a constitutive loss that remains at its core.

While the lyric hero does not seem to be moved by grief over another’s loss, the transformation of the peasant’s mourning into melancholia generates a vague sadness which he does in fact share. Whereas Savushka’s mother creates from her concrete loss an ongoing melancholia, the lyric hero has no sense of the cause of his own ennui. Yet, it is precisely this cause that is suggested to him by the story he overhears: these are the losses he is obviously liable to encounter should he only listen for them. Savushka’s loss may not be his own, but there is deeper loss in a society whose peasant members (and not just them) can be as bereft as Savushka’s mother. Her grief is for herself as one enslaved, impoverished, and abandoned.

Against Morality

In contrast to poems like “Poet i grazhdanin,” which explore the individual’s (and the poet’s) responsibility to society, “V derevne” focuses on social rather than moral relationships and thus only indirectly invokes guilt. The question “who killed Savushka?” (as a version of “who is to blame?”) is therefore not the main question that it asks. In modeling an alternative to sentimentalism, “V derevne” suggests that it is not up to the individual to resolve concretely existing social antagonisms. What brings the distinct classes together is not a feeling; they are already structurally related, as the poem’s two-part structure clearly shows.

We might imagine that, if the lyric hero were to produce a lament in direct response to the peasant’s, he would focus on his own moral responsibility, much like the confessions of Nekrasov’s other lyric heroes in, for example, “Rodina” (“Homeland”). This lyric hero speaks of the countryside as the site of his guilt: “Gde inogda byval pomeschikom i ia; / Gde ot dushi moei dovremenno rastlennoi, / Tak rano otletel pokoi blagoslovennyi” (“Where I too was once a landowner; / Where from a soul corrupted before its time / Blessed peace quickly departed”). Rather than acknowledging moral responsibility on the speaker’s part, “V derevne” attempts to comprehend society as a whole—within its very divisions.

The peasant undermines folk tradition, with her individual pain breaking through the norms of the lament; the lyric hero undermines sentimentalism, with his lassitude prohibiting conventional expressions of pity. In this intensification of individual feelings and individual situations, the *limits* of the individual are brought to bear. It is because of these limits that we can begin to see beyond the singular world of each speaker. Individually, the speakers make no direct attempt to broaden their perspective beyond themselves. Such a broadening is left implicit in the poem itself, where a nearby peasant speaker shows how one such as the lyric hero may absorb another person's overheard words even as he seems to dismiss them. "V derevne" creates an expectation for true community in its dialogic structure, but, like its aggrieved speakers, insists on the gaps and the losses that constitute the social world in which they actually live.

Conclusion

By depicting in its two-speaker structure fractured social relations, "V derevne" also shows how individuality takes on a tragic form. Speakers define their own limits and the whole emerges as a sphere beyond their grasp. This inaccessible whole remains, however, the root cause of their grief—one whose expression has transformed from ritualized mourning into a modern melancholia. "V derevne" acknowledges a shared social tragedy which its own lyric hero cannot acknowledge and thus works toward the creation of a social lyricism built around the peasant's lament as unapologetically aggrieved and in need of listeners and the lyric hero who likewise insists on his own weakness.

Both peasant and lyric hero intimate their connection to each other in various ways, the peasant through the dialogic nature of her address and the lyric hero in his reaction to the lament. Both speakers nevertheless resist their interconnectedness by focusing on themselves. The poetic as well as social ineffectualness typical of the tragic pathos in Nekrasov's poetry is not, however, the poem's final word. The peasant and even the lyric hero grieve and complain to the point that such a stance becomes a form of poetic action. The peasant insists on her particular loss as a cry that has no end, while the lyric hero offers no easy resolution, leaving readers with the malaise that he and the peasant share. Their melancholia demands attention rather than resolution: we have no relief from the refrain, "he's dead" and are held in this uncomfortable place.

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 ABSTRACT

This paper argues that Nikolai Nekrasov's "V derevne" explores the limits of the Romantic view of lyricism as a socially isolated endeavor and attempts instead to use the lyric form to express social relationships. It contends that the poem works to conceptualize a social whole in which peasant and non-peasant are directly connected. Tragedy emerges as the mode of this connection: the lyric hero of the poem's first monologue and the lamenting peasant in the poem's second part each turn inward to bemoan circumstances which they feel they cannot change, including, in the case of the lyric hero, their own individual moods. This is the essence of Nekrasov's tragic pathos. As a folkloric omen, the poem's central image of gathering crows introduces a supernatural element to the poem which, rather than distinguishing a space separate from socio-economic realities, renders what might otherwise be considered natural an intentional effect. The poem's allusions through the crow omen to supernatural forces points to the actual social forces that structure the poem's world. The mysteriousness of these forces is thematized as a shared alienation, which is experienced even by the peasant in her presumably collective sphere as her mourning becomes a more modern sense of melancholia. Representing a collective experience of shared isolation, the poem attempts to embody the social totality which no single individual can grasp, in this way drawing on tragedy to offer a new form of lyric which does not ignore social divisions but rather expresses them.

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