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SOLOMIYA KRUSHELNYTSKA: BETWEEN HISTORY AND MYTH

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The name of the world-renowned Ukrainian *soprano*, Solomiya Krushelnytska, occupies a stable and symbolically charged place in Ukrainian cultural memory. Music critics' publications, television and radio programs, street names, numerous musical events, and museum exhibitions create the effect of Krushelnytska's presence within the contemporary cultural imagination, sustaining her 'visibility' across art, stage, and literature, urban space, and institutional narratives. Within public discourse, she is most frequently described as a 'legendary' singer.

The combination of permanent *visibility* and the rhetoric of *legend* has contributed to the mythologization of Krushelnytska's image, gradually transforming it from a *historical figure* into a *cultural hero* within the Ukrainian symbolic space.

Alongside numerous musicological studies devoted to her artistry, her persona has been repeatedly reinterpreted in literature and theatre. Among such representations are Oleksandr Balabko's novel *A Kimono for Butterfly: From the Life of Solomiya Krushelnytska*, [1] the memoiristic narrative by Andi Semotiuk *Solomiya: Star of the Golden Age of Opera* [3], and Olena Lazovych's theatrical work *Solomiya: Pages from the Life of Solomiya Krushelnytska* (Teatr na Pechersku, Kyiv).

Particular attention should be given to musical works that construct her image through music itself. These cases create a complex epistemological situation of knowing '*music through music*,'[4] in which biography is mediated by musical language.

For many opera lovers, Krushelnytska's name remains inseparable from Giacomo Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. Although she performed numerous major Italian roles, *Cio-Cio-San* became central to her artistic myth. After the unsuccessful premiere at *La Scala* in 1904, Puccini revised the opera and invited Krushelnytska to perform the leading role in Brescia.

Krushelnytska's triumphant performance in *Madama Butterfly* is preserved in cultural memory through archival recordings, reviews, and biographies. Her pivotal role in the opera's revival is highlighted by museums, theatrical exhibitions, and musicological research. The *Solomiya*

Krushelnytska Musical Memorial Museum in Lviv exhibits materials related to this performance. Annual memorial concerts and festivals honor her contribution to world opera, particularly her decisive role in transforming *Madama Butterfly* into an operatic masterpiece. The artistic poetization of Krushelnytska's persona has contributed not only to the mythologization of her figure but also of her *voice*.

The voice of Solomiya Krushelnytska is often described as a unique phenomenon in the world of opera. It combined power, technical perfection, and emotional depth, allowing her to take a prominent place among the greatest opera singers of her time. Critics and contemporaries highlighted several key aspects in their descriptions of her voice:

- *Range and Technical Mastery*: Her voice spanned a wide range, encompassing both lyrical and dramatic styles. She was famous for her ability to perform both soprano and mezzo-soprano roles with equal ease. Critics admired her ability to transition from tender, lyrical notes to dramatic climaxes.

- *Timbre and Expressiveness*: One of the most striking characteristics of her voice was its rich, warm, and resonant timbre. She could convey the finest shades of emotion, making every performance profoundly deep and emotionally saturated. Her voice was noted for its purity and nobility of sound.

- *Musical Sensitivity*: Beyond technical perfection, Krushelnytska was distinguished by extraordinary musical intuition and interpretative skill. She possessed the ability to penetrate the essence of every role, providing them with depth and drama. Her talent for interpreting complex musical works fascinated audiences and earned high praise from music critics.

- *Star Status in Society*: Critics from Italy, France, Argentina, and other countries called her voice "divine," "unique," and "majestic." For instance, after her performances in Milan, she was compared to an "unreachable goddess of the stage," while the Argentine press wrote that her voice "embraces the hearts of listeners, stirring the deepest feelings" [1]. "S. Krushelnytska is such a complex phenomenon that people do not even realize what impresses them most when they listen to her or look at her" [2].

Gradually, within the cultural space, the singer's voice transformed into her '*alter ego*,' acquiring a "separate" or "additional" life of its own.

Ultimately, over time, the figure of Solomiya Krushelnytska has acquired the clear traits of a *cultural hero* [3] within Ukrainian cultural memory – as a character (in fiction) who is linked to a specific musical text (the role of Cio-Cio-San) and who possesses superhuman, supernatural qualities (the voice).

The further evolution of Krushelnytska's mythologized image in Ukrainian culture eventually raised the question of how to embody her sound world. The challenge of "how to convey her primary, divine quality" – her voice – became the most vulnerable area for intermedia artistic solutions. Most often, authors choose the simplest and shortest path: citing rare archival audio recordings of Krushelnytska's voice.

A unique and somewhat paradoxical interpretation of the singer's image was Myroslav Skoryk's ballet *The Return of Butterfly*, with a libretto by Valeriya Vrublevska.

However, a particularly revealing case is the cinematic portrayal of Solomiya Krushelnytska, which involves a conscious directorial construction of her sonic image and the formation of a cinematic vocal portrait.

In Oleg Fialko's adaptation of Valeriya Vrublevska's novel *The Return of Butterfly* [1], the dramatic role of Krushelnytska was performed by actress Olena Safonova, while the singing voice was provided by Gizela Tsyypola. The separation of corporeal presence and vocal embodiment produces a specific hybrid form, a "*film-opera*": a cinematic narrative structured by operatic principles of vocal centrality.

The film reconstructs key stages of Krushelnytska's career, culminating in her triumph as Cio-Cio-San. Yet its narrative logic extends beyond biographical representation. The protagonist is framed primarily through artistic vocation and self-discipline, while the sphere of personal intimacy remains markedly restrained. As a result, the figure of the singer is monumentalized: she appears less as a psychologically individualized character and more as a symbol of professional destiny.

Created within the late Soviet cultural context, the film reflects a recognizable pattern of heroization. Devotion to art, perseverance, and the renunciation of private life form the ethical axis of the narrative. This structuring of the plot introduces a clear ideological inflection, aligning the myth of the prima donna with broader narratives of sacrifice and service.

Particularly significant is the film's *orthoepic* dimension, which carries artistic, dramaturgical, and ideological meaning. Due to Soviet language policy, *The Return of Butterfly* exists in two versions – Russian and Ukrainian. Within the Ukrainian version, however, an additional linguistic opposition becomes central: *Italian – Ukrainian*. This contrast operates not merely as a marker of setting but as a structural device within the film's sound design.

Dramaturgically, three layers of *orthoepy* may be distinguished: everyday speech, operatic pronunciation, and stylized folk intonation. Despite their functional differences, these layers converge toward a unified academic-literary norm. Such convergence produces a form of orthoepic

universalism that mirrors the protagonist's trajectory from struggle to artistic glory. The discipline of pronunciation parallels the discipline of vocation; sound itself becomes a vehicle of ideological meaning.

Thus, the film does not simply depict Krushelnyska's biography. It actively participates in consolidating her cultural myth. Through the hybrid structure of the *film-opera*, the mediated separation of body and voice, and the Italian–Ukrainian orthoepic opposition, cinema becomes a site where historical memory is transformed into symbolic narrative.

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