

# “Freer Than the Wind”: The Earliest Train Song in Context

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The purpose of this article is to contextualize the world’s oldest art song directly associated with the railway—*Travelling Song* by the Russian composer Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857). The composer’s personal circumstances surrounding the creation of the song are examined, along with the historical and technical background of that era. While railways have always been associated with technological progress, new solutions for high-power engines, and the accuracy of arrival and departure timetables, the poetic and romantic side of train travel and railways in general has not yet received sufficient academic coverage. This essay is intended to partially fill this gap, though it rather outlines directions for possible development of its topical range. Each of the suggested reference points and stories is in itself an example of how the arts reflected the inspiration that cutting-edge technological advances of the period were exerting on artists, musicians, and other creative individuals.

*Keywords:* railroad music, railway song, train song, Mikhail Glinka, *Travelling Song*

## Introduction

This essay explores the sociocultural context and personal underpinnings of the world’s earliest art song whose musical composition and lyrics are directly linked to a train: *Travelling Song* by the Russian composer Mikhail Glinka (1804-1857). The terminological and methodological basis of this study, technological details of the development of the railway in the early decades of its inception, as well as several striking examples of works in various genres of art, music, and fiction that show how the railway has inspired creative individuals over the decades, precede and follow the secret romantic story of the composer, which caused him to create that very song, which turned out to be the first song associated with the perception of the railway in the early years of its appearance. It was the fact that none of the few references to the “first train song” take into account the context of its creation (other than the recognition that a new technological product might have impressed the people who saw it) that prompted the author to finally write this essay.

Richard Taruskin, an American musicologist specializing, in particular, in Russian music, stated that “the reader who wants to know Glinka in depth must still come to grips with the Russian language” (Taruskin, 1975, p. 151). It is not surprising that one of the most reliable and thorough sources mentions, as the context for Glinka’s *Travelling Song*, only the “experiencing various personal problems, not least the disintegration of his marriage” (Winterson, 2021, p. 119). Being a native Russian speaker, the author of these lines knows how to use these skills when the object of his research is of Russian origin. Therefore, this is a wonderful opportunity and a suitable context to tell here the story of the secret love of the father of Russian music and the daughter of the muse of the father of Russian poetry, a direct consequence of which was the creation of the song cycle *A Farewell to Saint Petersburg*, one of the parts of which is that very song.

In line with the latest trends in ethnomusicology, that is, comparative musicology based on a variety of ethnographic sources, which is currently seeking new paths and niches, one such direction is the study of the place of music in technological progress and the reflection of this progress in musical culture. A notable example of this approach is a recent book, which examines various aspects of music heard and played in Detroit, including in the city's automobile factories (Slobin, 2019). This branch of object-oriented musicology has not yet been given a name, so it will be introduced here later.

I will begin by defining the existing terminology that will be used and identifying its place among relevant niches and areas of research.

### **Terminology and Method**

Throughout the history of mankind and its culture, and even more so in the era of technological progress and industrial production, people have had a desire to travel. Travel was always common to people of certain professions, such as merchants, even much before the age of commercial and passenger moving vehicles, but the era of travel notes as a literary genre, the creation of paintings depicting stormy seas and shipwrecks, as well as music directly related to aviation and railways, arose only with the invention of the corresponding types of transport. Music related to cars and motorcycles occupies a special niche in this milieu, since these vehicles are intended for private use and are largely privately owned. There are, in addition, local preferences. For example, country style is closely associated with Harley-Davidson riding (no reference needed—ask any biker!).

What categories of terminology are used in the academic literature to describe this range of topics? First of all, what branches of the humanities, art history, musicology, and theatre/film studies are related to the topics of travel and transport? Surprisingly, there is neither a single terminology nor common disciplinary names for the branches of research that explore such artistic phenomena as films about the sinking of the Titanic or plane crashes, the corresponding paintings of J. M. W. Turner and I. Aivazovsky and other artefacts of this corpus. However, you can come across several terms such as “marinist art”, “travel notes”, “railroad music”, and “train songs”. There is at least one scholarly article that addresses travel as a performance art (Adler, 1989), as well as several sources devoted to classifying and listing songs associated with trains and railroads. To date, Winterson's monograph is the most comprehensive source on train songs throughout history (Winterson, 2021). Salisbury examines songs written by fettlers from the island working on the railways of North Queensland, Australia. The focus is on how these songs reflect their identity as a community in the diaspora (Salisbury, 2009). Elkoshi addresses train noise as music, comparing the interpretations of both music students and non-musicians (Elkoshi, 2021).

While the various subject branches of musicology are given names such as ethnomusicology or organology (study of musical instruments), the field that explores the relationship between music, travel, and moving vehicles may be called “musicology of travel and transportation” or “travel-and-transport musicology”. Yet, since this essay is intended for a fairly broad academic audience within the realm of philosophy, anthropology, and cultural studies, no use of existing or invented *special* disciplinary terminology (whether technical, musicological, or otherwise) will be further made.

The study is carried out using methods generally accepted in humanities and cultural studies, including working with print and online sources, as well as some techniques of creative writing associated with the art-based research method.

### The Railroad as a Source of Inspiration

Although the oldest known constructed trackways date back to the 4th Millennium BC (Bunning, n.d.), and pre-steam railway with wooden rails and horse-drawn traffic started as early as the mid-16th century, the history of the railroad dates back to little more than two centuries. Since the inception of steam railway transport, it immediately began to receive an artistic response both from artists and even more from poets and musicians who felt the need to express their impressions of this technical miracle. Among the most striking examples of such reflection is the painting by J. M. W. Turner, *Rain, Steam and Speed—The Great Western Railway*, created in 1844 (Figure 1).



Figure 1. J. M. W. Turner. *Rain, Steam and Speed—The Great Western Railway* (1844).  
The National Gallery, London, UK.

While the average speed of European trains by the 1850s was around 50 mph, the fastest British train was topping 80 mph, or nearly 130 km/h (Fleming, 2012). This could impress everyone! Turner, already trained to paint natural disasters, fires, and shipwrecks, was ready to capture a steam locomotive cutting through the wall of rain and racing across the dam. Those who have not seen this work in the National Gallery can only guess what it looks like (and what it looked like right after it was created, when it has not yet darkened), since multiple reproductions on the Internet tend to either darken it or recolor (or, rather, restore?) it into a hotter palette, making it somewhat similar to another painting by the artist, *The Burning of the Houses of Parliament*, created a decade earlier. The version reproduced here closely matches the photograph of this work as it appears on the gallery wall, next to other paintings.

Perhaps the earliest work of fiction about trains, and considered by many to be the best work on the subject, is Charles Dickens' *Mugby Junction* (1866), three loosely connected stories featuring mysterious freight trains “covered with palls and gliding on like vast weird funerals”, a satirical description of a railroad canteen, and a ghost story about a train crash, considered the best ever ghost story. Another high-profile railway novel is *La Bête Humaine* (The Human Beast) by Émile Zola (1890), “a hysterical tale of psychosis and sexual jealousy”, about which one critic said: “Too many trains and too many crimes”. The novel tells the story of people living or

working along the line between Paris and Le Havre. It also includes descriptions of places such as Saint-Lazare station at night: the lanterns along the platform, which look like “smoky stars”, and a number of other living associations (Martin, 2014).

By the 1920s, trains on the continent were already reaching speeds one and a half times faster than their British counterparts in Turner’s time. This continued to inspire the younger generation of creative intelligentsia. In 1923, French composer Arthur Honegger composed the *mouvement symphonique* (symphonic movement), a six-minute piece for orchestra called *Pacific 231*, which, as the composer describes in the score, is intended to convey to the listener “the quiet breathing of the machine at rest, its effort in starting, then the gathering speed, the progress from mood to mood, as a 300-ton train hurtles through the dark night, racing 120 miles an hour” (Varineau, 2017). Honegger was known as a railway enthusiast: “I have always loved locomotives passionately. For me, they are living creatures and I love them as others love women or horses” (from *Classicalexburns.com*).

Trains as a means of transportation and travel by rail have received an enthusiastic artistic response not only and not so much in instrumental music, but rather in songs, and from the very beginning of this transport, since the days of steam engines. Whilst the earliest mentioned piece of music associated with the railroad is A. Clifton’s *Carrollton March* for brass band performed on July 4, 1828 at the opening ceremony of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (USA), most sources, including the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, point to Glinka’s *Travelling Song* (1840) as “the first ever railway song”. Winterson provides a fascinating survey of railway-related music ever written. The range of genres varies from early unaccompanied songs or songs without a surviving melody, written even few years before Glinka’s *Travelling Song* (which she considers “the first *art* song to be written about the railway” (Winterson, 2021, p. 120, my italics) to music for railway works bands, choirs, and musical societies.

But even in this exhaustively deep book, the history of the context that prompted Glinka to write his *Travelling Song* is not revealed. Only the opening dates of the St. Petersburg–Tsarskoe Selo railway line and assumptions about whether Glinka travelled on the train are indicated.

### **Railroad in Russian Creative Arts**

In Russia, the railway as a technical idea, a construction industry, an institution, and a source of inspiration for creative individuals, occupied a very special, important, and even symbolic place and meaning. Among the last of the major countries to end feudalism and abolish serfdom in 1861, Russia found itself with former peasants flocking to factories in the big cities and other construction projects, with no experience other than that of peasants, and, on the other hand, talented inventors were already filling the offices of the Tsarist government with amazing technical ideas that required implementation by accessible means.

One of the first and still basic works of art related to the railroad in Russia was Nikolai Nekrasov’s poem *The Railway* (1864). The work, based on a real context of the construction of the Nikolayevskaya (now Saint Petersburg–Moscow) Railroad between 1843 and 1851, was a metaphorical and highly critical look at early capitalism in Russia, which used the cheap labor of yesterday’s peasants. Considered a century later to be one of the most powerful anti-capitalist statements in Russian literature of the 19th century, this work, published in the almanac *Sovremennik* in 1865, led to the closure of the magazine that dared to publish this dangerous, in the opinion of the Tsarist secret police, literary work (Zhdanov, 1971; Chukovsky, 2005). Another work, closely related both in theme and in view of the subject, but in the field of fine art, was Konstantin Savitsky’s painting *Repair Work on the Railway* (1874). The work depicts the hard labor of railway workers and, standing on a par

with Ilya Repin’s famous painting *Barge Hauliers on the Volga*, created a year earlier, represents the pinnacle of works of Russian critical realism.

The Soviet period of Russian history (1917-1991) was particularly fruitful for railroad imagery in music. Since Lenin’s famous 1920 slogan: “Communism is Soviet power plus electrification of the whole country” (Lenin, 1967, p. 30), industrialization and railways became a symbol of the country’s new perspective. However, to think, following the popular belief, that the ideological dictate of the Communist Party over literature, art, and music from the very beginning of Soviet power left little freedom for creativity is to oversimplify the subject. “Until the mid 1930s, the creative atmosphere of Soviet music was both innovative and daring” (Rosenblatt, 2020, p. 80). Thus, in 1926, composer Vladimir Deshevov, who was working then on music for a theatrical performance called *Rails* in the genre of industrial melodrama, in accordance with the spirit of the time, used real industrial sounds in the score along with instruments of a symphony orchestra. All that remains from this experiment is a laconic but unusually expressive piano miniature with the same name. French composer Darius Milhaud, who heard it when he was in the USSR in 1926, praised him later in the French press as a “genius” and “extremely original” (according to Last.fm).

Beginning in the mid-1930s, Russian railway music, especially songs, was already imbued with ideology. However, as enthusiasm had accompanied railway music since its inception, the enthusiasm for building a new society based on equal opportunity—as was believed at the time—led to the railway songs of the 1930s, including images of the locomotive rushing to a bright future, that is, to communism. By the end of the 1940s, a previously untapped social segment was touched upon—riding a train and looking out the window at the endless fields, villages, and factories with the feeling that “everything around is mine”, like a person’s involvement in public life. Such is the *Travel Song* by Sergey Vasilyev/Isaak Dunayevsky (1949), which earned love and popularity among the Soviet people.

A completely different take on the train is *Rasseyannyj* [Absent-minded] (1930), the most popular poem by the Russian-Soviet poet Samuil Marshak, which tells the story of a man who boarded an uncoupled carriage, fell asleep and, looking out the window once in a while, asked the people on the platform what stop it was, realizing at the end, after a day of travel, he “came back” to Leningrad. It was one of the most famous and beloved children’s poems. This poem is known to English readers as *The Absentminded Fellow* thanks to Richard Pevar’s translation into English (1999), with “Leningrad” replaced by “London”. But let’s go back to the 19th century...

The following section is an attempt to unravel the mystery of Mikhail Glinka’s secret love story, as it is fragmentarily presented in several sources that have recently become publicly available. Most facts rely on human memory, which may be inaccurate; others follow the rules of self-censorship left over from the country’s communist past, where anything that contradicts the image of a good family man in relation to a public person (even from the distant past) must be omitted or avoided in discussions. However, as fiction teaches us, life is sometimes more complex than the rules we come up with. The story presented below is based on sources of a biographical and journalistic nature (Ivanova, 2021; Tyrlova, 2006); in the genre of historical novella (Kazovskij, 2017); as well as various information for a wide audience, all in Russian, which, despite some discrepancies on sensitive issues, are all based on archival materials and personal correspondence of the composer. The story is written using features of a creative writing style, as well as imagery characteristic of the time being told, something that is well practiced in works related to art-based research.

### Behind the Scenes of *Travelling Song*

#### I

Glinka’s ancestors came from the Polish gentry. The boy was born in the Russian village of Novospasskoye, Smolensk Province, in 1804 and was the second of eleven children whose parents married for love. He grew up sickly and was short in stature, but from childhood, he was distinguished by his special abilities for playing the piano and improvising. After a trip to Italy and a close acquaintance with Western classical music of that time, Glinka, who was then offered a position in the St. Petersburg Court Chapel, and who dreamed of writing an opera in the Italian style, but on a Russian plot, returned to St. Petersburg and temporarily settled with relatives, where he met 19-year-old Maria, to whom he soon proposed and married in 1835, at 31 years old. This marriage was not happy: The couple had no children, and four years after the wedding, in 1839, Glinka learned what all of St. Petersburg had been talking about for a long time: His wife was almost openly cheating on him. After a stormy showdown, the composer packed his things and left home, and soon after filed for divorce.

Ekaterina Kern was born in 1818 in the family of Yermolay Kern, a military personnel, and his wife Anna. Yermolay was 35 years older than his wife, and she led a very turbulent life, leaving her husband early and entering into relationships with various members of the nobility, including the poet Alexander Pushkin, whose muse she was for several years and for whom the poet dedicated his famous poem *I Remember a Wonderful Moment*. There is some indirect evidence that Ekaterina may have been the daughter of Emperor Alexander I, who was among those who took a keen interest in the young general’s wife and then favored the family and bestowed generous monetary gifts on her. Yermolay Kern, though, considered Ekaterina his daughter. As Anna Kern divided her time and residence between different places and partners and, moreover, was giving birth and care to younger children from her lovers, Ekaterina (Figure 2) was in the care of either mother or father until she was enrolled into the Smolny Institute of Noble Maidens in St. Petersburg where, at one of the cultural events, she would meet Mikhail Glinka...



Figure 2. Anonymous. Ekaterina Kern, c. 1838 (Grayscale copy).  
Courtesy: Museum-Estate “Trigorskoye”, Pushkinskiye Gory, Russia.

## II

Having made friends with the poet and journalist Baron Anton Delvig and his wife, Anna Kern, moved into their apartment... The same company that went to parties with the famous poet Vasily Zhukovsky had fun at the Delvigs' apartment. They sang, danced, and played charades. In the summer, they went for walks outside the city, and Glinka accompanied them too. He developed a warm, purely friendly relationship with Anna. As a man, he could not excite her. One day, as if by chance, Glinka asked:

- I heard that Pushkin dedicated a lovely poem to you. Is this true?

After a pause, Kern nodded:

- It is true. Didn't you see in Delvig's *Northern Flowers*?
- I admit I missed it. Can you read it? Can't you?
- Why, I can.

And, slightly closing her eyes, she began: “I remember a wonderful moment...” He sat hunched over, fingers clasped, swaying to the beat. And when the poem was finished, he froze in shock. Finally, he said:

- What a miracle these lines are. That's how they ask for music. The woman smiled:
- Well, then write a romance, Mikhail Ivanovich.
- I need words. *Northern Flowers* cannot be found now. Don't want to dictate?

Wrinkling her nose, the beauty replied:

- Oh, not now. Listen: I'll give you the original. If you swear not to lose it.

Having fled to her room, she brought back a sheet of paper folded in four. Glinka turned around and saw Pushkin's sweeping handwriting.

- I will treasure it like the apple of my eye.

He did not sit down to work right away, hid the manuscript in a volume of French poetry, and then forgot about it, distracted by his marriage and a trip with his wife to Novospasskoye. He remembered the poem only four years later, when a meeting occurred in his life that stirred up his feelings. Mikhail Ivanovich remembered well that this happened on the third day of Easter 1839: He went to Smolny and on the way felt an incomprehensible “nervous irritation” and could not contain it. Arriving at his sister's, he walked back and forth from room to room. “There I saw E.K. for the first time. She did not look good; there was even something painful on her pale face. ... My gaze involuntarily stopped at her: her clear, expressive eyes, her unusually slender figure... and some special charm and dignity that spread throughout her person attracted me more and more. I found a way to talk to this sweet girl”, this is how the composer recalled this in one of his letters.

Not without difficulty remembering where he put the piece of paper with the poem given to him by Anna Kern, Glinka soon wrote his famous romance *I Remember a Wonderful Moment*, inspired by the daughter of the one to whom the poem was dedicated. He also secretly dedicated to Ekaterina another of his compositions, created in the same year, *Valse-Fantasie*, but he could not do this openly for fear of compromising his beloved, and did it in a veiled manner, dedicating *Valse-Fantasie* to D. Stuneev, his sister Maria's husband.

## III

Glinka and Ekaterina have the idea to go abroad together. Further events developed as follows: Judging by Glinka's letter to Shirkov, with whom the composer was especially close in those years, E. Kern became pregnant. In an August letter (1840), Glinka wrote to a friend: “You know that a significant amount was required for liberation”. In those years, the word *liberation* meant abortion. It is quite natural that Ekaterina's pregnancy was

kept in the deepest secrecy. And in a letter to his mother: “You donated 7,000 to a well-known cause during a difficult last year—if you had not done this, and she had died, I would not have survived her”. And a remarkable confession: “I’m not afraid of children, I want them. I cannot look at other people’s children without tears of tenderness”. These words indicate that the “liberation” was carried out contrary to the feelings of Glinka and, most likely, his beloved.

At this time, Glinka became very close to the famous writers, the Kukolnik brothers. The apartment in Fonarny Lane where they lived was a place where creative people of St. Petersburg loved to gather. So often visiting the bohemian environment of the Kukolniks, Mikhail Ivanovich at the end of May 1840 decided to compose a series of romances based on the poems of the middle brother Nestor, which were later combined into a vocal cycle called *A Farewell to Saint Petersburg*. While composing vocal miniatures—including *Travelling Song* with its clickety-clack piano accompaniment imitating the voices of a train moving over tracks, and the metaphor “freer than the wind”<sup>1</sup> in the song’s lyrics, clearly hinting at the composer’s desire to be free to build a new chapter in his life—Glinka did not connect them with a single plot. The cycle rather reflected the feelings of a man longing to leave the city where he had endured so much suffering. Work on the collection went very successfully, and 12 miniatures, in close creative collaboration with the author of the poetic texts, were completed by August 9 of the same year.

After her father’s death in 1841 and recovering from a difficult abortion, Ekaterina Kern returned to St. Petersburg in 1842. She meets with Glinka again, but the former trepidation of the relationship, at least on the composer’s part, is gone: Now they are more like just friends. Back at the end of 1940, in the same letter to Shirokov, Glinka writes about Ekaterina: “My ideal has collapsed. The properties of which I could not even suspect for a long time, were expressed so sharply on several occasions that I thank Providence for their timely discovery”. What is behind these words? Perhaps E. Kern did not tolerate pregnancy well, or the forced abortion had a serious impact on her state of mind. Or, perhaps, exhausted by separation and the uncertainty of her position, she could not control herself and broke down.

The first orchestration of the *Valse-Fantasia* dates back to the same period, which was made by the then-famous conductor J. Hermann and was often performed at summer concerts at the Pavlovsky Railway Station. The waltz began to be called Melancholic, or Pavlovian. The score made by the director of the Pavlovsk concerts has not survived. It may have remained with Hermann, who probably treasured both the work itself and his work as an arranger.

#### IV

The divorce drags on endlessly, and despite irrefutable evidence of the woman’s infidelity (a secret wedding with her lover, which became obvious), bribery of officials leads to the initiation of a lawsuit against Glinka, who allegedly bribed a drunken priest to obtain evidence against his unfaithful wife. As a result, the divorce is postponed, and Glinka is forced to sign a written undertaking not to leave. Perhaps it was during this period of crisis for him that Glinka became addicted to alcohol: This is clearly evidenced by P. Karatygin’s life drawing of 1842, later transferred to a woodcut, depicting the composer, poet Nestor Kukolnik, and artist Karl Bryullov with glasses of wine in their hands, and two bottles are waiting on the piano (Figure 3).

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<sup>1</sup> This is a free translation offered by several sources, including such an authoritative one as *The Guardian* (Bateman, 2016) and therefore perceived as generally accepted. However, the original Russian text (“И быстрее, шибче воли поезд мчится в чистом поле”) translates more accurately as “And faster than the speed of will, the train rushes through the open field”—A.R.

In June 1844, after the consistory refused his petition for divorce, but having received the right to leave St. Petersburg, Glinka stopped by E. Kern in a travelling carriage to say goodbye to her. He never saw her again.



Figure 3. K. Bryullov, M. Glinka, and N. Kukulnik. Engraving by I. Matyushin, 1889, from life drawing by P. Karatygin (1842), as appears in *Ruskiye deyateli v portretakh* (1889, p. 60).

Glinka received the news of his divorce in 1846, while in Madrid. His foreign passport was expiring, and he had to go to Russia. He lived in Novospasskoe for a long time and again wanted to move to Paris, but the events of 1848 (revolution, barricades) detained him in Warsaw. Returning to Russia, he lived with his sister, Lyudmila Shestakova, in Tsarskoe Selo and wrote memoirs. Here in 1854, he learned about E. Kern’s marriage. Saddened, he fell ill. Having seemingly recovered, in the spring of 1856, he fled to Berlin, where he made the latest version of the orchestration of the *Valse-Fantasie*, in which it has since been performed. Glinka dedicated the final version of *Valse-Fantasie* to his friend K. Bulgakov, writing: “This music will remind you of the days of love and youth”.

The composer died on February 3, 1857, from complications after a severe cold: either a heart attack or “enlargement of the liver” (that is, cirrhosis), as indicated in the archives of St. Petersburg, the city where he was reburied sometime after the funeral in Weimar.

## V

Ekaterina waited for him for 10 years, from 1844 to 1854. Sometimes he wrote to her from abroad, more often from Madrid, where he especially liked and where he composed the immortal *Jota Aragonesa*, hired a Spanish servant, and learned Spanish. But there were no more words about love, much less about marriage, even after the news of his divorce.

She was already turning 36, and had long given up on her possible family life, when lawyer Mikhail Shokalsky proposed to her. He liked Ekaterina, and although her soul remained indifferent to him, life might not

have given her another chance. Two of their common children died soon after birth, but then a third appeared, a son named Yuly, and he survived.

After 12 years of marriage, Ekaterina was widowed. She moved from St. Petersburg to Trigor'skoye: Her cousin Maria Osipova was the boss there. Nearby, in Mikhailovskoye, Pushkin's son, Grigory Alexandrovich, lived. He treated Yulik with love (after all, the grandson of Anna Kern herself, the “genius of pure beauty”!), took him hunting with him, taught him to garden, set him on the right path, and together they rode horseback.

Ekaterina returned with her son to St. Petersburg, sent him first to the gymnasium, and soon to the Naval Cadet Corps, while she herself worked as a governess in rich families. Yuly Shokalsky became one of the greatest geographers of his time. He introduces the concept of a single World Ocean and convincingly shows this unity in the main scientific work of his life, the book *Oceanography*, published in 1917. In 1919, Shokalsky was directly involved in the introduction of time zones in the USSR. Thus, the son and grandson of the two women, who inspired the two men to write about “wonderful moments”, himself had a global mindset, thinking in terms of the global ocean and time zones.

Ekaterina Kern-Shokalskaya, who lived in her son's apartment for the rest of her life, lived to be 86 years old and died in 1904, the year of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Glinka, whom she apparently loved until the end of her days.

### Conclusions and Final Thoughts

Comparing publicly available information in English with the above story, the question arises as to what may have actually prompted Mikhail Glinka to compose one of his most famous works, namely, *Travelling Song*. Was the opening of Russia's first railway line a sufficient reason to write a song, the words of which were then adapted by the poet Nestor Kukolnik? Or was it rather the composer's desire to escape from himself and especially from the city in which he was known as a deceived husband and a careless lover? None of these reasons might seem self-sufficient, but their combination gave rise to such beautiful works of musical art as *Travelling Song* and *Valse-Fantasia*. Be that as it may, the secret love story of the father of Russian music for the daughter of the muse of the father of Russian poetry not only teaches us that the world has always been a small place (long before the age of social networks), but also gives us a deeper understanding of how the most beautiful works of art were created.

Another point worth emphasizing here is that railways have always had a profound impact not only on the world of transport, but also on society as a whole, influencing many aspects of our daily lives, both in the past and to this day. Even now, at the age of flights and cars, the railway symbolizes something that is more of a social live than of a private experience. Thus, contemporary British poet Peter Burgham, in his 2023 book *Connections: Railway Verses*, takes a rather unconventional look at the influence of the railways on British society, past and present.

As I come to the end of this essay, I want to touch on one of the most impressive and original references to the railroad in literary fiction. It was Leo Tolstoy who drove his heroine to commit suicide by throwing herself under a train. The name Anna Karenina has long become a household name. However, the image of this unfortunate woman was not reflected in the arts, with the exception of cinema, until 2017, when a group of rail fans—photographers and their models—from the Russian city of Yekaterinburg went for a photo shoot to an abandoned locomotive cemetery located in the vicinity of another city, Perm, travelling about 400 kilometers on

private cars, while some parts of the “road” to this forsaken place were... railroad tracks (according to e1.ru, September 6, 2017). As a result of this shoot, a variety of railway and old locomotive-related photos, part of which in a steampunk style, were taken.

As against railway fans, the object of whose works is usually a locomotive as a central figure, themes of the shoot were rather other stories that are associated in Russian literature, historical epics, and songs with the trains. Such were scenes from the Russian Civil War (1918-1920), the Great Patriotic War (part of World War II from the Russian perspective, 1941-1945), and... various images of Anna Karenina waiting for a train (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Anna Karenina, waiting for a train. Staged photo: Victor Ch, 2017. Public domain.

The material was almost ready when I discovered that Los Angeles, where I was dividing my time between the libraries of two universities during the summer months of 2024, is home to one of the world’s largest model railroad museums (1:87 scale, designated H0)—the Pasadena Model Railroad Museum. It was once located in the city of Pasadena, CA, but eventually moved to Los Angeles, retaining the same name. I would not say that I would have written this paper in a somewhat different way if I had visited this museum before the first draft was ready, but the exhibition of this amazing contribution to the memorialization of technological progress in its mechanical era is worthy of not only respect and praise, but gives you a clear understanding of why people for nearly two centuries have been so sensitive and impressed by this evidence of the power of the human mind and mastery over the forces of nature.

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