

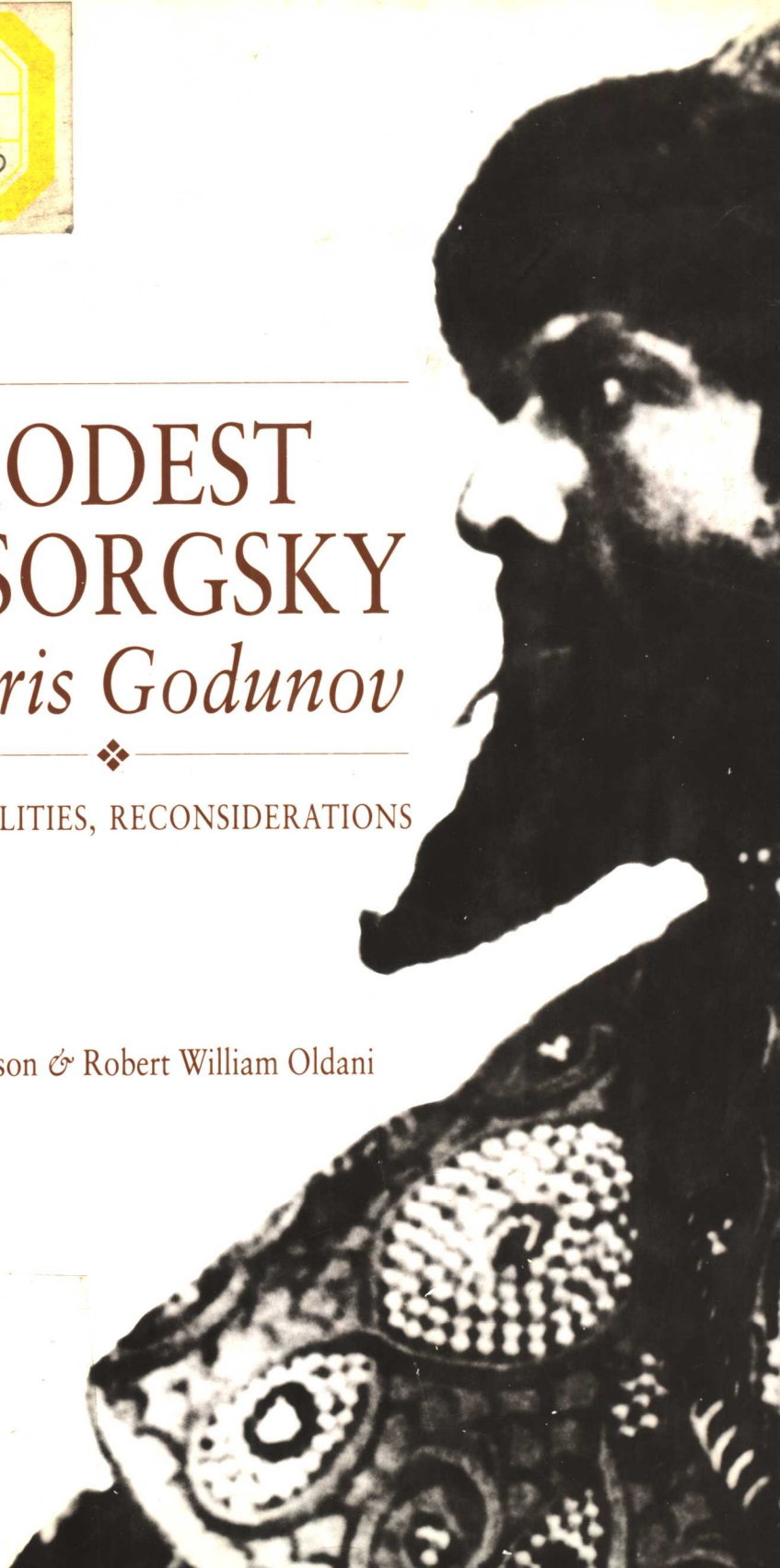


MODEST MUSORGSKY & *Boris Godunov*

MYTHS, REALITIES, RECONSIDERATIONS

Caryl Emerson & Robert William Oldani

Godunov
(Musky)



MODEST MUSORGSKY AND *BORIS GODUNOV*

MYTHS, REALITIES, RECONSIDERATIONS

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov* is the greatest Russian opera – and surely one of the most controversial. With its troubled textual history, its multiple versions (some by very gifted hands), the problematic personality of its author and its half-century of subjugation to Soviet ideology, *Boris* and its creator have generated an array of legends unusual even for Russia, a culture traditionally possessed by its art. One of the goals of the present volume is to challenge some of these entrenched perspectives, which in our view misrepresent Musorgsky's musical creativity, his relations with other composers (both Russian and West European), and his dealings with St. Petersburg's musical establishment. To our deep satisfaction, Russian scholars currently examining Musorgsky's life and manuscripts for the first Academy Edition of his works – projected to begin in the early 1990s with the 1869 version of *Boris* – appear to be engaged in a similar rethinking.

Part I of the book provides basic literacy for examining the opera: its historical material, its most immediate literary sources, the operatic plot, the work's genesis, and an account of the famous premieres, both East and West. Part II attempts to reflect the rhythms of *Boris*'s reception and performance from the composer's day to the present by stitching together in separate narratives both relevant censorship decrees and classic documents of criticism. Part III is interpretation: the poetics and dynamics of the libretto, an analysis of the opera's musical structure, and a speculation on the potential of the "Boris Tale" in Russia's post-Communist future. The book concludes with a discography and select bibliography. Many of the illustrations in this volume are reproduced from copies of early and rare photographs, whose quality is less than optimally clear. Cambridge University Press has made every effort to present them with a clarity that approaches that of the originals.

Although our work is collaborative in that we each have examined every sentence, primary responsibility for the various chapters rests with one or the other of us according to our professional interests and experience. Thus,

Preface and acknowledgments

Caryl Emerson is largely responsible for Chapters 1, 2, 8, and 10; Robert William Oldani for Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6, and 9. Both authors answer for the selection, translation, and headnotes in Chapter 7. Ellipses in our source texts in chapters 6 and 7 are presented as they occur in the text. Ellipses that we have introduced are enclosed within square brackets.

Use by scholars of many different systems of transliteration from the Cyrillic alphabet has produced many variant spellings in the literature concerning *Boris Godunov* published outside Russia. One finds, among others, Modeste and Modest, Petrovitch and Petrovich, Moussorgsky, Mussorgski, and Musorgsky, and Godounoff, Godounov, and Godunov. In the interest of consistency, we have chosen to standardize spellings (following *The New Grove Dictionary*) in quotations incorporated in the text and in the textual part of endnotes. In bibliographic citations we have reproduced transliterated names and words exactly as they appear in the source. In our own transliterations, we have attempted to approximate English spelling in the text but have adhered to the conventions of Cambridge University Press in both endnotes and bibliography. Thus, for example, the forms Tchaikovsky, Bessel, and Alexander appear in the text, whereas Chaykovsky, Bessel', and Aleksandr appear in the documentation.

Unless otherwise indicated, we give pre-revolutionary dates according to the Julian calendar (Old Style), which remained in use in Russia until January of 1918. The Julian calendar lagged twelve days behind the Gregorian (New Style) in the nineteenth century and thirteen days behind in the twentieth. We cite documents prepared in the West, where the Gregorian calendar was in force, according to the conventional dual system in which the Julian date is given first, the Gregorian second, thus 4/16 September 1885.

We wish to thank our colleagues and friends – foremost among them Roland John Wiley and Richard Taruskin – who have aided our work at various stages of its gestation. Without their help our lot would have been much more difficult, and we can think of no happier way to acknowledge our debt than to paraphrase Musorgsky's own dedication of his opera: to all those who, with good advice and sympathetic concern, enabled us to realize the present work, we offer our heartfelt thanks. We thank as well the editors and publishers of the following publications for permission to draw upon and freely incorporate, at various places throughout the book, material that originally appeared in their publications: *19th-Century Music*, *Liberal Arts Review* and its successor *Liberal and Fine Arts Review*, *The Opera Quarterly*, The English National Opera's opera guide series, UMI Research Press's series in Russian music, Gordon and Breach's series in musicology, and Indiana University Press. We acknowledge and deeply appreciate the work of Jeffrey

Preface and acknowledgments

Nevin, who prepared the music examples using computer software. Caryl Emerson would like to thank her long-standing Moscow friend and passionate advocate for Russian music, Mikhail Feldshtein, who has been on "Boris Watch" for materials, performances, and new publications for longer than either of them can remember. Robert Oldani acknowledges with pleasure the support of the Graduate College, the College of Fine Arts, the School of Music, and the department of Humanities at Arizona State University; each of these units, either by financial or release-time support, has contributed to the successful completion of this book.

The sources of our illustrations are as follows: Frontispiece and no. 4 from Modest Petrovich Musorgsky, *Boris Godunov* (holograph full score), St. Petersburg, Central Music Library of the Kirov Theater MS 3695; nos. 1, 2 from A. Orlova, *Trudy i dni M. P. Musorgskogo: Letopis' zhizhni i tvorchestva* (Moscow: Gos. Muz. Izd., 1963); nos. 3, 9, 16 from R. Shirinyan, *M. P. Musorgsky Al'bom* (Moscow: "Muzyka," 1987); nos. 5, 6, 7 from A. I. Sharleman', *"Boris Godunov": Risunki dekoratsy k tragedii A. S. Pushkina* (St. Petersburg: Izd. M. A. Shishkova, 1870); nos. 8, 10, 12-15 from R. Sarkisyan, *F. I. Shalyapin Al'bom* (Moscow: "Muzyka," 1986); and no. 11 from A. Gozenpud, *Russky operny teatr XIX veka, 1873-1889* (Leningrad: "Muzyka," 1973).

CONTENTS

<i>List of illustrations</i>	page ix
<i>List of tables</i>	x
<i>Preface and acknowledgments</i>	xi
Part I Background	
1 Tsar Boris in history	3
2 Musorgsky's literary sources, Karamzin and Pushkin	12
3 Narrative and musical synopsis of the opera	35
4 History of the composition, rejection, revision, and acceptance of <i>Boris Godunov</i>	67
5 A tale of two productions – St. Petersburg (1874–1882), Paris (1908)	91
Part II Entr'acte	
6 <i>Boris</i> and the censor: documents	127
7 The opera through the years: selected texts in criticism	134
Part III Interpretation	
8 The <i>Boris</i> libretto as a formal, literary, and historical problem	183
9 The music	225
10 <i>Boris Godunov</i> during the jubilee decade: the 1980s and beyond	278
<i>Notes</i>	289
<i>Discography</i>	317
<i>Select bibliography</i>	324
<i>Index</i>	333

ILLUSTRATIONS

First page of the composer's holograph full score of
Boris Godunov

frontispiece

1	Osip Petrov as Varlaam and Pavel Dyuzhikov as Misail, St. Petersburg, 1874	<i>page 47</i>
2	Ivan Melnikov as Boris, St. Petersburg, 1874	50
3	Ivan Melnikov as Boris, St. Petersburg, 1874	51
4	A page from the composer's holograph full score of Act II	95
5	Set design for "The Call of Boris to the Throne," St. Petersburg, 1874	98
6	Set design for the Inn scene, St. Petersburg, 1874	99
7	Set design for the <i>Terem</i> scene, St. Petersburg, 1874	99
8	Feodor Chaliapin as Boris, Mamontov Private Opera, Moscow, 1898	111
9	S. F. Selyuk-Roznatovskaya as Marina, Mamontov Private Opera, Moscow, 1898	112
10	Boris's exit from the Uspensky Cathedral after his coronation	116
11	Yulia Platonova as Marina and O. O. Palechek as Rangoni, St. Petersburg, 1874	215
12	Feodor Chaliapin as Boris, St. Petersburg, 1911	261
13	Feodor Chaliapin as Boris, St. Petersburg, 1911	261
14	Feodor Chaliapin as Boris, St. Petersburg, 1911	262
15	Feodor Chaliapin as Boris, St. Petersburg, 1911	262
16	Modest Petrovich Musorgsky, 1876	277

TABLES

3.1 Comparison of Musorgsky's versions of <i>Boris Godunov</i>	page 63
5.1 Comparison of Musorgsky's, Rimsky's, and Diaghilev's <i>Boris</i>	118

PART I
BACKGROUND

I

TSAR BORIS IN HISTORY

The rise and fall of Boris Godunov is one of Russia's most popular plots – and to a certain extent, Western Europe's as well. Over the past three hundred years, this story has inspired dozens of dramas, musical settings, poetic sketches, and historical novels. The Boris Tale received its most distinguished treatment, however, in the Russian nineteenth century. In the fifty years between 1824 and 1874, it was cast in three different genres by three of the nation's greatest masters: as history in the sentimentalist mode by Russia's first popular historian, Nikolay Karamzin; as drama by Russia's greatest poet, Alexander Pushkin; and as opera by Russia's greatest nationalist composer, Modest Musorgsky.

Historian, dramatist, and musician each linked his version of the tale with a larger ambition: the crafting of a specifically Russian or national genre within their respective fields. Since the time of Peter the Great, high culture in Russia had been marked by massive borrowings and imitations from Western Europe, which included authoritative models in such fields as German historiography, French tragedy, and Italian opera. To be sure, our three artists were not the first to seek independence from imported models (in opera, Glinka's *Life for the Tsar* and *Ruslan and Lyudmila* preceded Musorgsky by two decades); nor were their creative products exempt from the beneficial influence of Western masterpieces that continued to flood the capitals (the influence of Verdi on Musorgsky is a good case in point).¹ But by the 1820s in literature and the 1860s in opera, a culturally specific Russian "language" and style had matured. Thus each of these retellings of the Boris Tale stimulated major controversy. Authors, advocates, and detractors alike deployed these new genre-models polemically, as propaganda for "Russian-ness" and as ammunition against dominant borrowed European models. In each case, then, the familiar story of Boris Godunov became the vehicle for purposely national forms of art.

Musorgsky's contribution to the cultural evolution of this story is the topic of Chapters 2 and 8. In this opening chapter we attempt something both

Background

simpler and, paradoxically, more problematic. By the twentieth century, Musorgsky's version of the tale had eclipsed all others; indeed, for most audiences in the West, Boris Godunov is a story that has always been sung. So popular, in fact, did Boris Godunov become in art – and specifically in operatic art – that only much later and with considerable difficulty was his image reconstituted on the basis of historical evidence. This evidence often contradicted the biography that had been canonized in literature and music. But these later “adjustments” to the story, for all their factual documentation, did not liberate Godunov – as they did not Richard III – from his traditional “aestheticized” plot. Who was the historical Boris? We present below the basic outlines of his story and his reign as Soviet and Western historians now tend to reconstruct them.²

In 1580, Tsar Ivan IV, the Terrible, celebrated a double wedding. He took for himself as his seventh wife Maria Nagaya, and he married his younger son, Feodor, to Irina Godunova. Irina was not of noble rank. She and her brother Boris, orphaned as young children, came from an old Russian boyar (or serving) family and had been raised at the Muscovite court as wards of the Tsar. In this way they became intimates of the royal family at a time when princely lineage was viewed as potentially seditious and even as a liability. It was safer to be low-born; during the most internally disruptive years of Ivan's long reign (1533–84), the old families were systematically decimated.

The Tsarevich Feodor was gentle and devout, but physically backward and feeble-minded. By marrying him into the Godunov clan, which had a record of loyal service to the crown, Tsar Ivan was assured that his younger son would have the guidance and protection of a strong, able family. Feodor was clearly not fit to rule. For matters of state and succession – where intellectual and physical vigor was primary – Ivan IV relied on his elder son and heir, the Tsarevich Ivan. The young man had been trained in statecraft and gave promise of being a strong leader.

During the next year and a half, two events occurred in the royal family that history would later deem fateful. One day, enraged over what he took to be an insubordinate comment, Ivan the Terrible savagely struck his son Ivan and his son's pregnant wife; the wife suffered a miscarriage and Tsarevich Ivan died. Some months later, Tsaritsa Maria gave birth to a son, Dmitry. As the offspring of a union not blessed by the Russian Orthodox Church (canonical Church law permitted only three marriages), the infant Dmitry's claim to succession was tenuous. When Tsar Ivan died in 1584, therefore, the dynasty became suddenly and dangerously insecure. Of the two claimants to the throne, one was the feeble-minded and still childless Feodor, the other was his two-year-old, quasi-legitimate half-brother.

Feodor was duly crowned, although no one expected him to rule. The new Tsar exiled the toddler Dmitry together with his mother and her brothers – in effect the whole ambitious Nagoy clan – to the appanage city of Uglich north of Moscow, where they maintained a minor court and retinue. Feodor then turned over the practical side of his reign to his wife's gifted brother. For fourteen years, Boris Godunov (addressed in official documents as "the great sovereign's Brother-in-Law, Ruler of the Russian Lands") openly presided over the country, with great energy and success. He made peace with Lithuania, stabilized Russia's northern front that had so drained the resources of Ivan IV, and kept in check the ruinous Tartar raids from the south. Through a mix of skill and guile, he manipulated the reluctant hierarchy of the Eastern Orthodox Church into granting Russia its own patriarch. Moscow's diplomatic ties with Europe (and especially with England) were strengthened, and organized state support was at last offered to the fur traders and Cossacks who had begun to colonize Siberia. To be sure, along with these successes there were also setbacks. The chronic demand for a reliable labor force and a stable tax base in the countryside led the government gradually to restrict the right of peasant movement from landlord to landlord, and also to extend and protect the landlord's right of forceable return. Thus the administrative machinery of serfdom was first laid down during Godunov's term of governance – measures that won Boris much support among the urban classes and rural gentry, although they were deeply unpopular with the peasants. There was in addition the constant threat of treason from the old princely families. An untitled boyar as the power behind the throne was a standing rebuke and a reminder of the princes' disenfranchised state. The Mstislavsky and Shuisky clans in particular found common cause with Russian merchants and churchmen, who railed against restrictions on monastic properties and against privileges that Boris – following Ivan IV's precedent – continued to grant to cunning and infidel foreign traders, primarily the English. Plots proliferated. In 1586, those two clans spearheaded a drive to divorce the Tsaritsa Irina from Tsar Feodor on grounds of barrenness, and thus to rid themselves of the Brother-in-Law as well. Feodor was mortified at the insult (Irina was not infertile; she had suffered several miscarriages) and instructed Boris to take proper measures. Several princes were forcibly tonsured and exiled. Each of these challenges to Boris's authority, in fact, served further to consolidate his power.

Half-way through Feodor's reign, in 1591, the Tsar's nine-year-old half-brother Dmitry was found one May day in the Uglich palace courtyard with his throat slit. The boy was an epileptic; he had been playing knife-toss with friends when a fit came upon him. The Nagoy clan, long chafing at their

Background

exile and now desperate over the loss of the "heir," clamored that the death was in fact a murder. The town was roused to vengeance, and in the resulting drunken turmoil half a dozen Muscovite officials were killed. When news of these events reached Moscow, Boris appointed an official commission to investigate, headed by one of his craftiest opponents at court, Prince Vasily Shuisky. The commission's report concluded that Dmitry's death had indeed been self-inflicted during an attack of the "falling illness," and was thus an act of God.

A year later (1592) Irina Godunova bore Tsar Feodor a daughter, but the child died in infancy. When Feodor himself died in 1598, therefore, the Rurikovid dynasty – which had ruled Russia since the ninth century – came to an end. On his deathbed Feodor passed the crown to his wife. But the widowed Irina, prostrate with grief and guilt for not having produced an heir, entered a convent. Moscow was aflame with rumor and warring factions. After a nervous interregnum, which involved much delicate maneuvering, manipulation of easily aroused crowds, and strategic shows of reluctance from the Brother-in-Law, a *zemsky sobor* or "Assembly of the Land" elected Boris Tsar. Understandably apprehensive (an elected tsar was unprecedented in Russian history), Boris required that elaborate loyalty oaths be taken to himself and his family, and set in place an efficient security apparatus.

The first three years of Tsar Boris's reign were relatively prosperous and peaceful. Although constantly the target of plots, attempted poisonings and witchcraft against his person (a charge taken very seriously in the sixteenth century), Boris never responded with a reign of terror. In fact, the demotion and terms of exile suffered by his enemies were, for the times, remarkably benign. As a sixteenth-century Muscovite, the Tsar believed deeply in sorcery and miracles. But he was also keenly – and for Russia, uncommonly – interested in Western medicine, book-printing, and education; he even dreamed of founding a Russian university on the European model. As a preliminary step, he sent young men of noble birth abroad to study (none, however, returned). Contemporaries praised Tsar Boris for his hard work, statesmanship, royal demeanor, and generosity. Russia seemed to have regained the mandate of God that Ivan the Terrible had so sorely tested.

In 1601, this initial good fortune began to turn. A series of natural disasters, which included massive spring floods and a killing frost in August, ruined the harvests throughout Russia. In the Muscovy of those times, crop failure was hardly rare. But in a normal cycle, bad years alternated with good ones, permitting the poor peasant to sustain losses and not be ruined. In the early seventeenth century, all of Europe experienced a general cooling of the climate for several consecutive years. This spelled disaster for a northern

country as vast and underdeveloped as Russia, with her already marginal growing season, subsistence agriculture, primitive sowing, harvesting and storage techniques, and rudimentary network of food distribution. By 1603, Russian villages had literally nothing to sow. What is more, the great famine of 1601-03 was the first major famine to occur in conjunction with enserfment – that is, after the Decree of 1597 annulling the traditional right of any debt-free peasant to leave his master on St. George's Day. Starvation was coupled with immobility. In some contemporary accounts it is written that one-third of the population of Muscovy perished from starvation or disease; in any event, the suffering was pervasive and immense.

This socioeconomic crisis coincided precisely with Boris's tenure on the throne. He reacted generously, opening state coffers of grain to the needy and severely punishing hoarders. But these measures only encouraged a disastrous emigration of starving peasants to the cities and furthered civil collapse. At a loss to explain events and always prone to apocalyptic scenarios, many Russians held their "Father Tsar" personally responsible; for inscrutable but momentous reasons, he had lost the mandate to rule. Boris, by now plagued with various chronic illnesses and desperate to make sense out of events, increased surveillance against many princely and boyar families (especially the Romanovs), accusing them of witchcraft and treason. Many were banished to Siberia or forced into monasteries. As peasant unrest continued to rise, the Tsar reinforced his internal police with a network of informers. Brutal tortures, rare since Ivan the Terrible's reign, again began to become the norm.

In the midst of this domestic crisis, sometime in the early spring of 1602, a young man turned up in Poland claiming to be the Tsarevich Dmitry. According to the story he circulated, he had been miraculously saved from the attempt on his life in Uglich in 1591. This Pretender, promptly identified by the Muscovite authorities as the runaway monk Grigory Otrepiev, apparently had been at one time in the service of the Romanovs; quite possibly he had been groomed by them for this risky but tantalizing mission. The young man was not without talent. A veteran of several monasteries, where his skill at transcribing books and composing sacred canons had attracted some attention, Grigory even served as deacon for a year at the prestigious Monastery of the Miracle. It was there he first expressed, to a horrified fellow monk, his ambition to become "Tsar in Moscow."

Once across the border, the would-be Pretender had some difficulty finding a patron. But historical and political circumstances came to his aid. The southern reaches of Muscovy were on the brink of civil war; the countryside was demoralized, the Don Cossacks in open revolt. Poland, a rival country always ready to exploit Russian weakness and experienced in using

pretenders to unseat neighboring regimes, produced enough ambitious parties willing to make of this Pretender a pretext for war. In support of this massive fiction, both territorial and religious ambitions came into play. Ever since the time of the Teutonic Knights, the Catholic Church had entertained the possibility of "winning the East back into the Roman fold," and Poland-Lithuania was now a robust, expansionist state. Neither the Polish King Sigismund III nor the Pope was bold or foolhardy enough to back the Pretender's claims too openly with large, well-funded troops. Both did give their unofficial encouragement, however, and the False Dmitry was formally converted to the Catholic faith. He then affianced himself to Marina Mniszech, beautiful daughter of a wealthy Polish magnate, by promising to his ambitious bride the Muscovite crown and to her father large tracts of Russian territory, including the rich Western Russian cities of Novgorod, Pskov, and Smolensk. On both sides of the border, the Pretender found himself riding a wave of anti-Godunov sentiment.

In 1604, the False Dmitry crossed over into Muscovy with a motley invasion crew of 2,000 mercenaries and Polish adventurers. So small a force would have presented little danger were it not for the Don Cossack army, which spontaneously joined the effort, and the numerous bands of desperately impoverished peasants eager for some change of luck. The whole southern frontier soon rose in inchoate revolt. The ideological standard of this alliance, it must be said, defied any logical description: the purported son of Ivan the Terrible, returning to the Orthodox throne of his fathers by challenging the godless "usurper" Tsar Boris, was marching under the banner of infidel Poles and Jesuits. But in the confusion this indiscrepancy was apparently masked or disregarded – for things went badly for the Pretender from the start.

Late in 1604, the forces of Tsar Boris, vastly superior in arms and men, defeated the invaders and forced them to flee to Putivl. Inexplicably, Boris's commanders did not follow up on their victory. Minimal arms supplies from the Poles and a continual influx of impoverished peasants and rebel Cossacks enabled the False Dmitry to hold out. In January 1605, however, rebel forces were again decisively defeated; again they were not destroyed. Whether for reasons of treason, exhaustion, interrupted supply lines, or simply anger at increasingly brutal punishment for "collaboration," Moscow's armies procrastinated once again. The fortified town of Kromy, headquarters of the rebellious Don Cossacks, survived six months under siege against government troops. Having survived the winter, the False Dmitry was unexpectedly joined by a full-scale peasant uprising in the spring. At this time, key leaders in Boris's own military staff began to defect.