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Sodener Str. 45a, D-61462 Königstein im Taunus
info@tschaikowsky-gesellschaft.de / www.tschaikowsky-gesellschaft.de

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Čajkovskij and *Grand opéra*.
Considering the Dramaturgy of *The Opričnik* and *The Maid of Orléans*

Emanuele Bonomi

In nineteenth-century Russian opera, the status of librettist played but a minor role. The exceptional example of Catherine II, Empress of Russia from 1762 to 1796 and a prolific dramatic writer – her literary legacy includes nine operas,¹ fourteen comedies, seven short plays, and a large variety of dramatic writings –, was to remain rather unique. In the following decades, librettists were usually no more than subservient collaborators or second-, third-rate poets, widely differing from their high-crafted European professional equivalents, such as Eugène Scribe or Felice Romani. In addition, many libretti had a complicated history, resulting from puzzling contributions by different hands. Owing to this unfavourable situation, Russian composers generally reacted in two opposing ways. Sometimes they wrote entire portions of music without text and subsequently asked their librettists to add words to the vocal lines, as it was the case with Glinka's *Žizn' za carja* ('A life for the Tsar', 1836) or Serov's *Judif* ('Judith', 1863). Sometimes they decided to write their own libretti, like Dargomyžskij and his self-declared followers of the so-called 'The Five', freely adapting the dramatic plot of the literary source or better preserving its original verses.

From this point of view, Čajkovskij represented a remarkable example, since he worked with a number of librettists – including major playwrights (Ostrovskij), minor poets (Sologub, Polonskij), dramaturges (Špažinskij) and consummate old hands (Šilovskij, Burenin, his brother Modest) –, personally interfering in the writing of his operatic texts. The composer's literary contributions have not raised much interest so far, but they give clear evidence of Čajkovskij's genuine skill in the most up-to-date dramatic techniques. This essay aims to concentrate on *Opričnik* ('The Opričnik', 1874) and *Orleanskaja deva* ('The Maid of Orléans', 1881), the only operas for which he was the sole author of the words, in order to show how both were consciously modelled on Scribe's most influential historical *grands opéras*. Although soon ignored as an artistic creation, the complete failure of *Voevoda* ('The Voyevoda', 1869), Čajkovskij's first operatic effort, deserves some attention, so we will start our survey from the beginning.

I

Čajkovskij's operatic career seemed to be born under the best auspices. Still a student at Sankt Petersburg Conservatory, he had fallen in love with Aleksandr Ostrovskij's *Groza* ('The Storm', 1860), the most successful drama by Russia's most famous playwright. Cherishing a lyrical treatment of the subject, the composer had written an overture as a composition essay in Anton Rubištejn's class, but then found to his great disappointment that the comedy had already been promised to his second-rate colleague Vladimir

¹ Among these *Fevėj* ('Fevey', 1786) by Vasilij Paškevič, *Novgorodskij bogatyr' Boeslaevič* ('The Novgorod Hero Boyeslayevich', 1786) by Evstignej Fomin, *Gore-Bogatyr' Kosometovič* ('The Unfortunate Hero Kosometovich', 1787) by Vicente Martín y Soler, *Načal'noe upravlenie Olega* ('The Early Reign of Oleg', 1790) by Paškevič together with Carlo Cannobio and Giuseppe Sarti and *Fedul s det'mi* ('Fedul and his Children', 1791) by Fomin together with Martín y Soler.

Kašperov.² Yet Čajkovskij was still confident that Ostrovskij would write a libretto for him.³ His hopes were not vain. After he had moved to Moscow, the composer soon established friendly relations with the dramatist, who suggested his recent drama of historical-fantastic character, *Voevoda, ili Son na Volge* ('The Voevoda, or A Volga Dream', 1865), as substitute, offering him to provide the libretto personally free of charge. Their collaboration was, however, of short duration and ended with the mutual decision to break off the relation. Both had clear responsibilities, but Čajkovskij was so persistent in his requests that a failure was the only possible consequence. On the one hand, the composer lost Ostrovskij's verses to the first act of the opera and the first scene in the second, thus forcing the playwright to write them once again. On the other, he interfered increasingly in the overall dramaturgy, so that Ostrovskij's enthusiasm for the project soon cooled,⁴ leaving Čajkovskij the thankless task to conceive the rest of the text on his own.

The result was an insipid, highly static work, which did not completely satisfy its author. Moreover, its performance was postponed several times, and when the opera finally reached the stage at the Moscow Bol'shoj Theatre on 11 February 1869 it suffered from such a miserable production that the composer withdrew the full score and destroyed it some years later. In a well-known letter to Nadežda fon Mekk of 27 November / 9 December 1879 Čajkovskij explained the reasons of his failure:

Voevoda is beyond question a very bad opera. [...] In the first place, the subject was not appropriate, since it lacked any dramatic interest and a real plot development. Moreover, the opera was written too quickly and without much thought, so that its forms turned out non-operatic and not suitable for the stage. I simply wrote music to a given text without bearing clearly in mind the huge difference between operatic and symphonic style. When a composer writes an opera, he should always keep the stage in mind and remember that the theatre requires not only melody and harmony, but *action* too. He must not abuse the concentration of the theatregoer who came not only to listen, but also to watch. Finally, the operatic style should be in keeping with the decorative style in painting: *simple, clear* and picturesque. [...] In *Voevoda* I concerned myself only with the meticulous working-out of the musical themes, and completely forgot the scene and all its needs. [...] For *opera* one has the advantage that one can speak the musical language of the *masses*. The very fact that an opera can be played, say, forty times during the season gives it an advantage over a symphony, which will be performed once in ten years!!! [...] But I digressed from the critique of *Voevoda*. Its third fault: a too massive orchestra and its predominance over the voices. These are all shortcomings arising from inexperience. It is necessary to go through a number of failed attempts in order to achieve the greatest possible degree of success, and I am not at all ashamed of my operatic failures. They have served as useful lessons and instructions for me.⁵

Among these experiences, the habit of writing portions of text became a lasting acquisition for Čajkovskij. After his stormy collaboration with Ostrovskij and a couple of ill-fated

² Kašperov's work was premiered at the Moscow Bol'shoj Theatre on 11 November 1867 with a confident success, but when it was staged at the Saint Petersburg Mariinsky Theatre some months later it proved a complete failure. Only several decades later Ostrovskij's masterpiece received a worthy operatic treatment with Janáček's *Kát'a Kabanová* (1922).

³ "I really hope that Ostrovskij himself will write a libretto for me based on his *Voevoda*." ČPSS V, 113-114 (letter to his brother Anatolij, 20 November 1866). For a detailed analysis of the tormented relationship between Čajkovskij and Ostrovskij see Sergej Popov, *A. N. Ostrovskij i P. I. Čajkovskij in: Ostrovskij i russkie kompozitory. Pis'ma*, eds. Evgenija Kolosova and Vladimir Filippov, Moscow-Leningrad 1937, 141-171. All Russian translations are mine.

⁴ In the meantime Ostrovskij had also embarked upon a more prestigious project with Serov, Russia's most acclaimed composer. Both had agreed upon a libretto based on the former's comedy *Don't Live as You Like* (*Ne tak živi, kak chočetsja*, 1854), but the collaboration came to a sudden end due to their conflicting dramatic views.

⁵ Letter to Nadežda fon Mekk, 27 November / 9 December 1879; see ČM 2 – 1935, 267-268.

projects – the beloved *Undina*, composed with great enthusiasm in 1869 to an old-fashioned libretto originally written by Vladimir Sologub for Aleksandr L'vov in 1848,⁶ and *Mandragora*, a fantastic tale of flowers suggested by the botanist Sergej Račinskij⁷ – the composer decided to take part directly in the preparation of his libretti. For his next opera his target could not be more challenging, since he adapted a historical tragedy banned for decades by the censor.

II

Opričnik (1874) was Čajkovskij's third operatic title in chronological order but the first to achieve repertory status. As a literary source he chose a vigorous costume play by Ivan Lažečnikov (1792-1869) about a young member of the *opričnina*, Ivan the Terrible's cruel personal retinue. The dramatist had been a real celebrity during the 1830-1840s and his highly praised *Poslednij Novik* ('The Last Novik', 1833), *Ledjanov dom* ('The Ice House', 1835) and *Basurman* ('The Infidel', 1838) had laid the foundations for the Russian historical novel.⁸ Though completed in 1842, the drama was published more than fifteen years later,⁹ while the censor prevented its stage performance for another decade – its *première* took finally place on the stage of the Aleksandriinskij Theatre in Saint Petersburg on 27 September 1867. The principal reason for this long delay had been the violent, provocative portrayal of the Tsar, although Ivan's character, like the finely accurate historical *milieu*, served only as a background for a romantic tragedy of ill-fated lovers. For Čajkovskij, who had probably attended a Moscow performance of the play¹⁰ and had just finished off his overture *Romeo i Džul'etta*, this represented with all evidence no deficiency, permitting him to disregard the political intrigue in order to concentrate on his most beloved theme: a star-crossed love affair that ends tragically.

Having decided to write his own libretto, Čajkovskij could clearly set up both the structural and the dramatic principles to start from. His first decisions were of course motivated by practical reasons. In order to avoid the huge problems with the censor Lažečnikov's play had incurred, he completely removed Ivan's figure from the opera, transferring his functions to the *opričnik* Vjaz'minskij. Then he drastically reduced the number of characters, focusing the entire plot on a linear succession of striking events. Finally – and most crucially in the overall dramaturgical economy –, Čajkovskij did not only cut out many of the original verses, as is usual in operatic conventions, but even radically altered the order of the play's scenes, according to specific needs of musical construction. Referring to the composer's own libretto, Laroš wrote that:

Lažečnikov's *Opričnik* contains an almost completed opera in itself. Reduce the number of characters, shorten the dialogues and cut all the scenes which burden the course of the action, and you will have a libretto which stands out by its proportions, variety, and deep and unremitting interest. The main deficiency of the libretto of *Opričnik* consists exactly in the fact that it did not keep itself faithful enough to the original drama, since the librettist felt the need to modify Lažečnikov's scenario with

⁶ The full score was submitted on 18 August 1869 to the Imperial Committee, but the opera was never produced.

⁷ The only remaining number of the work is a *Chorus of Flowers and Insects* (ČW 441, TH 71).

⁸ The other Russian champion of Walter Scott was Michail Zagoskin (1789-1852), whose novel *Jurij Miloslavskij, or the Russians in 1612* (1829) met with huge success and was later set to music by Napravnik in his *Nižgorodcy* ('The Citizens of Nižnij Novgorod', 1868).

⁹ Ivan Lažečnikov, *Opričnik. Tragedija v 5-ti dejstvijach v stichach* ('The Opričnik: A Tragedy in Five Acts in Verses'), St. Petersburg 1859.

¹⁰ In its first season the tragedy held the stage for 15 performances.

another one, newly created, in which both the architecture and the psychological likelihood of the literary source have gone lost.¹¹

Laroš was generally right in complaining that Čajkovskij's reduction lost the „psychological likelihood” of the literary source. Almost all the pseudo-historical *bytovyje* scenes, which formed the emotional heart of Lažečnikov's drama, were suppressed. Moreover, most of the characters are treated as two-dimensional figures: their role assignment follows faithfully the love triangle so typical of Romantic opera – “a tenor and a soprano want to make love, but are prevented from doing so by a baritone” paraphrasing George Bernard Shaw's famous epigram – and one looks in vain for profound psychological development. Nevertheless, in conciseness and dramatic effect the opera gained much.

Since Gerald Abraham's assertion, *Opričnik* has been defined summarily as „Meyerbeer translated into Russian”.¹² Indeed it bears clear similarities to some of his major works, as *Les Huguenots* or *Le Prophète*, both in the subject's choice – a crude drama presenting one ‘strong’ situation after another – and in its musical treatment – a number opera given a sense of cohesion by means of a few reminiscent themes. More crucially however, Čajkovskij's ‘translation’ affected the dramaturgical level.¹³ His new scenario owes a great debt to Scribe's structural methods, thus demonstrating not only the composer's perfect knowledge of the most up-to-date operatic trends, but also his outstanding ability in adapting a complex narrative plot in order to accomplish a well-minded dramatic strategy.

III

To begin with, Act 1 was Čajkovskij's own creation, but not an appropriate one. It consists for almost three-quarters of recycled material from *Voevoda*, for the composer tried hard to preserve as much music as he could of his earlier opera. In addition, he sometimes transferred even the original text, and to accommodate the new setting, characters and plot events had to be twisted. In Lažečnikov's tragedy the young lovers, Andrej and Natal'ja, are immediately given a nocturnal secret *rendez-vous* in a garden (Scenes 1-2). Then, in the remaining part of the act, set in Prince Žemčužnyj's palace, their parents are introduced. Natal'ja's father is portrayed as a greedy man, who promises his young daughter, without dowry, to his elder, weak suitor Mitkov. In contrast Andrej's mother, whose actions are guided by the unconditioned love for her son, emerges as a much more likable and sympathetic figure. In a high dramatic confrontation scene (Scene 10) with Žemčužnyj – which also provides the opportunity for the dramatist to explain how he has reduced the Morozovs to poverty by fraud – mother and son are brutally thrown out of their home. Finally, the act ends when the Prince summons her daughter to announce her marriage to Mitkov, but the young girl suddenly faints.

Almost none of Lažečnikov's text is to be found in Act 1 of the opera. With the exception of a few lines taken from the dialogue between Žemčužnyj and Mitkov in Scene

¹¹ German Laroš, *Opričnik*, in: *Muzykal'nyj Listok*, 21-22 (1873-74); Id., *Muzykal'naja chronika. 'Opričnik', opera v četyrech dejstvjach, sjužet zaimstvovan iz tragedii Lažečnikova, muzyka P. I. Čajkovskogo*, in: *Golos*, 17 April 1874; reprinted in: Id., *Sobranie muzykal'no-kritičeskich statej*, eds. Nikolaj Kaškin and Vasilij Jakovlev, 2 vols., Moscow 1913-1922, II/1, 107-123.

¹² See Gerald Abraham, *Slavonic and Romantic Music: Essays and Studies*, New York 1968, 130. Originally published in Gerald Abraham (ed.), *The Music of Tchaikovsky*, New York 1946, 136.

¹³ Cf. Richard Taruskin, *Russian Opera and Russian Historiography, ca. 1870*, in: *Russian and Soviet Music. Essays for Boris Schwarz*, ed. Malcolm Hamrick Brown, vol. 11 of *Russian Music Studies*, Ann Arbor 1984, 76-146: 86.

7 and from that between Andrej and Basmanov in Act 2, Scene 5, Čajkovskij's scenario is completely different and proceeds in the slow rhythm typical of *grand opéra*. In Scribe's historical *pièces* the opening act habitually prepares the audience for the actual drama – see for example the lengthy series of genre pieces that opens Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* –, so the composer intended it as a long *divertissement*. Even if not original and purely decorative, its music (the scene with Natal'ja, and her nurse and girlfriends) has a fascinating folk-like Russian flavour. Among the newly composed numbers, both Basmanov's and Natal'ja's ariosos reveal a clear Meyerbeerian influence. The young *opričnik* is given to a contralto and may be seen as a direct counterpart of the trouser role of Urbain, Marguerite de Valoise's page. On the other hand, the beautiful melodic phrase in G flat major that opens Natal'ja's arioso has often been connected to the slow section (in the same key) of the huge love duet in Act 4 of Meyerbeer's opera, when Raoul ecstatically sings "Tu l'as dit: oui tu m'aimes!"

Much of the criticism of *Opričnik* has blatantly condemned Čajkovskij for reusing material taken from *Voevoda*. Among his strictest accusers, his brother Modest was the first in complaining that:

[...] the violent intrusion of Ostrovskij's text into Lažečnikov's tragedy produced an alteration of the scenario and caused a marked weakening on the entire libretto. The plot became unclear, the characterization was completely destroyed, beginning with the sly and rapacious Žemčužnyj. When the curtain rises the composer-librettist has him talking congenially with Mitkov and there is little trace of that maliciousness and cruelty which explains Morozov's entrance into the *opričnina*.¹⁴

With regard to Andrej's characterization, even Laroš, a sincere supporter of the composer, found the music accompanying his first appearance inappropriate. Indeed the restless rhythmic figurations of the violins have a somewhat Rossinian derivation suggesting a 'comical' atmosphere not consistent with Andrej's tragic decision. If one looks deeper, however, the overall dramaturgy of Act 1 reveals Čajkovskij's firm dramatic sense. Its protracted lyricism and the predominance of purely decorative elements may be seen as a necessary counterweight to the unleashing of the impetuous plot development in the rest of the opera. Consequently, Natal'ja's song of the captured nightingale – taken from Act 2, Scene 2 of *Voevoda* and keeping Ostrovskij's original text – acquires vivid dramatic sense, for it expresses the tragedy's general context of a young woman denied her true love by the intervention of an older man. The oddness of the music associated with Andrej and the *opričniki* has been described as another touch of theatrical genius, for it would depict the hero's 'dissociated' state of mind when he joins his violent cohorts.¹⁵ But such an argument is hard to demonstrate at a dramatic level. Modest was totally right in considering that scene "against the central idea of the tragedy",¹⁶ because the audience doesn't gain a due sense of Andrej's hesitancy in joining Ivan's personal entourage. Moreover, its insipid musical language clashes with both the predominant Russian folk-based idiom of the genre pieces and the overall stylistic technique which relies highly on recurrent motives. Another indubitable point of weakness is represented by Žemčužnyj's figure. Much of Lažečnikov's Act 1 shows his subtle machinations against the Morozovs and in a powerful confrontation scene with his enemies he emerges as a real antagonist, but in Čajkovskij's opera his role as villain is cruelly reduced, for the character appears only twice (the remainder being a couple of irrelevant lines in Act 3). If the composer had lived long enough to subject the

¹⁴ Žizn'Č I, 389.

¹⁵ See in particular ZajaczkowskiO, 13-22:18.

¹⁶ Žizn'Č I, 389.

opera to a radical revision – as he wrote to the editor Bessel’ in November 1884¹⁷ –, one may be sure that he would have begun with its first act.

Having decided to remove all the ‘*opričniki*’ scenes from the opera – which shaped the historical background in Lažečnikov’s drama –, in Act 2 the composer combined material from the central corpus of the tragedy. Morozova’s pathetic monologue and the ensuing dramatic confrontation between mother and son (Act 2, Scenes 6-7) formed the whole first *tableau*, while Andrej’s fatal oath to the Tsar (Act 3, Scene 8) became the vigorous climax of the second. The decision to delay Morozova’s appearance on stage at the beginning of the second act, thus giving the character a strong dramatic weight, was one of Čajkovskij’s most trenchant choices. Scribe used to place an extended solo at the beginning of the second act in his *grands opéras* – see for example Masaniello’s barcarole “Amis, la matinée est belle” in Auber’s *La muette de Portici* or Marguerite’s virtuoso pastorale “O beau pays de la Touraine” in Meyerbeer’s *Les Huguenots* –, but it consisted generally in a descriptive genre piece, not related to the dramatic plot.

Here, on the contrary, Morozova’s monologue is an astonishing portrayal of an old widowed Bojarinja lamenting her sad loneliness, but still strong in her pride. Her role, given to a contralto voice, is beyond any doubt the most impressive in the opera, and it is quite unique in the whole Russian lyrical repertory, having many similarities with other well-celebrated suffering mothers, as Meyerbeer’s Fidès or Verdi’s Azucena. Lažečnikov’s spare text – thirteen verses altogether – obviously had to be extended, since Morozova’s utterances in Act 1 had been eliminated. So Čajkovskij maintained six lines of the original, which formed the recitative section, writing his own words for the aria. Similarly, the subsequent duet between mother and son – the first dramatic confrontation scene of *Opričnik* – strictly follows Lažečnikov’s text at the beginning (set in recitative dialogue), whereas the lyrical parts exhibit newly written lines.

At the musical level a brief orchestral motive, which is taken from Morozova’s tender phrase in her previous aria, holds together the recitative sections. Moreover, contrasting musical ideas are employed to reflect the characters’ opposite feelings. In her ariosos Morozova is given delicate, passionate accents. Her first theme – a calm melody based on descending fifths – suggests her sincere love for Andrej and is suggestively played again by the flutes in the closing section of the duet. The other, rich in descending fourths, occurs when she pleads her son not to leave her alone and is treated by Čajkovskij as one of the most important recurrent themes in the opera (we have already heard it in the short orchestral introduction).

On the other hand, Andrej’s utterances reveal the young man’s resolute will to avenge his humiliated family. After Morozova’s first arioso he replies with a pathetic phrase sustained by a percussive orchestral accompaniment. To a martial rhythm typical of Meyerbeerian *grands opéras* he explains his mother his decision to join the *opričnina*.

¹⁷ Cf. ČPSS XII, 465 (letter to Vasilij Bessel’, 3 November 1884).

Duet Andrej-Morozova, *Opričnik*, Act 2, No. 8

1-71	<i>Moderato</i>	Scene Andrej-Morozova		A
72-110	<i>Andante non tanto</i>	Arioso Morozova, then Duet with Andrej	G major/ E minor	B
111-167	<i>Moderato quasi allegro- Allegro-Andante</i>	Scene Andrej-Morozova		B'/A'
168-252	<i>Allegro moderato</i>	Arioso Morozova, then Duet with Andrej	D flat major	C
253-301	<i>Moderato-Allegro moderato</i>	Scene Andrej-Morozova	C minor	B"

The next two *tableaux* meet the strictest demands of Scribian dramaturgy. Act 2, Scene 2 displays a colossal crowd scene, whereas Act 3 begins with a decorative folk-style introduction followed by a gradual accumulation of characters up to an impressive *morceau d'ensemble*. By means of what we could aptly define as a well-calculated 'strategy of tension', Čajkovskij alternates static and dramatic sections in order to freeze the drama's culmination points and to delay the tragic *dénouement* as much as possible. Act 2 ends with Andrej's fatal oath to Vjaz'minskij (Tsar Ivan) incorporating a few lines from Act 3, Scenes 6 and almost the entire text of Scene 8 of Lažečnikov's tragedy. The dramatist had indulged in the description of the *opričniki*'s fanaticism, extreme violence and quasi-monastic life, but the whole was depicted by Čajkovskij in a brief, very suggestive scene. Their four-part chorus, sung off-stage in 'religious' style, produces a somewhat hypnotic effect, due to the fact that it constantly switches between a pair of chords. Moreover, its artificially ecclesiastical mood is subtly stressed, since the composer combines it three times with a dynamic section presenting the *opričniki*'s menacing theme. There are evident reasons to believe that *Les Huguenots* was again Čajkovskij's implicit model. In Meyerbeer's opera the oath-taking celebration, led by Saint-Bris and three monks during the *Bénédition des poignards* scene (Act 4, No. 23), distinctly stands out against the general harmonic background, due to its repeated combination of chords the roots of which are a third apart.

The finale displays a well-shaped progression of musical episodes that obtain general cohesion by means of reminiscent themes. It begins when Andrej is brought on stage by his companion Basmanov and continues as a new outstanding confrontation scene, for the *opričniki* act as a collective character under Vjaz'minskij's control. For three times the terrible oath form sung by Ivan's faithful servants is juxtaposed to the tenor's timorous replies – the syncopated orchestral accompaniment properly depicts his indecision. Both phrases are built on their respective recurrent themes (we hear Morozova's motive too when Andrej is brutally forced to disown his own mother). Their increasing superimposition helps to heighten the dramatic tension. Then, when Andrej's oath seems finally to come, the climax is delayed still further, since Čajkovskij gives the tenor a *Moderato assai* arioso, where his voice (again to a syncopated rhythm) is gradually carried through the high register till the long-desired "kljanus" ("I swear"). His agonizing entrance in the *opričnina* is now definite, so Andrej can join his new fellow comrades in a glorification chorus to Tsar Ivan.

Grand opéra's convention is even more striking in Act 3's overall dramaturgy. Here Čajkovskij's aim was to set up the general dramatic situation towards the climax when Morozova curses her son. So he built up the atmosphere from two quite static numbers – first a chorus of Moscovian people bemoaning their sense of abandonment by the Tsar, then an arioso for Morozova who laments her own lonesome doom – to a series of progressive entrances of characters, each marking a sudden and irreversible narrative shift. Notably enough, Čajkovskij's scenario greatly differs from Lažečnikov's. Some of the chorus's words were taken indirectly from two different scenes of the tragedy's Act 3: the speeches of the boyars Fëdorov, Mitkov and Viskovatov (Scene 3), and Bomelij's gloomy report from Moscow to Ivan (Scene 5).

Čajkovskij, *Opričnik*,
Act 3, no. 10

ХОР
Времена настали злые:
Нас покинул Царь-отец,
и волков голодных стая
разоряет нас в конец.
[...]
Но покинул пастырь добрый
стадо жалкое свое,
бед великих преисполнил
наше горькое житье.¹⁸

CHORUS
Evil times have come.
Our father Tsar has abandoned us
and a pack of hungry wolves
is completely destroying us.
[...]
Our good shepherd has abandoned
his poor, wretched flock,
and filled
our bitter existence with terrible woes.

Lažečnikov, *Opričnik*,
Act 3, Scenes 3 and 5

ВИСКОВАТОВ
[...] горько, горько на святую Русь,
как на вдовицу сирую, смотреть,
покинул, видно, нас совсем Державный!

БОМЕЛИЙ
[...] Пришло худое время
С тех пор, как нет Адашев наш в совет.
Народ опричникам на откуп отдан:
Рвут хлеба изо рта, пьют нашу кровь,
Кто правит нами, нам не знать.¹⁹

VISKOVATOV
[...] woe, woe on Holy Russia,
Like a deserted widow she appears,
it seems our Ruler has abandoned us!

BOMELY
[...] Evil time has come
since our Adašev [Ivan's minister] has left.
The people is now at the *opričnina*'s mercy:
they steal our bread, drink our blood,
nobody knows who rules our country.

The idea of Morozova's following arioso came again from her brief soliloquy in Act 2, Scene 6, while the little chorus of street urchins mocking Andrej's mother and a few subsequent lines were drawn from Lažečnikov's Act 3, Scene 1. However, Natal'ja's sudden entrance and her lengthy duet with Morozova were Čajkovskij's amazing invention. In Lažečnikov's tragedy (Act 4, Scene 5) Žemčužnyj's palace is assaulted by Ivan's cruel retinue and the young girl is brutally abducted by Andrej, whom she recognized as *opričnik* with horror. The libretto has Natal'ja play a more active role, since she seeks protection from Morozova, after she has run away from home. Their duet provides a first musical climax and with the two previous episodes – all of them grouped in a single number –

¹⁸ Petr Čajkovskij, *Opričnik. Opera v četyrech dejstvijach. Sjužet zaimstvovan iz dramy Lažečnikova* ("Opričnik: An Opera in Four Acts after Lažečnikov's drama), St. Petersburg: Bessel', 1874, 26-27.

¹⁹ Ivan Lažečnikov, *Opričnik. Tragedija v pjati dejstvijach, v stichach*, in: Id., *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij*, 12 vols. (1900), XI, 261-402: 333, 339.

displays a careful combination of static and dynamic sections. It may be divided in well-rounded (by cadences), yet interrelated parts, forming a continued musical progression.

Recitative, Chorus of street urchins, Duet Natal'ja-Morozova, *Opričnik*, Act 3, No. 11

1-43	<i>Moderato</i>	Arioso Morozova		
44-85	<i>Allegro</i>	Chorus of street urchins	B minor	
86-98	<i>Moderato</i>	Recitative Morozova		
99-141	<i>Allegro giusto</i>	Scene Natal'ja	A minor/ A major	A
141-202	<i>Allegro-Allegro giusto- Andante</i>	Arioso Morozova, then Recitative Natal'ja		B/A'
203-238	<i>Allegro</i>	Arioso Morozova		C
238-270	<i>Meno mosso</i>	Arioso Natal'ja	B flat major	B'
269-337	<i>Tempo I (Allegro)</i>	Duet	D minor/ D major	B''/C'

With Žemčužnyj's entrance, accompanied by a chorus of people according to *grand opéra's* recipe, the growing tension reaches a new culmination. What should be a trio is rather an extended arioso for Natal'ja in two parts. In its first section (♩, *Allegro tranquillo*) a lamenting clarinet motive in D minor sustains the sobbing phrases of the soprano, then the tempo slows down to a $\frac{12}{8}$ *Andante* and the main melody is given to the voice for dramatic effect. Moreover, in order to give the scene even more power, Čajkovskij had the *Andante* literally repeated to a new text by Morozova. The menacing theme of the *opričniki* brings finally the trio to a brusque end, for with the entrance of Andrej and Basmanov the finale, a colossal *morceau d'ensemble avec chœurs* meticulously saturated with Scribian structural methods, begins.

After Morozova has recognized Andrej, the action comes to a surprising arrest. In Lažečnikov's drama their ensuing confrontation (Act 5, Scene 9) is confined to a few horrified lines for the former, who immediately dies in her son's arms. On the contrary, Čajkovskij's dramatic aim was to monumentalize Morozova's curse by an impressive choral *tableau*, so she survives her fatal meeting with Andrej in the opera. A suggestive close-up on both characters fixes the audience's attention on a tragic mother-son conflict. In addition, the tension slowly heightens again by means of a well-balanced process of musical growth. Beginning with Morozova's pathetic recitative, the number goes on with Andrej's two ariosos. The *Andante* in E major is set to another reprise of the main melody heard in Natal'ja-Morozova's duet (Andrej restores his mother's confidence of his filial love). Then in the following *Allegro risoluto* in B flat minor the tenor retells his oath to the Tsar sustained by two contrasting choruses (the *opričniki* and the people). In a vehement recitative constructed upon distorted variants of the *opričniki* theme Morozova unpredictably renounces her own son. Here comes, finally, the climax for which the preceding action had served as an intentional grounding. The *Andante non troppo* in D minor starts with a quartet, where the canonic treatment of the voices is sustained by an obsessive tonic pedal on the second beat, then evolves into a hypertrophic *morceau d'ensemble avec chœurs* which brings a new level of musical intensity. Once the emotional mood has gained its maximal power, the narrative course is resumed with a brief recitative for Basmanov who suggests

Andrej to beg directly Tsar Ivan for instant release. His idea meets the universal accord, generating a final choral *tableau*, this time crystallized into homorhythmic masses and provided with a lengthy coda.

Opričnik's Act 4 owes a great debt to *grand opéra*'s dramaturgical models too. Departing from Lažečnikov's text – only the culmination scene between Ivan's 'counselor' Grjaznyj²⁰ and Andrej (Act 5, Scene 8) was maintained almost literally –, Čajkovskij's scenario opens with a lengthy *divertissement* in which wedding songs and virtuoso dances provide local colour.²¹ As a typical device of *grand opéra*, this decrease in tension is going to be developed for dramatic contrast, since Andrej's and Natal'ja's worried utterances are repeatedly set against it. Another touch of striking Russian flavour may be seen in the tenor's deeply affected farewell speech, an *Andante* in B flat minor accompanied by a chorus of *opričniki*, where the composer reused Bastrjukov's tune *Razmyčem my gore po matuške Vol'ge* ("We stifle our pain on Mother Volga") in the style of Russian folk song from *Voevoda*'s Act 1. After the third time that the wedding chorus is heard, the tragedy gets under way again by means of a rapid musical progression. In a tempestuous recitative scene held together by the obsessive reiteration of the *opričniki* motive's incipit Basmanov reminds Andrej that he is still an *opričnik* till midnight. Then Vjaz'minskij announces with malevolent joy that Tsar Ivan wants to see Natal'ja alone. The newly-wed bridegroom cannot endure such a humiliation and, beside himself with anger, breaks his oath. As happened before with Morozova's terrible curse, Andrej's surprising reaction represents the act's climax. Consequently, it is given the richest musical development through a final, fixed choral *tableau* (a quartet with chorus) in two sections, after which the drama is soon led to its inevitable denouement.

IV

Opričnik's perfect mixture of musical inspiration and dramaturgic craftsmanship marked Čajkovskij's powerful entry into European operatic history. As he was Russia's first professionally trained composer, his work obviously satisfied all the traditional stylistic criteria. That's why many of his fellow countrymen treated it as clear evidence of the composer's obedience to trite routine. Setting aside Kjuj's habitually sarcastic review,²² Musorgskij's comment about his young colleague's opera is worthy of quotation:

The Opričniki aims both at flattering the audience and at making a name for himself. Its author has imitated the popular taste (oh paša!) and at the same time has devoted himself passionately and sincerely to his own work (oh Sadyk!) ["Sadyk-paša" is the mocking nickname with whom Mussorgsky refers to Čajkovskij in his letters]. Firstly, popular taste is unstable; secondly, Russian artists have to write Russian works; finally, it is a shame to use art for private matters. So Sadyk, as a real paša, doesn't lack for cynicism [or: is not without cynicism] and openly professes the credo of beauty at any rate [...].²³

Musorgskij notwithstanding, Čajkovskij's recourse to convention was neither a demonstration of despicable self-interest, nor a sign of conscious conservatism. His

²⁰ As for Ivan's lines, Grjaznyj's too were given by the composer to Vjaz'minskij.

²¹ They are based on five authentic Russian folk songs, whose melodies had already been used by Čajkovskij in his collection of *Fifty Russian Folk Songs* for piano duet.

²² See Cezar' Kjuj, 'Opričnik', *opera g. Čajkovskogo* ('*The Opričnik*', an Opera by Čajkovskij), in: *Sanktpeterburgskie vedomosti*, 23 April 1874, no. 110.

²³ Letter to Vladimir Stasov, 26 December 1872, in: Modest Musorgskij, *Pis'ma (Letters)*, ed. Evgenija Gordeeva, Moscow 1981, 111.

purpose was to show his ambitions to the full, thus in his next historical opera French *grand opéra*'s model became even more stringent. *Orleanskaja deva* ('The Maid of Orléans', 1881) was a direct response to Rubinštejn's colossal biblical work *Die Makka-bäer* (1875), triumphantly acclaimed by Berlin reviewers and premièred in Russian at the Mariinskij Theatre on January 1877.²⁴ From the beginning Čajkovskij predicted the opera would earn him an international reputation, and his hopes did not prove vain. *Orleanskaja deva* met an undisputed success at its first performance; in addition, it was the composer's first opera to be heard abroad, having a four nights' run at Prague's Provisional Theatre on July 1882. But afterwards its fate was not lucky. As a pressing consequence of Tsar Aleksandr II's assassination (just two weeks after the opera's *première*), the theatrical season was cut off at once, thus burying *Orleanskaja deva* in an unfair oblivion.

Departing from *Opričnik*'s pure Russian theme, Čajkovskij's ensuing *grand opéra* displays a more substantial cosmopolitanism of style, primarily reflected in the choice of a well-celebrated European historical subject. The figure of Joan of Arc had always attracted the composer – at the age of seven he had even written a poem about the French heroine –, and the reading of Žukovskij's translation of Schiller's play *Die Jungfrau von Orleans* in the aftermath of an acute matrimonial crisis soon stirred up the composer's creative power. Once again he decided to write his own libretto, but he did not limit himself to Schiller's text. In order to expand his scenario with historical and artistic details, he incorporated a great variety of borrowings from other sources: two detailed biographies of the saint, by Jules Michelet (1841)²⁵ and Henri Wallon (1860),²⁶ Jules Barbier's drama *Jeanne d'Arc* (1869),²⁷ and Auguste Mermet's opera with the same title (1876).²⁸ At first the composer's aim was to keep to Žukovskij's excellent translation as closely as possible, but Schiller's overall dramatic conception did not satisfy him:

Obviously, my libretto can't draw merely upon Schiller's scenario. There are too many characters, too many secondary episodes. It requires not only cuts but also changes, so I would like to know how a Frenchman [Auguste Mermet], always gifted with a sense for the theatre, has worked all this. In addition, I would like to rummage in catalogues and collect a whole little library in connection with *Jeanne d'Arc*. For example, Schiller has a scene where Joan starts a fight with Lionel. But I, for several reasons, would like to substitute Montgomery for him. Is this possible? Are these historical figures? To know all this, I shall have to read some books. In the meantime, I have taken one scene directly from Žukovskij, which, I must keep anyhow, even if I won't find it in Mermet: the scene where the King, archbishops and knights recognize Joan as heaven-sent.²⁹

Finally, when he did collect his scheduled 'library' on the subject (generously helped by his patron, Countess fon Mekk) his enthusiasm cooled somewhat. He found Wallon's book "very weak, excepting its superlative, luxurious edition and a wealth of interesting facsimiles".³⁰ Similarly, Mermet's scenario was judged "very bad, though there are a few effective scenes that I might use. So I came to the conclusion that although Schiller's tragedy does not conform to historical facts, it surpasses all other artistic portrayals of Joan

²⁴ Rubinštejn's opera remained the only work by a Russian composer to achieve repertory status both at home and abroad till the end of the century.

²⁵ Jules Michelet, *Histoire de France*, vol. 5, 1422-1461, Paris 1841, 45-180.

²⁶ Henri Wallon, *Jeanne d'Arc*, 2 vols, Paris 1860.

²⁷ Jules Barbier, *Jeanne d'Arc. Drame en cinq actes en vers*, Paris 1869. In 1873 Charles Gounod wrote some very successful incidental music for its revival at the Parisian Théâtre de la Gaité.

²⁸ Auguste Mermet, *Jeanne d'Arc. Opéra en quatre actes et six tableaux. Paroles et musique de A. Mermet*, Paris 1876.

²⁹ Letter to N. F. fon Mekk, 6 / 18 December 1878, ČM 1 – 1934, 534.

³⁰ Letter to N. F. fon Mekk, 10 / 22 December 1878, *ibid.*, 540.

in deep psychological truth.”³¹ Still before this – without a libretto and even a scenario! – Čajkovskij had started writing the music for the basic scene (Act 2’s finale) when Joan picks out the French King among his courtiers and tells the story of his life, finishing it in five days.

Afterwards, things proceeded rapidly, for the composer worked in a state of fervent excitement mixed with nervous anxiety. Indeed, the music came easily enough, but the text caused him serious trouble, in particular with rhyming verses.³² Nevertheless, by 5 March 1879 the whole opera, music and libretto, was ready. Its final scenario was mainly based on Schiller, even if Čajkovskij included a few modifications on his own from the other sources. As a result, the new work was conceived in terms of highly spectacular stage pictures set to a premeditated both vast and simple musical style. If compared to its main original literary source, *Orleanskaja deva* displays a remarkable effort to simplify its narrative plot too. The scenes among the English were abruptly eliminated, whereas the passing episode between Joan and Lionel became the opera’s culmination point, thus providing the pretext for a huge love duet in Act 3. Decorative and picturesque elements (songs, hymns, dances, and marches) were given strong prominence; on the other hand, the dramatic plot was projected on heroic scale by means of well-calibrated dynamic progressions – as in *Opričnik* –, so that each act culminates in a massive choral *tableau*.

V

Comparative studies between *Orleanskaja deva*’s libretto and its many literary sources, above all Schiller’s tragedy, have been widely discussed in recent years,³³ yet one main topic is still missing. Regarding Čajkovskij’s letter to his brother Modest on 3 January 1879: “I found Mermet’s *Jeanne d’Arc*”,³⁴ Zajaczkowski believed that the composer meant a copy of the vocal score, not just the libretto, as witnessed by a small stylistic resemblance in the ballet music.³⁵ But Mermet’s influence goes much deeper and involves the dramaturgical level too, sometimes at the point of direct emulation. If one looks in particular at Act 1 of both operas, as reported in the table below,³⁶ the correspondences are more than striking. The whole conception is nearly identical from the opening decorative chorus onward, the distinctive exception being Čajkovskij’s insertion of a trio for Joan, Thibaut and Raymond (taken from Schiller’s Prologue, Scene 2), whose perfunctory function is that of introducing the private dimension of the plot. As a result, Joan is given a little more active role than in Schiller. In the tragedy she remains silent during the whole dialogue section between the two male characters, whereas in the opera she joins it, timidly refusing at last her father’s proposal of marriage – “Mne sud’ba naznačena drugaja. Vole neba podvlastna ja” (“My destiny is different. I submit to Heaven’s will”).

³¹ Letter to N. F. fon Mekh, 26 December 1878 / 7 January 1879, *ibid.*, 560.

³² Cf. letter to N. F. fon Mekh, 3 / 15 January 1879, *ibid.*, 14.

³³ See Sofia Khorobrykh, Schillers ‚Jungfrau von Orléans‘ und Tschaikowskys Bühnenwerk: Züge der Literaturoper, in: Schiller und die Musik, eds. Helen Geyer and Wolfgang Osthoff, Cologne 2007, 149-175; Alfonsina Janés, ‚Die Jungfrau von Orléans‘: Čajkovskij und Schiller, in: Mitteilungen 13 (2006), 131-143.

³⁴ ČB, 194.

³⁵ See Henri Zajaczkowski, ‘The Missing Piece of the Jigsaw Puzzle,’ in: *The Musical Times*, 131 (1990), 238-242: 239. *Jeanne d’Arc*’s vocal score was published by Choudens soon after its unsuccessful *première*: A. Mermet, *Jeanne d’Arc: Opéra en quatre actes: Poème et Musique de A. Mermet: Partition Chant et Piano arrangé par Hector Salomon*, Paris 1876.

³⁶ Numbers and titles of the musical sections, as derived from the vocal scores, are reported in italics, whereas plot similarities are underlined in the text between brackets.

Čajkovskij, *Orleanskaja deva*

Mermet, *Jeanne d'Arc*

Act One

Act One

- | | |
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| <p>1. <i>Chorus of Maiden</i>
[<u>A group of girls embellishes an oak tree with garlands.</u>]</p> <p>2. A. <i>Scene</i> Thibaut-Raymond
B. <i>Trio</i> Raymond-Thibaut-Joan
[<u>Thibaut describes France's poor condition</u>, then urges his daughter to marry Raymond for protection.]</p> <p>3. <i>Scene</i> Thibaut-Joan-Raymond
[Joan declares her fate is preordained by Heaven.]</p> <p>4. A. <i>Chorus of People</i>
B. <i>Scene</i> Bertrand-Thibaut-Raymond with Chorus
[<u>A group of fleeing peasants enters. Bertrand relates that Orléans is under siege</u>, for Queen Isabelle, mother of the French king, has betrayed her country. He hopes Salisbury, the English commander, will be killed in battle]</p> <p>5. A. <i>Arioso</i> Joan
B. <i>Scene</i> Soldier-Thibaut with Chorus
[<u>Joan prophesies that an armed maid will free Orléans and declares that Salisbury has already been slain. A soldier rushes in and confirms Joan's words.</u>]</p> <p>6. <i>Hymn</i> Joan-Raymond-Bertrand with Chorus
[<u>All join in a hymn of praise.</u>]</p> | <p>1. <i>Chorus of Maiden</i>
[<u>A group of girls sings around an oak tree.</u>]</p> <p>2. A. <i>Choruses</i> of Peasants and Soldiers
B. <i>Aria</i> Gaston with Choruses
C. <i>Scene</i> Jacques-Joan-Gaston with <i>Chorus of fleeing People</i>
[<u>Asked by a group of maiden, Gaston de Metz, a French commander, describes the poor condition of his country.</u> All pronounce an anathema upon Queen Isabelle. <u>A group of fleeing people rushes in. Joan predicts Salisbury's imminent death.</u>]</p> <p>3. <i>Scene and Ballade</i> Joan
[<u>Joan evokes the history of the Breton martyr, Hena, then prophesies that an armed maid will save France.</u>]</p> <p>4. A. <i>Aria</i> Richard,
B. <i>Scene</i> Richard-Gaston-Jacques-Joan
C. <i>Quartet</i> Joan-Gaston-Jacques-Richard with Chorus
[<u>Richard, a French soldier, relates that Orléans is under siege, then confirms that Salisbury has been killed.</u> Joan describes the English commander's death. <u>All react with horror, then join in a praise to God.</u>]</p> <p>5. <i>Duet</i> Gaston-Joan
[Joan relates her heavenly visions, then affirms she will save France with God's help. Gaston decides to help the maid in her mission.]</p> |
|--|--|

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>7. <i>Aria Joan</i>
[Obedient to her visions, Joan sings farewell to her native countryside.]</p> <p>8. <i>Finale.</i>
Arioso Joan with Chorus of angels
[<u>Encouraged by an offstage chorus of angels, Joan embarks on her heavenly mission.</u>]</p> | <p>6. A. <i>Aria Joan</i>
B. Arioso Joan with <i>Chorus of angels</i>
[Joan gazes at her native countryside and hesitates. <u>Reassured by an offstage chorus of angels, Joan decides to accomplish her duty.</u>]</p> |
|--|--|

The ensuing three scenes display a sudden increase of dramatic tension, built up by means of a hasty accumulation of characters till a culminating point set to a static concertato. Once again, Čajkovskij's main source was Mermet's scenario, but the composer considerably developed it in terms of visual effects and choral movements. In Schiller's Prologue, Scene 3 there is scarce reference to fugitives, for they do not appear and it is Bertrand, questioned by Thibaut, to report indirect news of them. In Mermet's *Choeurs et Air* no. 2, fleeing people are given little emphasis as well – some of them just make a quick appearance on stage –, for the focal dramatic point has been Gaston de Metz's previous bipartite aria. Asked by a group of maidens, the loyalist commander first relates France's poor condition and then pronounces a violent condemnation against Queen Isabelle echoed by a general choral reprise.

On the other hand, the crowd of fugitives, with Bertrand as their spokesman, becomes the actual central character in Čajkovskij, who succeeds in giving the scene an impressive dramatic energy. After the fleeing people have restlessly rushed in, the two choruses – that of the peasants coming from offstage and that of the maiden onstage – gradually join their forces up to a culminating section, where all beg God for salvation. Pathetic choral utterances are also heard in Bertrand's ensuing report, for which the composer reemployed the previous martial rhythm. The text of his narrative was largely drawn from Schiller's Prologue, Scene 3, whereas Mermet's first lines in his *Scène des fugitifs* were significantly expanded providing the spectacular opening section, which shows vast fires in the distance accompanied by the tolling of an alarm bell in the orchestra:

Čajkovskij, *Orleanskaja deva*,
Act 1, no. 4
(*В дали слышен набат. На небе показывается зарево пожара.*)

РАЙМОНД
Вдали пожар... и колокола звуки...

ТИБО
Но что за шум?

ХОР ДЕВУШЕК
И голоса вдали...

(*Вбегает толпа крестьян и крестьянок в беспорядке, с детьми и пожитками. [...] На шум сбегаются жители Домреми.*)

Mermet, *Jeanne d'Arc*,
Act 1, no. 2

JACQUES
La flamme, le tocsin,
quel sinistre présage!

PEUPLE
Quel bruit confus
se rapproche de nous?

JACQUES
Les brigands, les brigands!
Le meurtre! Le pillage!

ХОР НАРОДА И ДЕВУШКИ

Пожар и разорение
враги с собой несут./ враги им принесли,
неистовою силой/ поля их раззоряли,
на нас они идут./ их хижины сожгли...
Спасите, приютите
бездомных бедняков,
на веки мы лишились
полей своих, домов!

FEMMES

On massacre nos fils,
nos frères, nos époux!
Donnez-nous un asile
ou nous périssons tous.

ВСЕ

О Боже, смилуйся над нами!
Ужель ты Фраиции своей
назначил пасть, и над врагами
не ниспошлешь победу ей?
Господь, молениям внемли
и нам спасенье ниспошли!³⁷

GASTON, JACQUES, PEOPLE ET FEMMES

O comble de misère!
Dieu, notre père,
la France va périr!

In English translation:

(An alarm bell tolls in the distance. The glow of a fire is seen in the sky.)

RAYMOND

A distant fire... the sounds of a bell...

THIBAUT

What is this noise?

CHORUS OF MAIDEN

And cries in the distance...

(A crowd of peasants, men and women, rushes in disorderly with children and goods. [...] At the same time people from Domrémy run in on stage.)

CHORUS OF PEOPLE AND MAIDEN

Fire and devastation
the enemies bring with them/the enemies brought with them,
with great power/ they destroyed their fields
they come against us./ and burned their huts...
Help and give shelter
to us, poor fugitives,
we have lost forever
our fields and homes!

ALL

O God, have mercy on us!
Have you doomed France
to ruin and condemned it
to lose from its enemy?
God, accept our prayers
and give us salvation!

³⁷ Petr Čajkovskij, *Orleanskaja deva. Opera v četyrech dejstvijach. Libretto (mnogie sceny zaimstvovany u Žukovskogo) i muzyka P. Čajkovskogo (The Maid of Orléans: An Opera in Four Acts: Libretto (Many Scenes Taken From Žukovskij) and Music by P. Čajkovskij)*, Moscow 1881, 8-9.

For the following *Scene* (no. 5) Čajkovskij could rely on Joan's first words in Schiller's tragedy, where she suddenly wears the helmet Bertrand has taken to her and prophesies in ecstasy that Orléans is soon going to be free.³⁸ Nevertheless, a comparison with Mermet's setting is very instructive, for the Russian composer greatly emphasized the choral dimension of the situation in order to freeze the overall reaction of the assembled characters in a static *morceau d'ensemble*. In Mermet Joan's divining words about Salisbury's death are set to a rapid recitative, after which she sings a lengthy ballad about a Breton martyr – its model being Hélène's aria "Au sein des mers" in Act 1 of Verdi's *Les vêpres siciliennes* (1855) –, to incite her countrymen to rebel against the occupiers (no. 3, *Scène et ballade*).

Another decorative piece is given to Richard, a French knight coming from Orléans, whose bad news stirs up again Joan's patriotic fervour. She describes the English commander's death to a vigorous recitative and in the ensuing quartet all react with horror, before joining with the chorus in praise to God. Čajkovskij's setting shows, in contrast, a well-minded dynamic progression. Joan's words of incitement are repeated twice with increasing force and accompanied by choral utterances; moreover, her ardent declaration that Salisbury has just been killed proves instantly right, for a French soldier rushes onto the stage confirming her foretelling. Once the dramatic tension has reached its peak, the action finally comes to a sudden halt. In the following hymn – significantly enough, Joan takes the leading role of *zapevala* – the musical ensemble comes to monumental dimensions.

Even for the two final numbers of the act (no. 7, *Joan's Aria*, and no. 8, *Final*), Čajkovskij clearly had Mermet's finale in mind (no. 6, *Air et Choeurs d'Ange*), for many resemblances can be traced. Both arias are indeed provided with a da capo section, where the orchestral accompaniment reappears in a varied, embellished form – light string figurations in *Jeanne d'Arc*, melancholy woodwind countermelodies in *Orleanskaja deva*. In addition, both composers stressed Joan's hesitancy in embarking upon her divine mission by means of an offstage chorus of angels, whose callings are brilliantly interwoven with the heroine's troubled replies. If one compares the two operas, Čajkovskij exceeds Mermet both in proportions – the Russian composer decided to follow almost literally Schiller's Scene 4 – and in terms of purely musical contrast. Compare in particular the choir of angels: Mermet gives it a somewhat pastoral, submissive character, whereas Čajkovskij is able to convey a striking sense of persistent menace as if filtered out through Joan's mind.

Grand opéra's manner is still largely predominant in Act 2, the dramaturgic construction of which bears, once more, many similarities to Mermet's scenario, as one can notice in the table below. It opens indeed with a long choreographic *tableau* – presenting a *Chorus of Minstrels*³⁹ and a series of dances –, which has its perfect counterpart in *Jeanne d'Arc's* lengthy *divertissement* (the latter includes an aria *di bravura* for Agnès with chorus too). Both ballets are meant to emphasize Charles VII's disregard of his people's requests. But if its dramatic potential in Mermet seems somewhat softened, for it comes after a large number of decorative pieces (see nos. 7-8-9), Čajkovskij's decision to place it at the rise of the curtain proves more skilful. In order to radically shorten Schiller's intricate intrigue, the author conflated furthermore the eight original scenes in two big closed numbers,

³⁸ In Schiller (Act 1, Scene 11) Joan prophesies Salisbury's death to an English herald.

³⁹ Significantly, the chorus was Čajkovskij's sole concession to local colour, since the author employed the melody of *Mes belles amourettes*, included as 'Mélodie antique française' in his *Children's Album* for piano, op. 39, no. 14. As for the origin of the song, cf. Elena V. Titova, Čajkovskij's „Altes französisches Liedchen“ als „Echo vergangener Zeiten“, in: *Mitteilungen* 13 (2006), 182-198.

transferring La Hire's and Du Chatel's functions to the brave knight Dunois. Thus the latter becomes a central figure in Act 2's dramaturgy – his role was created by the celebrated bass Fëdor Stravinskij, father of Igor' – and, more crucially, Charles VII's real antagonist. His duet with the king, for which Čajkovskij wrote his own text, is based on two contrasting musical themes, each representing the characters' conflicting ideals. Dunois's moral nobility is depicted by an emphatic ascending motive delineating the D minor chord, whereas the voluptuary monarch is given a dreamy melody in F major. Both themes repeatedly alternate till Dunois succeeds in stirring him up and their voices join in a bellicose cabaletta which embodies one of the latest examples of 'march-duet', a typical ingredient of French *grand opéra*'s recipe.⁴⁰ But what should be the duet's 'natural' conclusion evolves in a dynamic scene where dramatic tension is unexpectedly heightened to the level of musical paroxysm. The dying La Hire rushes in with news of defeat; Charles VII decides immediately to retreat beyond the Loire, while Dunois leaves disgusted (sustained by his theme) in order to die in the desperate defence of his beloved Orléans.

In the following scene the narrative rhythm is aptly released with two static pieces for Agnès, an arioso and a *duettino* with the king. The former, an *Andante* in E flat major, has a prominent Gounodesque taste for its 'sugary' delicacy; the latter, the words of which are Čajkovskij's own creation, has often been compared (as in the case of Natal'ja's arioso in *Opričnik*, Act 1), with Raoul's phrase "Tu l'as dit: oui tu m'aimes!" in Act 4 of *Les Huguenots*, but shows clear musical analogies with Mermet's love duet as well (see ex. 1-2).

Beginning with Dunois's hasty return bringing news of the victory, the final part of the act closely follows *Die Jungfrau von Orléans*'s Act 2, Scenes 8-9-10. For practical reasons due to operatic convention Čajkovskij was forced to certain changes. He cut nearly half of the original verses, created new lines for the choral utterances, and used La Hire's words to enlarge Dunois and Raoul's extended narrative to the archbishop. Nevertheless, the remaining text draws from Schiller almost literally.⁴¹

On the musical level the three concluding numbers (nos. 14-15-16) show the author's aim to work out a deliberate process of musical intensification, where the melodic form is strictly connected to the dramatic situation. Thus the vibrating account of the archbishop is set to an electrifying recitative peppered with military accents in the orchestra, whereas for Joan's ensuing crucial narration Čajkovskij employed the Dargomyzhskian melodic recitative – compare Pimen's monologue in *Boris Godunov*, Act 1. The overall context of collective fascination, which has already been given partial expression when the king (soon followed by a choral reprise) has become convinced of the maid's vatic powers, reaches its climax in the finale. As in a rondo-form, a grandiose vocal refrain occurs three times with increasing power of massive orchestral and choral accompaniment, thus permitting the composer to monumentalize the culminating point: Joan's investiture as leader of the French army with ecclesiastic blessing.⁴²

⁴⁰ Among other noteworthy examples of 'march-duets' one can include the duet Don Carlos-Posa in Verdi's *Don Carlos* (1867), Act 2, or that, less-known, between Didier and Saverny in Amilcare Ponchielli's *Marion Delorme* (1885), Act 4. Cf. Leopold M. Kantner, *Zur Genese der Marschduette in der Grand opéra*, in: *Anzeiger der phil.-hist. Klasse der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 113 (1976), 322-334.

⁴¹ A brief description of Čajkovskij's autograph notes on his copy of Žukovskij's edition of *Die Jungfrau von Orléans* can be found in Ada Ajnbinder, "Zur Genese des Librettos von Čajkovskijs Oper *Die Jungfrau von Orléans*", in *Mitteilungen* 18 (2011), 12-25:17-20.

⁴² It is first introduced by the archbishop, passes then to Dunois who sings in unison with the former, and in the end it is given by all assembled characters just before the conclusive stretta.

Lento con anima

Agnesa *a mezza voce*
 Akh, s-to-boy i bed - stvi-ya

Korol' *a mezza voce*
 Akh, s-to-boy i

The score is for a duet. Agnesa's part is in the upper voice, and Korol's part is in the lower voice. The music is in 3/4 time, key of B-flat major. The tempo is 'Lento con anima'. The lyrics are in Russian. The score includes dynamic markings like 'pp' and 'f'.

ra - dost - no pri-nyat' go - to - va ya.

bed - stvi - ya ra - dost-no pri - mu ya.

This is a continuation of the duet from the previous block. It shows the vocal lines for Agnesa and Korol' with their respective lyrics. The music continues in the same key and tempo.

Ex. 1 – P. Čajkovskij, Orleanskaja deva, II.13 (Duetтино Charles VII-Agnés)

Agnés
 le Roi

Ai - mer! etre ai - mé! de -

ai - - mer! etre ai - mé! dé - li - ces - su-

The score is for a duet. Agnés's part is in the upper voice, and le Roi's part is in the lower voice. The music is in 3/4 time, key of B-flat major. The tempo is 'Lento con anima'. The lyrics are in French. The score includes dynamic markings like 'f'.

li - ces - su - pre - - mes! bon - heur,

pre - mes! Ai - mer, etre ai - mé, c'est le bon - heur,

This is a continuation of the duet from the previous block. It shows the vocal lines for Agnés and le Roi with their respective lyrics. The music continues in the same key and tempo.

Ex. 2 – A. Mermet, Jeanne d'Arc, II.8 (Duet King-Agnés)

Čajkovskij, *Orleanskaja deva*
Act Two

Mermet, *Jeanne d'Arc*
Act Two

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>9. <i>Entr'acte</i></p> | <p><i>Entr'acte</i></p> |
| <p>10. <u><i>Chorus of Minstrels</i></u></p> | <p>7. <i>Aria</i> Richard
[Hoping no more of France's deliverance, Richard is ready to flee from his beloved country.]</p> <p>8b. <i>Scene</i> Charles VII-Agnès-Richard-Maitre Jean
[Richard relates about his meeting with Joan, but Charles VII is distracted by hunting horns.]</p> <p>9. <i>Scene and Couplets</i> Charles VII
[Charles VII drinks a toast to Agnès' beauty.]</p> <p>9b. <i>Scene</i> Page-Charles VII
[Uninterested in political affairs, the King welcomes a group of minstrels.]</p> |
| <p>11. <u><i>Dances</i></u>
A. <i>Dance of Gypsies</i>
B. <i>Dance of Pages and Dwarfs</i>
C. <i>Dance of Jesters and Skomorokhi</i></p> | <p>10. <u><i>Chorus of Minstrels</i></u></p> <p>11. <i>Aria</i> Agnès with <i>Chorus</i></p> <p>12. <u><i>Divertissement</i></u></p> |
| <p>12. A. <i>Scene</i> Charles VII-Dunois
B. <i>Duet</i> Dunois-Charles VII
C. <i>Scene</i> Lauret-Dunois-Charles VII
[As the treasure has no money to pay the army, Dunois, a French knight, tries to persuade his future king not to waste his wealth for dances and pleasures. <u>Lauret, a wounded soldier, rushes in, reports another defeat</u> and dies. Charles VII thinks of retreating, Dunois leaves for Orléans.]</p> | <p>8. A. <i>Cavatina</i> Charles VII
B. <i>Duet</i> Charles VII-Agnès
[King Charles VII is unmoved by war and only cares about love and pleasure. <u>Agnès reassures him of her feelings.</u>]</p> |
| <p>13. A. <i>Scene</i> Charles VII-Agnès
B. <i>Arioso</i> Agnès
C. <i>Duettino</i> Charles VII-Agnès
[<u>Agnès promises her money to save France, then consoles Charles VII reassuring him of her love.</u>]</p> | |

14. A. *Scene* Charles VII-Agnès-Dunois-Archbishop with Chorus of People
 B. *Narrative Archbishop*
 [Dunois soon comes back with a festive crowd with news of victory. An archbishop relates how a mysterious young girl has miraculously defeated the English army. Charles VII decides to test the maid and orders Dunois to take his place as king.]
15. a. Scene Dunois-Joan-Charles VII with Chorus
 b. Arioso Charles VII, taken up again by Agnès-Dunois-Archbishop with Chorus
 c. *Narrative of Joan*
 [Joan picks up immediately the true king, then reveals the contents of two of Charles VII's prayers to God. All become convinced of her vatic powers. At the archbishop's request Joan tells her story.]
16. *Finale*
 a. Quartet archbishop-Charles VII-Agnès-Dunois with Chorus
 b. Duet Charles VII-Joan with Chorus
 c. Quintet archbishop-Dunois-Charles VII-Agnès-Joan with Chorus
 [Believing in Joan's heavenly mission, Charles VII puts her at the head of the army. She asks for the archbishop's blessing. All urge the maid to lead France to victory.]
13. *Finale*
 A. Scene Bar-de-Buc-Charles VII-Agnès-Gaston-Lauret with Chorus B. Duet Gaston-Lauret
 C. Scene Charles VII-Gaston-Agnès-Lauret-Joan with Chorus,
 D. Arioso Charles VII-Joan with Chorus
 E. Septet Gaston-Charles VII-Lauret-Richard-Gaucourt-Agnès-Joan with Chorus
 [Bar-de-Buc rushes in with bad news, but Lauret and Gaston describe how Joan has led the French army to victory. Hearing that Joan is coming, Charles VII decides to test her, ordering Lauret to take his place as king. Joan appears, recognizes Charles VII among the crowd, then reveals the contents of two of his prayers to God. Persuaded that Joan will save France, the king grants her control of the army. All urge the maid to lead their country to victory.]

Both Act 3 and Act 4 are divided into two *tableaux* where Joan's inner conflict is strongly juxtaposed to highly spectacular public events: first a coronation ceremony, then her funeral procession to the stake. For the latter Čajkovskij had followed Barbier's tragedy, Act 5, Scene 9, for his declared aim was that of keeping nearer to the historical truth than Schiller. Moreover, the new stage situation⁴³ permitted him to avoid another battle scene – see the introduction to Act 3 – and to make use of three contrasting choruses (soldiers and people onstage, angels offstage) upon a continuous orchestral tissue.

On the contrary, the remaining parts were drawn from *Die Jungfrau von Orléans*, even if the composer conflated texts from different acts of the tragedy. Schiller's Act 3, Scenes 10-11, formed the basis for most of Joan's and Lionel's utterances in the opera (Act 3, Scene 1), yet the latter's initial words were taken from those of two other Schillerian characters: Montgomery and Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy (Act 2, Scenes 7-8).⁴⁴ In addition, a few lines of their first duet were written by Čajkovskij himself, as it happened for the majority of Act 4, Scene 1, apart from Joan's little monologue which was drawn from Schiller's Act 5, Scene 1. Both duets have already been exhaustively discussed with regard to their formal structure,⁴⁵ so there is no need to analyse them further. One would

⁴³ Curiously enough, Čajkovskij's next opera, *Mazepa* (1884), offers another entire *tableau* which is centred around a public execution; see Act 2, nos. 13-14.

⁴⁴ Cf. Sofia Khorobrykh, 162-166.

⁴⁵ Cf. Lucinde Braun, *Studien zur russischen Oper im späten 19. Jahrhundert*, ČSt 4, 198-206: 202-206.

just have to emphasize Čajkovskij's expert use of French and Italian models – see in particular the calculated sequence of kinetic-static sections in Joan-Lionel's first encounter – as well as the clear influences of Meyerbeer in the colossal love-duet in Act 4 – compare with that between Raoul and Marguerite in *Les Huguenots*, Act 4.

Regarding *grand opéra* reception, Act 3, Scene 2 deserves the utmost attention, since it displays an impressive Coronation scene, strongly reminiscent of those in *Le Prophète*,⁴⁶ *Don Carlos*, and *Boris Godunov*. The whole style has often been blamed for being deliberately conceived in terms of rude musical contrasts and visual magnificence, but one must acknowledge its indisputable stage effectiveness. As in Musorgskij, the ceremony takes place behind the curtain and the ensuing royal procession, here preceded by a solemn orchestral march, is greeted with choral shouts of joy. All the assembled characters having entered Reims Cathedral, a sudden close-up of Thibaut and Raymond follows. Their brief dialogue, evolving in a *duettino* while the organ suggestively sounds from the nearby church, is of crucial importance in the overall dramaturgy – Joan's father, still convinced that his daughter is in collusion with the devil, declares to Raymond his steady resolution to expose her in public.

The following finale appears as a *morceau d'ensemble avec chœurs* of vast proportions, yet it shows Čajkovskij's great effort towards simplicity and fluency. It begins with a choreographic section upon which the royal procession comes forth from the cathedral, acclaimed by festive fanfares. A delicate *arioso* over *pizzicato* strings is then given to King Charles VII who begs Joan to unveil her "immortal image" so that they may worship her. As Joan recognizes her father among the crowd, the dramatic tension instantly heightens. Thibaut vehemently accuses her of sorcery, asking his daughter to declare herself "holy and pure", but the girl keeps silent amidst the general horror. As in *Opričnik*, Act 3, the shocking *coup de théâtre* brings the action to a climax, for the culmination point – once again, a tragic parent-son confrontation – is greatly monumentalized in a static concertato.⁴⁷

Introduced by a frenzied section in *Allegro vivo*, Thibaut's terrible accusation with its powerful declamato recitative sustained by violent orchestral gestures has a Verdian dramatic force. All remain astonished and in the first section of the ensemble, a brief *Adagio* in C flat minor, the hesitating rhythm expresses the general uncertainty. As an unexpected enharmonic shift to B major occurs, Joan's voice joins the concertato. Her beautiful ascending melodic line, doubled by the strings, is given strong emphasis, emerging significantly from the whole musical tissue; to Heaven alone (say, the audience) she confesses her sins and demands punishment. In the ensuing *stretta* her decisive judgement eventually takes place in a dynamic choral scene. Dunois, Thibaut and the Archbishop respectively, each sustained by his recurrent motive, urge her to prove her father's accusations false, but three gradually louder thunderclaps are heard as the girl remains silent.

For the musical construction of the scene Čajkovskij may have had in mind Radames's trial in *Aida*, Act 4. In order to convey a feeling of increasing menace, both composers make use indeed of a single scheme returning each time within a distance of a semitone and successfully employ the avoided cadence to link one statement to the other. Persuaded in Joan's guilt, all react with horror, producing a hasty change in affect which is given new

⁴⁶ For a dramaturgic comparison between the two operas see Marina Frolova-Walker, *Grand Opera in Russia: Fragments of an Unwritten History*, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, ed. David Charlton, Cambridge 2003, 344-365: 358-359.

⁴⁷ Cf. Lucinde Braun, *Das „pezzo concertato“ in Čajkovskijs Opern*, in: *Mitteilungen* 6 (1999), 17-26.

height of musical volume in a lengthy *morceau d'ensemble*.⁴⁸ Upon stormy orchestral figurations all the assembled characters exit except Lionel who urges Joan to flee with him. A protracted pause underlines the dramatic instant of the young girl's silence, but soon she raises her eyes, recognizes the Burgundian knight and piercingly denounces him as her "detested enemy". The scene finishes with tumultuous recitative accents.

VI

In his later years Čajkovskij felt deeply dissatisfied with both *Opričnik* and *Orleanskaja deva*. Since 1885 he wanted to rewrite the former completely and even picked up the full score of the opera at the Archives of the Imperial Theatres in order to modify it, just a few days before he died. In the same period, according to his brother Modest's memoirs,⁴⁹ he was contemplating drastic changes in the latter, in particular the substitution of Schiller's original conclusion, where the heroine dies heroically on the battlefield, for his own pessimistic ending.

To a great extent, however, such a negative attitude may be due to the composer's typical self-criticism and constant uncertainty. Both libretti indeed show Čajkovskij's close acquaintance to Scribe's dramaturgical methods; moreover, the musical style of his two *grands operas* reveals a subtle, sure-handed composer who knew how to make use of the operatic conventions of his day to their maximum effect. As a result, the experience gained in assembling operatic texts – one must include *Evgenij Onegin* ('Eugene Onegin', 1879) too, of which the text is almost entirely Čajkovskij's own – proved very useful for his later operas. Both for *Mazepa* and *Čarodejka* ('The Enchantress', 1887) he personally took part in the genesis of the libretti, making several cuts and changes, just as he took an active role in shaping the scenario that his brother had prepared for *Pikovaja dama* ('The Queen of Spades', 1890). If one calls to mind the disastrous outcome of *Voevoda*, the first step in the composer's operatic career, the improvement of his dramaturgical skills could not be more considerable.

⁴⁸ For the opera's *première* the choral episode was drastically reduced.

⁴⁹ *Žizn' Č II*, 310, III, 646.